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Virtue Ethics and Practitioners

Until recently, virtue ethics was confined to the ancient world, but since the nineteen-sixties, there has been something of a renaissance in this ethical theory, both in academic philosophy, and in more practical applications, for instance, in business or health care. While its roots lie in Aristotle, the revival in virtue ethics can be dated from the publication of a paper by the Oxford philosopher Elizabeth Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy."[1] Together with Philippa Foot and Iris Murdoch,[2] she pioneered this movement in contemporary ethics. Its subsequent popularity owes much to Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue,* and theologically to the work of Stanley Hauerwas, while another stream has pursued a Neo-Thomastic exploration of the moral philosophy in Aquinas.[3] This revival in virtue ethics places virtue center stage (as opposed to virtue being simply one part of a moral theory—Kant has a place for virtue, but his is not virtue ethics) and self-standing, rather than derived from some other fundamental moral theory.

Virtue ethicists "regard it as one of their main tasks to say something about how people should act or live, and under this assumption the task of virtue ethics includes giving a distinctive virtue-ethical account of the rightness or wrongness, goodness or badness, of human actions."[4] The particular variant of virtue ethics that I am commending is that primarily derived from Aristotle, and mediated through MacIntyre. Aristotle understands that the virtuous person is perceptive of the rightness or wrongness of any given situation because of the way that they have, by practice, come to inhabit

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1. Anscombe "Modern Moral Philosophy", *Philosophy 33*.

2. Foot, *Virtues and Vices and Other Essays in Moral Philosophy*; Murdoch, *The Sovereignty of Good.*

3. Porter, *The Recovery of Virtue.*

4 Stone, "Virtue Ethics," 326.

the world. It is not a matter of following pre-existing rules or regulations, and Aristotle thinks that such rules are inadequate to the complexity and subtlety of lived experience. Instead, the virtuous person intuits sensitively what is right or wrong—some have likened it to a form of connoisseurship—through having been formed by virtuous practices. Acts count as right because a virtuous person would choose them.

Rosalind Hursthouse[5] interprets virtue ethics as roughly, "acts are right or wrong depending on whether the virtuous person would choose them; a individual counts as virtuous is s/he has and exercises all the virtues; and virtues are qualities of character that an agent needs in order to attain *eudaimonia,* overall well-being or a good life."[6] This is not the only way to interpret Aristotle. It can be argued that virtuous people are those who are perfect judges of what is right or noble, and reliably see what is pre-existently noble and right, derived from some prior gift. This would accord more closely with a notion of morality as given from a prior divine account, given from outside of human existence. The very existence of what we might define as the virtues (courage, as opposed to betrayal, for instance) presupposes that a culture understands what the good life looks like, and Aristotle characteristically sees the virtues as a way of achieving the good life.

I want to work with something of a blend of these two approaches, as we consider ministerial formation. That there is not a complete set of rules for every pastoral situation is self-evident and ministers need to be capable of some kind of intuition, within a broadly-based set of prior characteristics of 'the good.' Formed as virtuous persons, they need to see what the rightness and wrongness of actions look like, but the prior identification of the good life will, for the Christian virtue ethicist, be constrained by the virtues that flow from the person of Jesus Christ, from his character and life as the incarnate Son. The virtuous person is exactly so according to their conformity to Christ, and here is the ground of the good life, and its *telos*: the attainment of eternal life "which is to know God and the One who he has sent" (John 17.3). Thus, it treats the whole person as the agent, rather than one who simply makes moral choices from a prior set of given rules (either God-derived, or derived from a particular cultural context and historical account of the good life).

As a place to start exploring virtue ethics further, I commend Tom Wright's *Virtue Reborn*,[7] as a popular account of the relationship between

5. Hursthouse, "Virtue Theory and Abortion."

6. Stone, "Virtue Ethics," 327.

7. Wright, *Virtue Reborn*. Cf. other accounts of the relationship between virtue ethics and the New Testament: Kotva, *The Christian Case for Virtue Ethics*; Harrington and Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*.

virtue ethics and the New Testament. In it he contends that the New Testament has continuity with the ancient conceptions of virtue, in that it sets forth a vision of being human whereby, through an encounter with Christ by the Spirit, we learn what it is to be authentically human, both in ways that inform our moral judgments, and also forms the character that means that we can live by those judgments. The name he gives for this way of being human is virtue, a concept transformed by Jesus himself.

An important line of theological enquiry uses the work of Alasdair MacIntyre[8] and his scheme of Aristotelian virtue, communities of practice and their supporting institutions to understand the character of a virtue-based ecclesiology. MacIntyre is amongst the most influential of philosophers and ethicists at the beginning of the twenty-first century, arguing that in modernity there has been a fragmentation of morality, with no common shared conception of what it is to be human, nor of the good to which humanity is directed, and that this fragmentation has resulted in moral judgments being little more than arbitrary expressions of the individual, originating in emotional preferences. In response to this, MacIntyre argues that a recovery of Aristotelian virtues, and the practices in which they are formed, offers a hopeful alternative to post-Enlightenment social forces dominated by the market. This has already been applied to other organizational contexts, such as commercial businesses or health care institutions[9], as well as some preliminary investigation of its application to the Christian church[10]. Here, I want to explore first the notion of the community of practice within which virtue is constructed.

Communities of Practice

How learning takes place in 'communities of practice' owes much of its ideological and pedagogical theory to the work of the early twentieth century Russian educationalist and psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Working in the context of the Russian revolution, he created an approach to social science commensurate with the Marxist political order. Appointed to the People's Commissariat for Public Education in 1924, the twenty-eight-year-old

8. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*; MacIntyre, *Dependent, Rational Animals.*

9. Moore, "Humanizing Business: A Modern Virtue-Ethics Approach"; Moore, "Reimagining the Morality of Management: A Modern Virtue-Ethics Approach"; Moore and Beadle, "In Search of Organizational Virtue in Business: Agents, Goods, Practices, Institutions and Environments"; Beadle and Moore, "MacIntyre: Neo-Aristotelianism and Organizational Theory."

10. Moore, "Churches as Organizations"; Mannion, *Ecclesiology and Postmodernity*; Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom.*

Vygostsky argued for a profound transformation of the Russian educational system, and guided by a cultural-historical theory of the formation of mind, he created psychological theories that were used as approaches to the pedagogies of all learners, not simply children's learning. Arising from this sociocultural theory of development, the notion of a "community of practice" in which learning takes place, has become an important line of research and understanding in Western educational theory.

In a community of practice participants are brought together and sustained in relation to some common practice, within which a common language and shared understandings are developed.

> In using the term community, we do not imply some primordial culture sharing entity. We assume that members hold different interests, make diverse contributions to activity and hold varied viewpoints. In our view, participation at multiple levels is entailed in membership in a community of practice. Nor does the term community imply necessary co-presence, a well-defined, identifiable group or socially visible boundaries. It does imply participation in an activity system about which participants share understandings concerning whatever they are doing and what that means.[11]

Participation in the activities of a community of practice enable the person to "become", moving from peripheral participation to full membership. A person finds their identity being constructed, and re-constructed, formed and re-formed, over personal lifetimes, and Wenger argues, learning changes who we are. Thus, in the language of ministerial formation, the learning within a community of practice (those who practice ministry) that takes place in the college and congregation contexts creates the identity of the person as a "minister." They not only acquire knowledge and skills appropriate to the practice of ministry, through this acquisition they "become" ministers, moving from the periphery of that community (as one whose call has been recognized and therefore commended for training) to the mainstream (practitioners of ministry) and participants in the tasks of handing on the practice: those who shape the next generation of ministers.

> Participants start out as newcomers on the periphery of the community and gradually, through observation and incremental participation with the established community members, the so-called old-timers, acquire the understandings and values along with the way of speaking that constitutes the community. In this way, they gradually move to the center of the community

11. Lave and Wenger, *Situated Learning*, 171.

and newcomers become old-timers equipped with the knowl-
edge, understanding, language and identities of full community
members.[12]

The knowledge that is gained through community participation is not
so much a series of self-contained units of cognitive capital, but rather the
embodied ability to behave as community members. Concepts are tools
that enable community members to act, and which can only be understood
through use. Here is a powerful case for practice-based learning in ministe-
rial formation. "In our view, learning is not merely situated in practice—as
if it were some independently reifiable process that just happened to be lo-
cated somewhere; learning is an integral part of a generative social practice
in the lived-in world."[13]

So, communities of practice are something like the guild where a
common set of practices are developed over a long period of time, with a
common purpose and a shared repertoire of tools, discourses and actions.
Indeed, we might want to engage a notion of scale here, with hierarchies of
communities within communities: in ministerial terms, the global commu-
nity of those who practice ministry, within which there are tradition-based
sub-communities (such as Baptist ministry); and within those sub-commu-
nities there are smaller-scale communities whose role it is to bring partici-
pants from the margins to the center—from junior members, learning the
craft, to full members (symbolized by ordination and accreditation). It is
important to understanding the ways in which (i) those communities of
learning (colleges) and the church communities within which much of the
learning takes place (placements) vie for influence upon the person being
formed for ministry, and (ii) how certain practices and actions, understand-
ings and goals, are held in tension between them. It is in the interaction
between the two that the real learning takes place, negotiating what is com-
municated didactically in the lecture hall with the pre-existing practices and
patterns of activity in the church into which the minister-in-training enters
for a while, partly shaping them in that context, as well as being re-shaped,
through their presence and participation.

Rogoff proposes that learning and development takes place in three
"inseparable, mutually-constituting planes comprising activities that can
become the focus of analysis at different times, but with others necessarily
remaining in the background of the analysis."[14] Learning takes place either

12. Daniels, *Vygotsky and Research*, 97

13. Lave and Wenger, "Legitimate Peripheral Participation," 99.

14. Rogoff, "Observing Sociocultural Activity on Three Planes," 139, cited in Dan-
iels *Vygotsky and Research*, 101.

personally, through participatory observation, or interpersonally where learning is guided, as, also, within an institutional or community engagement: an apprenticeship. Ministers learn by simply observing others, by being guided, perhaps in an ad hoc way, or intentionally by a supervising minister. They can also be apprenticed to a skilled practitioner, with whom they have an intentional and long-term relationship purposed to develop the person joining the community of practice.

Two other aspects of Vygotskian theory that have traction in the understanding of ministry formation are his ideas of the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) and *perezhivanie*. First, ZPD concerns the relationship between instruction and development. It is the role of supporters of learning (such as the teacher) to enable the child to move ahead of their developmental level. "A process whereby the adult controlled those elements of the task that were originally beyond the learner's capacity, thus allowing the learner to complete those that were within existing capabilities."[15] The presence of a teacher may be actual, or may be distant, so that when a child seeks to solve a problem at home, having first been shown the solution in class, the "solution is accomplished with the teacher's help. This help—this aspect of collaboration—is invisibly present. It is contained in what looks from the outside like the child's independent solution of the problem."[16] The notion of the support offered by the teacher, carried psychologically by the child, can be transposed to the way in which, consciously or subconsciously, the tutor or teacher supports the minister-in-training, even when not physically present. In formation, the tutors, and other significant shapers of ministry are carried, so that their voice is heard "on the shoulder," as it were. Another term used in this context is scaffolding, where the tutor provides a supportive structure to enable the learning of skills to be developed. This scaffolder creates the safe environment in which the ability is developed to the point of self-supporting usage. So, a child learning to ride a bike is provided first with an adult arm, and a set of rear-wheel stabilizers, then just the proximity of the adult's arm, until finally no scaffold is needed at all. The bicycle can be ridden safely alone as balance becomes unconscious. Similarly, in the development of preaching as a key ministerial task, the early attempts can be reviewed before "performance" by a supervising tutor or the apprentice's master craftsman and the performance reflected upon afterwards; later, review can take place after the performance of the sermon alone, until, both preparation and performance, text and delivery, can be accomplished with some proficiency with the tutor being "invisibly"

15. Daniels *Vygotsky and Pedagogy*, 107.
16. Vygotsky, *Collected Works*, 1:216, cited in Daniels, *Vygotsky and Research*, 20.

present alone. The development of this skill takes place in the ZPD, where the development of the practitioner is led by the tutor in the learning process, with teaching leading development. A similar situation was discussed by Vygotsky in relation to play in early childhood: in play the child could become temporarily higher than his usual everyday behavior, pushing at the possibilities available. In play, as in instruction, the abilities at the edge of capability, at the limits of development are pushed, nurtured and stretched. Could this be applicable also to the development of ministry, where abilities in pastoral care, for instance, are stretched as the student "plays" within a supported situation? Permission to "play", to explore possibilities and use creative imagination, might be a significant role of the formal college formational process.

The second Vygotskyan idea that may be incorporated into our understanding of the formational process is that of *perezhivanie*, a Russian term that describes the integration of cognitive and affective elements, and which presupposes the presence of emotion. The links between the social situation of development and psychological development pervades the later work of Vygotsky in the crucial final years before his death in 1933. *Perezhivanie i*s the emotional experience of the child in the learning process. Vygotsky again:

> The emotional experience [*perezhivanie*] arising from any situation or from any aspect of environment, determines what kind of influence this situation or this environment will have on the child. Therefore, it is not any of the factors themselves (if taken without the reference of the child) which determines how they will influence the future course of his development, but the same factors refracted through the prism of the child's emotional experience.[17]

The emotional dimensions of ministry have perhaps been under-investigated, or inadequately factored into the formational process. Ministry by its very nature deals in the currency of emotions: the deepest grief, the greatest joy, the sharpest anger, the fullness of compassion, all are present within a ministerial life. The combination of personal circumstances, professional encounters within church and society, and the community dimensions of the formational process create the context in which learning and formation is mediated. Social relations work not only from the outside of us, but also from the inside—the internalization of social relations and interactions, both conscious and, more significantly, unconscious (especially

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17. Vygotsky "The Socialist Alteration of Man," 339, cited in Daniel, *Vygotsky and Research*, 44.

in the processes of transference and counter-transference.) Where Vygotsky argues that we must look at 'the experiences of the child, that is, a study of the environment which is transferred to a significant degree to within the child himself and is not reduced to a study of the external circumstances of his life,'[18] we might transpose minister for child. The internal world of the minister must be recognized as of great significance in the formational process: learning, social relations, and the experience of the work of the Spirit (a rather unique form of social relation perhaps) influence the degree to which a person is shaped for ministry. Where, for instance, the social relations in a placement church are fractured, confrontational, and antagonistic towards the minister-in-training, or indeed towards ministry *per se*, for either actual or transferential reasons, then this emotionally charged and enervating environment will become internalized in the psyche of the minister and inevitably shape to some degree their practice of ministry. They may become cautious or internalize a notion that the church, or a sector of it, is "against them", or is in some way the enemy to be fought, or the community to be dominated and subdued. Vygotsky's pointer towards the *perezhivanie* of the minister-in-training is of great help here.

MacIntyrean Virtue Ethics[19]

MacIntyre critiques modernity for its lack of any coherent moral framework, and the seeming impossibility of competing claims to truth to engage in rational debate. In *After Virtue*, he develops a narrative of late modernity in which Enlightenment liberalism, attempting to construct a philosophy and a society on the basis of non-teleological reason, falls into intellectual and especially moral incoherence.[20] In contrast with antiquity or the medieval period when moral discourse was given coherence through the virtues, supported by reflection on the rules necessary to sustain a moral community, "We have lost the unifying frameworks that are necessary for any coherent moral discourse; what we have instead are fragments from earlier discourses, which no longer make sense now that they have been wrenched out of their contexts, and which can serve only as vehicles for the assertion of power."[21]

18. Ratner, "Prologue," xiv

19. This exploration of MacIntyre's virtue ethics was first developed in a thesis presented for a doctorate and later published as Goodliff, *Ministry, Sacrament and Representation,* 139–44.

20. Porter, "Tradition in the Recent Work of Alasdair MacIntyre" 38.

21. Ibid., 39.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre questions whether both socialists and capitalists do not tend towards bureaucratic and managerial power because the only test of their value is instrumental effectiveness. As he puts it in *After Virtue*,

> What if effectiveness were a quality widely imputed to managers and bureaucrats both by themselves and others, but in fact a quality that rarely exists apart from this imputation . . . [S]uch effectiveness does turn out to be one more moral fiction, because the kind of knowledge which would be required to sustain it does not exist . . . Consider the following possibility: what we are oppressed by is not power, but impotence.[22]

And yet, it is precisely such instrumental effectiveness that has become one of the tests of ministerial quality: the ability to lead and manage a local church in pursuit of growth in numbers, and, it must be acknowledged, financial support. Unwittingly, this ethos buys into a philosophy of instrumental reasoning that is concerned with finding the most effective way of delivering the goods (be that health care, motor cars or educational outcomes) without questioning the morality of those goods. This is one of the most characteristic features of modernity, and its significance for virtue ethics is the way in which some forms of ministry have co-opted these values in the name of effectiveness (be that cashed in terms of church growth or an understanding of ministry as leadership). MacIntyre argues that the means do not justify the ends, and that the epistemological self-righteousness of the followers of Enlightenment philosophy, such as Marx or Weber, could be avoided by a return to Aristotelian virtue ethics. This enables ethics to move from a description of "what is," as apprehended by an analysis of the various alternative answers to the question "what is good?" to an apprehension of "what ought to be," as "derived from the pursuit of humankind's *telos*, its end, its purpose." The "good" results from the achievement of the purpose of human endeavor, which, in the concluding chapter of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre argues is what Aristotle calls friendship. While accepting the compelling critique of the Enlightenment's project by Nietzsche, he would not accept Nietzsche's alternative: the will to power of the *Übermensch*, but turned instead to both Trotsky and St Benedict, exemplars of what Aristotle describes as friendship. We might reflect upon this turn to friendship as a way of articulating the New Testament category of *koinonia*, fellowship, both with God through Jesus Christ and with others, and cashed out in the currency of love of the believers and, following Christ, of enemies and strangers. In other words, the habits of hospitality.

22. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 75.

The cultivation of these virtues takes place within the school of practices, as practitioners emulate the standards of excellence already established through the practice they wish to embrace. Such practitioners come to realize that they can achieve such excellence and that it not only constitutes goods for themselves, but also for wider society. Thus, the moral structure of a society is promoted as practitioners within it develop justice, courage and truthfulness (for MacIntyre, the three virtues required for the common good of society). These virtues are internal to practitioners and common to them as proper practitioners. There are other goods, certainly, and these include money, power and status, but these are instrumental goods, goods of effectiveness. They are also finite goods (there is only so much power or money to go around), whereas the internal goods are not limited in this way. The amount of courage or truth is infinite. Indeed, the acquisition of these external goods is only likely to impede the development of the internal virtues such as justice or truthfulness. They are the currency of what MacIntyre describes as institutions.

Institutions are necessary for the organization and sustenance of practices, but they constantly threaten to corrupt them. Here, we might argue, the church and its institutional structures are necessary for the flourishing of communities of justice, courage and truthfulness, yet also threatens in its structures and bureaucracy to diminish them in its pursuit of instrumental effectiveness. The church is necessary for the recognition and validation of ministry, but then tends to co-opt ministry to its own ends, unless there is exercised a constant vigilance and self-reflexivity to counter those ends. This might be achieved as the church is not only the proclaimer of gospel, of Scripture, of the truths of the faith to a watching or listening world, but is first itself the object of that gospel: it remains the human community to which Scripture and the Spirit are first addressed, and which must sit under Scripture before it attempts to proclaim it more widely.

In the sequel to *After Virtue*, titled *Whose Justice, Whose Rationality*, MacIntyre establishes Aristotelian philosophy as the tradition that most clearly uses the kind of teleological reasoning that is used by those who, rightly, he argues, "act in pursuit of the goods of excellence internal to social practices."[23] In this argument, it is both Hume and modern liberalism that constitute the alternatives to the Aristotelian teleological tradition. Both Humean and contemporary liberals prioritize the effectiveness of goods over goods of excellence.

> Both Humean and contemporary liberals regard money, power
> and status as susceptible to rational evaluation but anything

23. Knight, *The MacIntyre Reader,* 12.

postulated as a final end to be beyond the scope of reason. Both articulate the presuppositions of a social order that found early institutional embodiment in a legally regulated market and was then increasingly reinforced by bureaucratic organization.[24]

For the later MacIntyre it is not Aristotle *per se*, but the reading of Aristotle through the writing of Thomas Aquinas that achieves the necessary superiority of argument over any of his predecessors or, indeed, his successors. Aquinas combined Christianity, derived from Augustine, with Aristotle, and produced the most coherent account of rationality and justice. This account is fully realist, "conceiving the *telos* of enquiry as perfected understanding, as the adequacy of an intellect to its object."[25] This is understood by almost every practicing scientist, of course, but is denied by both liberal epistemology and Nietzschean perspectivism.

> The failure of the Enlightenment project left open two alternatives: to reconstruct the moral theory and communal practice of Aristotelianism in whatever version would provide the best theory so far, explaining the failure of the Enlightenment as part of the aftermath of the breakdown of a tradition; or, instead, to understand the failure of the Enlightenment as a symptom of the impossibility of discovering any rational justification for morality as hitherto understood, a sign of the truth of Nietzsche's diagnosis . . . Aristotelianism . . . finally emerged in its Thomistic version as a more adequate account of the human good, of virtues, and of rules, than any other I have encountered.[26]

Three aspects of MacIntyre's alternative strategy to the incoherence of modernity concern us here. First, the development of practices as a lens through which to understand the way of being that is ministry; second, the narrative unity of a human life; and third, the tradition-based context in which ministry is exercised.

Practices

MacIntyre understands practices to have rules and histories that aim at standards of excellence gained by submitting to those who have already attained them. MacIntyre writes,

24. Ibid., 14.
25. Ibid., 19.
26. MacIntyre in an interview with Giovanna Borradori, "An interview with Giovanna Borradori," 255–66, in Knight, ed., *The MacIntyre Reader*, 263.

> By a "practice" I am going to mean 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 derivative 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.[27]

And,

> Its goods can only be achieved by subordinating ourselves within the practice in our relationship to other practitioners . . . To enter into a practice is to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point. It is thus the achievement, and *a fortiori* the authority, of a tradition which I then confront and from which I have to learn.[28]

In ministry, therefore, the habits, practices and standards that represent excellence are not subjective, but agreed by the community, or guild, that preserves them. Any conception of ministry that over-emphasizes the individual's sense of call, that individualizes ministry in other words, loses this sense of communal solidarity. What matters is not so much the individual's sense of vocation as its recognition by the church, its transformation by ministerial formation (which is closer to an apprenticeship in a craft than simply the attainment of a theological education) and its continuing practice, sustained by virtues that correspond to its *telos*, its purpose.

> The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will not only sustain practices and enable us to achieve the goods internal to practices, but which will sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good.[29]

The tradition of ministry as word and sacrament fulfilled just such a function until its eclipse in recent years, and its replacement by a functional

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27. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.

28. Ibid., 191, 194.

29. Ibid., 219.

approach has proved inadequate to the task of forming ministerial virtues where it has not also been embedded in a sacramental theology.

Narrative Unity

In the fragmentation of the self that modernity produces,[30] MacIntyre understands the lack of any narrative unity to a human life as rendering it incapable of fostering virtue: "the liquidation of the self into a set of demarcated areas of role-playing allows no scope for the exercise of dispositions which could genuinely be accounted virtues in any sense remotely Aristotelian."[31]

Instead, virtues require a conception of human life as a unified whole where actions are embedded in an ongoing narrative giving practices meaning and point. It is in just such a unified whole that ministry, and its practice, will flourish. A conception that emphasizes the whole of life as a way of being will inculcate the virtues that ministry demands with greater effectiveness than one that sees ministry as a set of roles to be played (preacher, manager, leader, and so forth). Here again, an ontological approach perhaps is better able to give that narrative unity to life.

Tradition-based Contexts and Institutions

The virtues and practices MacIntyre promotes are not the product of a universal rationality but are forged in particular traditions. These tradition-based contexts, however, require institutions to support them. This has, however, an ambiguous impact in late-modernity which is fixated on efficiency and profit. The institutional context in which these practices flourish, supported by virtues, is for MacIntyre always undermined by the very institutions that they are predicated upon. So there can be no ministry without a church, the institution that provides its context, yet the same institution demands of its ministers practices that produce greater and greater efficiencies, to the detriment of the virtues themselves.

> For no practices can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions. Indeed, so intimate is the relationship of practices to institutions—and consequently of the goods external to the goods internal to the practices in question—that institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order

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30. Cf. Taylor, *Sources of the Self,* 48–52. Cf. Woodhead, "Theology and the Fragmentation of the Self."

31. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 205.

> in which the ideals and the creativity of the practice are always
> vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the
> cooperative care for common goods of the practice is always
> vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution. In this con-
> text the essential feature of the virtues is clear. Without them,
> without justice, courage and truthfulness, practices could not
> resist the corrupting power of institutions.[32]

This places ministry and church in a relationship of potential conflict, where the minister needs to resist the imposition upon their self-understanding and practice of the "characters" that MacIntyre places as typical of modernity: the therapist and manager.

We have seen how virtue ethics has much to offer in its understanding of ministerial formation, its processes and purpose. From Aristotle through Anscombe, Murdoch and MacIntyre, the growth in virtue by means of formation in the practices of ministry, conveyed through the communities of learning and practice, has the potential to form the good minister: virtuous, effective and Christ-like. We turn now to four related models of ministerial formation: a theological one, rooting it in the doctrines of creation and eschatology; the model of ministry as practical wisdom, ministry as a form of focused or exemplary discipleship and ministerial formation as a form of apprenticeship.

32. Ibid., 194.