

## A. MACINTYRE'S VIEWS ON ANIMAL RATIONALITY: A RESPONSE TO THE RELATIVIST CHALLENGE

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**Abstract:** Alasdair MacIntyre is considered one of the most prominent moral philosophers in the contemporary period. Nevertheless, some authors criticize his views on practical rationality as being relativistic. Though there have been authors who have defended MacIntyre through various arguments, none of these authors has referred to one of his later works, namely, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues (DRA)* for addressing the relativist challenge. The paper aims to fill this lacuna. Thus, the principal question to which the paper responds is: Can the views discussed in *DRA* contribute toward addressing the relativist challenge raised against MacIntyre? Accordingly, through various arguments, the paper demonstrates that MacIntyre's views on animal rationality, vulnerability and dependence as well as those concerning the virtues of care and *miserickordia* as discussed in *DRA* contribute their mite toward addressing the relativist challenge raised against him.

**Keywords:** Alasdair MacIntyre, practical rationality, moral relativism, animal rationality, vulnerability, care.

**Abstrak:** Alasdair MacIntyre merupakan salah satu pakar filsafat moral terkemuka di era kontemporer. Namun, beberapa pemikir menuh konsepnya tentang rasionalitas praktis bersifat relativistis. Meski banyak penulis lain telah berusaha membela posisi MacIntyre, tidak satu pun dari mereka mendasarkan diri pada karya MacIntyre yang lebih mutakhir, y.i. *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues (DRA)*. Makalah ini berusaha untuk mengisi kekosongan tersebut. Maka, pertanyaan utama tulisan ini ialah apakah gagasan-gagasan yang dikembangkan MacIntyre di dalam *DRA* dapat dipakai untuk menghadapi tuduhan relativisme terhadapnya. Artikel

ini hendak menunjukkan bahwa konsep-konsep yang dikemukakan di dalam DRA, seperti "rasionalitas hewani" (*animal rationality*), kerapuhan, ketergantungan, kepedulian, dan belas-rasa (*miserericordia*) dapat dipergunakan untuk menangkis tuduhan bahwa MacIntyre jatuh ke dalam relativisme.

**Kata-kata Kunci:** Alasdair MacIntyre, rasionalitas praktis, relativisme moral, rasionalitas hewani, kerapuhan, kepedulian.

## INTRODUCTION

Alasdair MacIntyre is considered one of the most prominent moral philosophers of the contemporary period. Nevertheless, his views have also been challenged by a number of authors from various perspectives. While some have doubted his claim of adhering to the Thomistic tradition of rational enquiry, others have critiqued his views as being communitarian, and some others have expressed disagreement with his views on liberalism. This paper will focus on such point of criticism, namely, that MacIntyre's views entail moral relativism.

MacIntyre has persistently rejected the charge of moral relativism, arguing that his views are not relativistic and that his views uphold the universality of moral principles. There have also been authors who have defended MacIntyre on this point, saying that, even though MacIntyre sees rational enquiry as being tradition-dependent<sup>1</sup>, he remains strongly committed to anti-relativism. Nevertheless, in responding to the charge of moral relativism, neither MacIntyre nor his defenders have hardly made reference to one of his later works, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*.<sup>2</sup> This is surprising and is indeed a lacuna, since it seems that the views expressed in DRA could contribute to defending MacIntyre against the relativist charge. In this paper, I will explore whether and how these views can serve to corroborate that Mac-

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1 Christopher Stephen Lutz, *Tradition in the Ethics of Alasdair MacIntyre: Relativism, Thomism, and Philosophy* (Lanham, Md: Lexington Books, 2004), p. 149. Though this is Lutz's description of MacIntyre's moral theory, I think that the description aptly expresses the essence of this theory.

2 Hereafter to be referred as DRA.

Intyre's views do not entail moral relativism. Accordingly, the principal question to which the paper will respond is: Can the views expressed in *DRA* contribute toward addressing the relativist challenge raised against MacIntyre?

With a view to respond to the question, the paper is divided into three sections, in addition to the introduction and conclusion. The first section discusses the relevant views of MacIntyre, and also those of three authors who are representative of those who have charged him with moral relativism. The second section outlines MacIntyre's views as expressed in *DRA*. It will also point out the fundamental continuity between these views and MacIntyre's earlier account of practical rationality as a tradition-dependent enquiry. The third section addresses the relativist challenge, drawing on MacIntyre's views in *DRA*, thereby responding to the principal question of the paper as posed above.

### **THE RELATIVIST CRITIQUE OF MACINTYRE: CONSIDERING THE SIGNIFICANT POINTS**

Before considering the challenge of relativism raised against MacIntyre, it is important to note that the term 'relativism' itself is fraught with ambiguities and understood differently by various philosophers. Michael Krausz expresses this point aptly, saying that defining relativism "is not an easy matter, since there seems to be no clear and well established usage to which one might appeal."<sup>3</sup> Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, I will adhere to the following definition of moral relativism: "The truth or falsity of moral judgments, or their justification, is not absolute or universal, but is relative to the traditions, convictions, or practices of a group of persons."<sup>4</sup> We shall next briefly consider the significant views of MacIntyre which prove to be the object of attack by MacIntyre's critics.

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3 Michael Krausz, "Relativism and Foundationalism: Some Distinctions and Strategies," *The Monist* 67, no. 3 (1984), p. 395.

4 Chris Gowans, "Moral Relativism," in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, accessed May 16, 2023, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2019/entries/moral-relativism/>.

MacIntyre persistently highlights the contingent nature of historical conditions and the influence of these conditions on the content of practical reason. He claims that “doctrines, theses, arguments all have to be understood in terms of historical context,”<sup>5</sup> and that rational enquiry is “inseparable from the intellectual and social tradition in which it is embodied.”<sup>6</sup> Accordingly, an account of practical rationality “begins in and from some condition of pure historical contingency, from the beliefs, institutions, and practices of some particular community which constitute a given”<sup>7</sup>. MacIntyre encapsulates this historically embodied nature of practical rationality through the term ‘tradition’. The MacIntyrean account of practical rationality is both tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive.<sup>8</sup> It is tradition-constituted in that all reasoning takes place within a specific context which has a continuity with the past and which conditions its strengths and limitations.<sup>9</sup> It is tradition-constitutive in that fundamental agreements regarding practical rationality tend to get defined and redefined through reasoning and deliberation especially during situations of conflict.<sup>10</sup>

The point of historical contingency influencing rational enquiry is so significant for MacIntyre that he rejects any abstract, unhistorical understanding of moral philosophy.<sup>11</sup> In light of the rootedness of rational enquiry in history, he claims that “there is no other way to engage in the formulation, elaboration, rational justification, and criticism of accounts of practical rationality and justice except from within some one particular tradition”.<sup>12</sup> Rather, “it is an illusion to suppose that there is some

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5 Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 9.

6 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 8.

7 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 354.

8 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 10.

9 Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), p. 222.

10 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 12.

11 MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, p. 11.

12 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 350.

neutral standing ground, some locus for rationality as such, which can afford rational resources sufficient for enquiry independent of all traditions."<sup>13</sup> Thus, there is no practical-rationality-as-such; there is only the practical-rationality-of-this-or-that-tradition.<sup>14</sup> Consequently, there can be no neutral ground nor any independent standards of rational justification even for evaluating rival moral traditions.<sup>15</sup> In other words, a moral tradition can be evaluated only in and through the standards internal to that tradition.

Various authors have charged MacIntyre with moral relativism by referring to the above views. Here I will discuss the views of three representative authors: Mark Colby, T.H. Irwin and Robert George.

Colby questions two of the core proposals of MacIntyre. Firstly, he questions the absence of independent standards of rational justification for evaluating rival moral traditions.<sup>16</sup> If, as MacIntyre claims, each moral tradition has its own standards for justifying and evaluating its judgements and practices, then there can be no meta-standards or tradition-independent standpoint to evaluate rival moral traditions. In such a scenario, traditions can neither agree nor disagree regarding beliefs and judgements because for arriving at either agreement or disagreement, there must be some common standards of intelligibility and adequacy. Since there are no such standards according to MacIntyre, it follows that traditions are non-comparable, and the possibility of dialogue between

13 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 367.

14 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 346.

15 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, pp. 346, 351.","plainCitation": "MacIntyre, 351.","dontUpdate": true,"noteIndex": 15,"citationItems": [{"id": 491,"uris": ["http://zotero.org/users/4510916/items/K3L8LHWG"],"itemData": {"id": 491,"type": "book","call-number": "B105.J87 M33 1988","event-place": "Notre Dame, Indiana","ISBN": "978-0-268-01942-6","number-of-pages": 410,"publisher": "University of Notre Dame Press","publisher-place": "Notre Dame, Indiana","source": "Library of Congress ISBN","title": "Whose Justice? Which Rationality?","author": [{"family": "MacIntyre","given": "Alasdair"}],"issued": {"date-parts": [{"1988"}]},"locator": "351"},"-schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"}]

16 The views of Colby cited in the paragraph are from his article "Moral Traditions, MacIntyre, and Historicist Practical Reason," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 21, no. 3 (1995): pp. 58-61.

traditions is threatened at its roots. For Colby, this kind of epistemological relativism inevitably lends itself to moral relativism.

Secondly, Colby objects to MacIntyre's proposal that practical rationality is tradition-constituted. If the content of practical rationality is so bound by tradition, then every moral tradition can claim to be unique and rationally justifiable by its own standards.<sup>17</sup> MacIntyre's rejection of any kind of ahistorical conceptual or epistemological content of rationality entails that every tradition is provisionally superior to every other. This historically embodied conception of rationality renders it difficult to choose between traditions or to change allegiance from one tradition to another, since there is no neutral, tradition-independent content of practical reason. Colby remarks that a criterionless choice of this sort is relativistic and concludes that MacIntyre's excessive emphasis on the historicist conception of practical rationality "yields a polytheism of incommensurable practical rationalities."<sup>18</sup>

Irwin disagrees with MacIntyre's claim about practical rationality, namely, that there is no practical-rationality-as-such but only practical-rationality-of-this-or-that-tradition. In making this claim, MacIntyre clarifies that communication is possible between traditions and that it could occur that one tradition acknowledges that the other is superior regarding rationality and the claims to truth during this communication.<sup>19</sup> Irwin questions the possibility of this occurring through a hypothetical example.<sup>20</sup> In the encounter between  $T_1$  and  $T_2$ , let us suppose that the former acknowledges the latter's superiority regarding rationality and the claims to truth. Such an acknowledgement is possible only if we assume that there are independent standards and conditions of rationality and truth, and  $T_2$  satisfies them better than  $T_1$ . What makes these stan-

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17 The views of Colby cited in the paragraph are from his article "Moral Traditions, MacIntyre, and Historicist Practical Reason," pp. 61, 69-70.

18 Colby, p. 53.

19 MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, pp. 364-65.

20 The views of T.H. Irwin cited in the paragraph are from his article "Tradition and Reason in the History of Ethics," *Social Philosophy and Policy* 7, no. 1 (1989): pp. 56-7.

dards and conditions right is independent of the fact of their acceptance or rejection by  $T_1$  and  $T_2$ . But this amounts to reintroducing the point of rationality-as-such. Thus, Irwin questions MacIntyre's claim about there being no practical-rationality-as-such. Accordingly, Irwin concludes that MacIntyre seems to be committed "to acceptance of some form of relativism."<sup>21</sup>

Robert George acknowledges the insightfulness of MacIntyre's emphasis on the role of tradition in practical rationality.<sup>22</sup> But he maintains that MacIntyre errs in emphasising tradition to the point of claiming that "there can be no resources of practical rationality apart from those supplied by traditions."<sup>23</sup> MacIntyre's "strong particularism"<sup>24</sup> makes it impossible for an enquirer outside of all traditions to choose rationally between moral traditions. If all standards of rationality are tradition-dependent as claimed by MacIntyre, the choice of such an enquirer must be arbitrary. George concludes that this exposes MacIntyre to the charge of relativism.

It should be noted that MacIntyre's account of the virtues also lends itself indirectly to moral relativism. As a philosopher of virtue ethics, it is not surprising that MacIntyre follows Aristotle's account of the virtues, but he holds that because of historically contingent factors, there is no universally acceptable list of virtues. A comparison of diverse cultures would reveal differences and even incompatibilities between their respective lists of virtues.<sup>25</sup> For example, humility is much appreciated and upheld in the Christian tradition, but it is considered a vice by Aristotle.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, the virtues of faith, hope and love are highly esteemed in the

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21 Irwin, p. 57.

22 The views of Robert George cited in the paragraph are from his article "Moral Particularism, Thomism, and Traditions," *The Review of Metaphysics* 42, no. 3 (March 1989): pp. 598, 603.

23 George, "Moral Particularism, Thomism, and Traditions," p. 603.

24 George, "Moral Particularism, Thomism, and Traditions," p. 594.

25 MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, p. 181.

26 MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, p. 182.

Christian tradition, but they are not even mentioned by Aristotle in his discussion of virtues.

For MacIntyre, traditions can differ not only regarding the list of virtues but also in the conceptual understanding of virtue itself. He summarizes his comparison of the concept of virtue in five different traditions<sup>27</sup> as follows:

A virtue is a quality which enables an individual to discharge his or her social role (Homer); a virtue is a quality which enables an individual to move towards the achievement of the specifically human *telos*, whether natural or supernatural (Aristotle, the New Testament and Aquinas); a virtue is a quality which has utility in achieving earthly and heavenly success (Franklin).<sup>28</sup>

In showing the difference in the concept of virtue as well as the diversity in the catalogue of virtues among various traditions, MacIntyre's intention is not in the least to substantiate or uphold moral relativism. Rather, it is only to show that historical, social and cultural factors influence both the catalogue of virtues and the meaning of virtue itself, and that this can lead to marked differences across traditions. Nevertheless, this difference as shown by MacIntyre might lend credence to moral relativism because the virtues, whether intellectual or moral, have a central place in MacIntyre's account of practical rationality. MacIntyre holds that there is no practical rationality without the virtues, because virtues enable one to reason soundly and decide the right course of action.<sup>29</sup> If that is the case, then every tradition would provide rational justification for its actions by taking recourse to its own catalogue of virtues as well as its own concept of virtue. Since these are both tradition-specific, MacIntyre's views lead indirectly to moral relativism.

In this section, we considered the significant views of MacIntyre including those regarding the virtues. We also discussed the views of three

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<sup>27</sup> For details, see MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, pp. 181–86.

<sup>28</sup> MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, p. 185.

<sup>29</sup> MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, p. 136.



authors representing those who charge MacIntyre with being relativistic. We proceed to the next section in which we will discuss MacIntyre's views as expressed in *DRA*.

### MACINTYRE'S VIEWS IN *DRA*

When *DRA* was published in 1999, it would have been a surprise both for the critics as well as for the supporters of MacIntyre. This is because the themes of discussion in *DRA* were unlike those discussed in any of MacIntyre's earlier works. As mentioned before, MacIntyre considers practical rationality as an enquiry which is dependent on tradition. Before *DRA*, all of MacIntyre's works reflect on and delve deeper into the nature of practical rationality as tradition-constituted and tradition-constitutive. Nevertheless, in *DRA* MacIntyre treads a totally different path, focussing on aspects of human beings which are usually not given sufficient attention in mainstream moral philosophy, namely, vulnerability, dependence, and disability. He questions the strict separation which is usually done between the abled and the disabled. He notes that those considered abled face disability at some point or other in their lives while those considered disabled possess some unique talents some of which those considered abled don't possess.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, instead of a strict separation between the abled and the disabled, MacIntyre proposes a scale of disability which includes all human beings. He claims, "Disability is a matter of more or less, both in respect of degree of disability and in respect of the time periods in which we are disabled. And at different periods of our lives we find ourselves, often unpredictably, at very different points on that scale."<sup>31</sup> What MacIntyre says about disability could be extended to vulnerability and dependence too. All human beings experience vulnerability and dependence at some point or other in their lives. Therefore, MacIntyre remarks that the aspects of vulnerability, dependence, and disability are

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30 Alasdair MacIntyre, *DRA*, (Chicago, Illinois: Open Court, 1999), p. 73.

31 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. 73.

an undeniable part of the animal condition of human beings and that they call for “a reassertion of human animality”.<sup>32</sup>

The reassertion of human animality leads MacIntyre to reintroduce some features of Aristotle’s “metaphysical biology”<sup>33</sup> in his account of practical rationality. MacIntyre realizes that he erred by rejecting these features in his earlier account of tradition-dependent practical rationality. Given the biological constitution of human beings, MacIntyre acknowledges that one cannot discuss an ethics independent of biology.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, he proposes that “the specific rationality of human beings is to be understood as animal rationality,”<sup>35</sup> and that the starting point for the development of practical rationality is our initial animal condition.<sup>36</sup> MacIntyre integrates this biological, natural dimension of practical rationality into the account of practical rationality as a tradition. The former could be referred to as the biology dimension and the latter as the tradition dimension.<sup>37</sup> Far from being a contradiction, there is a fundamental continuity between these two dimensions, and both dimensions together constitute MacIntyre’s theory of practical rationality.<sup>38</sup>

It is noteworthy that MacIntyre’s views on vulnerability are echoed in other contemporary reflections on ethics. Feminist philosophers such as Virginia Held, Eva Kittay and Judith Butler have played an inspirational role in these discussions, exploring close connections between ethics and vulnerability. Feminist author Martha Fineman argues that vulnerability is intrinsic to the human condition, and that it is universal and

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32 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. 5.

33 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. x.

34 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. x

35 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. 11. I am aware that, in some modern usage, referring to a human being as “animal” has a strongly pejorative connotation. Obviously, MacIntyre is not intending this connotation through the term “animal rationality”. Rather, he is considering “animal” in strictly Aristotelian categories.

36 MacIntyre, *DRA*, x.

37 Sherel Jeevan Joseph Mendonsa, *Alasdair MacIntyre's Views and Biological Ethics: Exploring the Consistency* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2022), p. 96.

38 For details, see Mendonsa, pp. 44-8.

constant.<sup>39</sup> The rethinking of vulnerability as an ontological condition of humanity<sup>40</sup> has led some feminist authors to take a step further and reflect on the theoretical and practical challenges to an ethics of vulnerability.<sup>41</sup> Thus, MacIntyre's views in *DRA* concerning vulnerability, dependence, and disability and their connection with ethics are neither isolated nor unusual.

In *DRA*, MacIntyre also discusses two virtues which play an important role in humans becoming independent practical reasoners, namely, care and *miser cordia*. The receiving and giving of care are especially important in close relationships such as those between parents and children. MacIntyre notes that those "who, having received care, will be from time called upon to give care, and who, having given, will from time to time themselves once more be in need of care by and from others."<sup>42</sup> He points out dependence on care during childhood contributes to the formation

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39 Martha Albertson Fineman, "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition," *Yale Journal of Law & Feminism* 20, no. 1 (2008), p. 1. The vulnerability approach is an alternative to traditional equal protection analysis; it represents a post-identity inquiry in that it is not focused only on discrimination against defined groups, but concerned with privilege and favor conferred on limited segments of the population by the state and broader society through their institutions. As such, vulnerability analysis concentrates on the institutions and structures our society has and will establish to manage our common vulnerabilities. This approach has the potential to move us beyond the stifling confines of current discrimination-based models toward a more substantive vision of equality.," container-title": "Yale Journal of Law & Feminism", "issue": "1", "language": "en", "page": "1-23", "source": "Social Science Research Network", "title": "The Vulnerable Subject: Anchoring Equality in the Human Condition", "volume": "20", "author": [{"family": "Fineman", "given": "Martha Albertson"}], "issued": {"date-parts": [{"2008}]}, "locator": "1"}, "schema": "https://github.com/citation-style-language/schema/raw/master/csl-citation.json"

40 Catriona Mackenzie, "The Importance of Relational Autonomy and Capabilities for an Ethics of Vulnerability," in *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*, Studies in Feminist Philosophy, Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds, eds., (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 33.

41 A significant example in this regard is the volume edited by Catriona Mackenzie, Wendy Rogers, and Susan Dodds. The volume is titled *Vulnerability: New Essays in Ethics and Feminist Philosophy*, (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014). The various contributors in this volume make a comprehensive analysis of the concept of vulnerability from the philosophical perspective and also explore the strengths and limitations of an ethics of vulnerability.

42 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. 83.

of an adequate sense of self,<sup>43</sup> and that “the acquisition of the necessary virtues, skills, and self-knowledge is something that we in key part owe to those particular others on whom we have had to depend.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, care plays a significant role in the acquisition of the virtues, whether intellectual or moral. We have seen in an earlier section the close connection between the virtues and practical rationality and how virtues enable one to engage in sound practical reasoning.<sup>45</sup> The fact that care plays a key role in the child's acquisition of the virtues shows that the virtue of care indirectly contributes to the process of sound practical reasoning.

In a similar vein, MacIntyre discusses the role of *miser cordia*, which MacIntyre translates as ‘just generosity’.<sup>46</sup> *Miser cordia* is exercised when one considers another's distress as one's own and does something to relieve it.<sup>47</sup> *Miser cordia* is unique in that, when an agent acts in accordance with this virtue, she considers the need of the other, irrespective of whether the other shares familial or social ties with her, thereby going beyond the boundaries of communal life. *Miser cordia* involves affectionate regard, but it is not merely a sentiment. It is a virtue, since besides experiencing the other's distress the agent is also guided by rational judgement in doing the act. Moreover, the agent does not set any predetermined limits on responding to the other's need, especially if the need is urgent and extreme. Thus, MacIntyre also translates *miser cordia* as ‘uncalculated giving’.

We have considered MacIntyre's views as expressed in *DRA* including those regarding the virtues of care and *miser cordia*. As mentioned earlier in the section, these views could be referred to as the biology dimension of practical rationality. In the next section, I will discuss how the biology dimension of practical rationality can contribute toward defend-

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43 For details, see MacIntyre, *DRA*, pp. 85-96.

44 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. 96.

45 For MacIntyre, “practical reasoning” is synonymous with “practical rationality”. Therefore, I am also using these terms synonymously in the paper.

46 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. 121.

47 The views of MacIntyre cited in the paragraph are from his book *DRA*, pp. 122-28.

ing MacIntyre against the relativist challenge. But before this discussion, I will briefly consider how the relativist challenge posed to MacIntyre's views has been generally addressed.

### USING THE BIOLOGY DIMENSION TO ADDRESS THE RELATIVIST CHALLENGE

As mentioned in the introduction, a number of authors have defended MacIntyre against the relativist challenge. M. Kuna and Micah Lott are examples of two such authors. Kuna shows that MacIntyre's approach is philosophically innovative because it avoids the dangers of relativism though at the same time it considers seriously the particularity of moral traditions.<sup>48</sup> Lott argues that though MacIntyre's account of practical rationality is tradition-dependent, it accepts that general, trans-traditional standards of rationality such as consistency and comprehensiveness exist, thereby showing that MacIntyre's views do not entail moral relativism.<sup>49</sup>

MacIntyre himself has responded to the relativist challenge in some of his works. In one of these works, MacIntyre argues that though the claims of a tradition would be incompatible with the claims of other traditions, this point does not necessarily make these claims relativistic, because the adherents of that particular tradition consider these claims as universal. This consideration clearly indicates an anti-relativistic commitment to truth.<sup>50</sup> In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, MacIntyre shows how the one posing the relativist challenge lacks sufficient resources for rational enquiry because he or she claims to be outside all traditions. When one is outside all traditions, one inevitably ends up in a state of moral and intellectual poverty, making it impossible for such a person to issue the

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48 For details, see M. Kuna, "MacIntyre on Tradition, Rationality, and Relativism," *Res Publica* 11, no. 3 (September 2005): pp. 251-73.

49 For details, see Micah Lott, "Reasonably Traditional: Self-Contradiction and Self-Reference in Alasdair MacIntyre's Account of Tradition-Based Rationality," *Journal of Religious Ethics* 30, no. 3 (January 2002): pp. 315-39.

50 For details, see Alasdair MacIntyre, "A Partial Response to My Critics," in *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, John Horton and Susan Mendus, eds. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), pp. 295-96.

relativist challenge in the first place.<sup>51</sup> We proceed next to discuss how the biology dimension of practical rationality can contribute toward defending MacIntyre against the relativist challenge.

As discussed in the earlier section, MacIntyre proposes that the starting point for the development of practical rationality is our initial animal condition, which manifests itself through experiences of vulnerability, dependence and disability. MacIntyre consistently insists that we human beings are “biologically constituted”<sup>52</sup> and that our “human identity is primarily, even if not only, bodily and therefore animal identity.”<sup>53</sup> Thus, our rationality as thinking beings is founded upon, though not completely determined by, our animality; rationality and animality are related to each other.<sup>54</sup>

All human beings, irrespective of the moral traditions they adhere to, share this animal condition or manifest “animal rationality”, which is included in the specific rationality of human beings. Thus, if this animal condition constitutes the starting point for the development of practical rationality as proposed by MacIntyre, then all moral traditions share some content of practical rationality which is not entirely tradition-dependent. Rather, unlike what is pointed out by MacIntyre’s critics, there is some content in MacIntyre’s account of practical rationality which is tradition-transcendent, since it is inseparably linked to our biological constitution and shared by all human beings irrespective of the moral tradition they adhere to. The vulnerability, dependence, and disability which human beings experience is indeed universal and thus, irrespective of place, culture, race (and other contingent factors). Thus, the biology dimension of practical rationality will be common to all moral traditions, even if they have developed their own practical rationalities on account of differing historical conditions. In this regard, MacIntyre rejects the view that “our rationality as thinking beings is somehow independent of our animality.”

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51 For details, see MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, pp. 352–66.

52 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. x.

53 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. 8.

54 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. 5.

ty.”<sup>55</sup> The differences in practical rationalities notwithstanding, we “remain animal selves with animal identities.”<sup>56</sup> Thus it can be claimed that the biology dimension of MacIntyre’s account of practical rationality is universal and tradition-transcendent, and accordingly that MacIntyre’s views do not entail moral relativism.

The biology dimension of MacIntyre’s account can also help promote dialogue and encounter between moral traditions. In writings prior to *DRA* MacIntyre had pointed out that moral traditions, despite their diversity, have a common structure which can aid dialogue.<sup>57</sup> When considering moral traditions, MacIntyre had asserted, “There has to be first some shared level of descriptive characterization and of associated reference at which each provides sufficient grounds for asserting that it is one and the same subject matter that they speak”<sup>58</sup>. The biology dimension, as discussed in *DRA*, could contribute further toward fostering genuine dialogue between traditions because it highlights the inevitability of human vulnerability and human dependence. Since all moral traditions can resonate with this point, this can lead to a broadening of the common ground for a genuine dialogue between moral traditions. This contribution to dialogue between moral traditions would further consolidate MacIntyre’s commitment to anti-relativism, thereby responding indirectly to the relativist challenge.

MacIntyre’s views in *DRA* regarding the virtues of care and *miseri-cordia* can also be useful for addressing the issue of the diversity of virtues across moral traditions. The virtues of care and *miseri-cordia* are directly related to human dependence and human vulnerability. Since all human beings irrespective of the differences in moral traditions are dependent

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55 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. 5.

56 MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. 49.

57 Alasdair MacIntyre, “Incommensurability, Truth, and the Conversation between Confucians and Aristotelians about the Virtues,” in *Culture And Modernity: East-West Philosophic Perspectives*, ed. Eliot Deutsch (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), p. 110.

58 MacIntyre, “Incommensurability, Truth, and the Conversation between Confucians and Aristotelians about the Virtues”, p. 110.

and vulnerable at some point in their lives, they are in need of care and *miser cordia*. Care is usually provided to a person in need by those with whom she has familial or cordial relations. As discussed earlier, the one exercising *miser cordia* does so in direct response to the need of another, irrespective of who that person is. In *DRA*, MacIntyre cites Mencius' example of a child fallen into a well. Upon seeing such a child, all human beings would experience distress and reach out to help, without considering in the least whether the child belongs to their own household or community.<sup>59</sup> Thus, irrespective of whether a moral tradition explicitly acknowledges care and *miser cordia* as virtues, all moral traditions implicitly hold both of these virtues in high regard. Therefore, care and *miser cordia* become virtues which are universal and tradition-transcendent. It was noted earlier that virtues are indispensable for an agent to engage in sound practical reasoning. Consequently, MacIntyre's comprehensive discussion of the universal virtues of care and *miser cordia* in *DRA* further corroborates his views on practical rationality as being committed to anti-relativism.

## CONCLUSION

The objective of this paper was to respond to the question: Can the views discussed in *DRA* contribute toward addressing the relativist challenge raised against MacIntyre? With a view to achieving this objective, the paper was divided into three sections. In the first section, after considering the significant views of MacIntyre's account on practical rationality, we discussed the views of three authors as representing those who pose the relativist challenge against MacIntyre's views. In the second section, we discussed MacIntyre's views as expressed in *DRA*. We saw how he integrated the feature of human animality into human rationality when he realized that one cannot discuss an ethics independently of biology precisely on account of the biological constitution of human beings. We also looked at MacIntyre's reflections on care and *miser cordia*. In the third section, we considered how his views on the biology dimension of prac-

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<sup>59</sup> MacIntyre, *DRA*, p. 123.



tical rationality as well as those on care and *miser cordia* address the relativist challenge raised against him. A significant reason for this was that these views would be acceptable to all human beings, irrespective of their adherence to particular moral traditions.

There have been various arguments which defend MacIntyre against the relativist challenge and we considered some of these in the paper too. These arguments are significant and ably respond to the relativist challenge. Nevertheless, there was a lacuna since these arguments hardly refer to MacIntyre's views on animal rationality, vulnerability and dependence as expressed in *DRA*. The paper aimed to fill this lacuna. Accordingly, by using MacIntyre's views in *DRA*, it is hoped that the paper has contributed its mite toward further corroborating that MacIntyre's views do not entail moral relativism.<sup>60</sup>

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