AN ANALYSIS OF ALTURISTIC BEHAVIOR PRACTICES IN TERMS OF MACINTYRE'S VIEW OF VIRTUE AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

The notion of altruistic behavior is an important and controversial notion particularly in current debates on morality in philosophy. For instance, the view evolutionary morality reads altruistic behavior as the central moral element. Altruistic behavior, in this sense, is considered by reference to its biological roots and based on the biological definitions, and also it is represented as the original ground for human moral behavior. The role of altruistic behavior in the evolution of human morality cannot be denied. However, I argue that different ways of reading altruistic behavior to bring about novel moral perspectives are possible. Keeping all this in mind, I want to employ Alasdair MacIntyre's moral concepts of virtue and practice to understand what altruistic behavior might mean. In order to achieve this, I also revisit the concept of habitual practice as it is applied in the MacIntyre's society centered moral view. I believe that making sense of altruistic behavior in such a way is useful in two senses: first, this view can help us to avoid taking altruistic behavior as a direct consequence of biological determination. Second, this approach can inspire us a new possibility for altruistic behavior, one which is compatible both with the society centered moral view and biologically informed understanding of moral action.

Key Words: altruistic behavior, virtue, practice, society, morality.

ÖZET

Özgeci davranış nosyonu, özellikle ahlak üzerine olan güncel tartışmalarda ve felsefe literatüründe önemli, önemli olduğu oranda da tartışmalıdır. Örneğin, evrimsel ahlak görüşü, özgeci davranışı temel bir ahlak nosyonu olarak okumaktadır. Bu görüş açısından özgeci davranış, biyolojik kökenlere ve biyolojik tanımlamalara dayandırılarak ele alınmakta ve aynı zamanda insanın ahlaki

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davranışlarının orjinal temeli olarak gösterilmektedir. Özgeci davranışın, insan ahlakının evrimindeki rolü yadsınamaz. Ancak özgeci davranışı farklı okuma yollarının yeni ahlaki görüşleri olanaklı kılacağını düşünüyorum. Bunları akılda tutarak, özgeci davranışı anlayabilmek için Alasdair MacIntyre'ın ahlaki kavramları olan 'erdem' ve 'pratik' kavramlarını kullanmak istiyorum. Bu amaçla, aynı zamanda alışkanlıksal pratik kavramını da MacIntyre'ın toplum merkezli ahlak görüşünde yer aldığı biçimiyle ele alıyorum. Özgeci davranışı, bu yolla yeniden okumanın iki açıdan yararlı olduğuna inanıyorum. Birincisi, bu bakışın, özgeci davranışın biyolojik belirlenimciliğin doğrudan sonucu olarak ele alınmasından kurtulmasına yardımcı olabilmesidir. Ikincisi, bu bakışın, bize hem toplum merkezli ahlak görüşü hem de biyolojiden haberdar ahlak anlayışı ile uyumlu yeni bir özgeci davranış olanağı hakkında ilham vermesidir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Özgeci davranış, erdem, pratik, toplum, ahlak.

I.   **THINKING ABOUT ALTRUISM**

Altruism can be said to be the sacrificing of one's benefit for the benefit of other(s). However, defining beneficent behavior changes from society to society in its every day use. In its everyday sense we use this concept to refer to personality traits of benevolent people. Furthermore, although we help our friends in many situations, our behavior in its everyday sense cannot be altruistic simply because of its direct benefit to our friends, for motives and intentions involved in such behavior are also important. The problem with everyday sense of altruism is that since it is not possible to observe motives behind these behaviors, it is difficult to decide whether such behaviors are really altruistic or not. In addition, we cannot always know whether a behavior is altruistic or not in everyday life, because behaviors that result in the benefit for others are affected by many factors. Of course, I do not mean that people never act altruistically. Although people behave selfishly or out of their own interests, they exhibit some behaviors, though occasionally, which benefit others and we can still call them altruistic. These altruistic behaviors may be done with selfish intentions but if these behaviors affect benefits for others, we can say, in the sense of the weak definition given at the beginning, these are altruistic behaviors.

In psychology and philosophy, altruism is not just an action and certain beneficial consequences for others that follow from this action, but also the motives behind any actions. Psychological view of altruism deals with motives behind this beneficial behavior and inferences for behavioral explanation of egoist and altruist individuals. Likewise, philosophical view of altruism deals with motives behind this beneficial behavior and consequence of this behavior for theories of ethics.

In biology, altruism is defined in terms of survival and reproduction and of the notion of "self sacrifice". Altruism is defined by biologists as "a group phenomena in which some genes or individuals, which must be presumed to be selfish, benefit others at cost to themselves" (Darlington, 1978, p. 385). While biological altruism includes beneficial behaviors of non-human organisms, psychological and philosophical definitions of altruism are restricted only to humans. Although having capacity to reflect seems to be the distinctive character of human beings human altruistic behavior is not discussed in terms of this distinctive character in evolutionary altruism. The human is a biological organism like all other organisms. Therefore, from an evolutionary point of view, actions and motives of behaviors are treated in terms of their value for survival and reproduction, regardless of the existence of a critical mind.

On the other hand, I like to read the concept of altruism from a different perspective, one which I think is promising to remove many difficulties we have seen so far as regards the notion of altruism. This perspective is based on two main motivations of altruism; empathy and sympathy that provide social relation and true perception of other people. According to this perspective, our altruistic behavior can be seen as norms, habits and repeated actions that provide the sustainability of society. Altruistic motivations change into altruistic behavior and then if that behavior is accepted in the society, it can be circulated as a habitual practice in this society. I call this practice "altruistic behavior practice" and will endeavor to show how altruistic motivations of human beings turn into practices in social life. I think I should remind here MacIntyre's concept 'social practice', which is the central idea in his ethical view. Thus, I want to go through MacIntyre's virtue ethics and his moral concepts and then I want to show the analysis of altruistic behavior within the framework of his moral concepts.

II. IN SEARCH OF ARISTOTLE THROUGH MACINTYRE

MacIntyre's moral philosophy is based on a Neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics and a critical reading of the moral philosophy of Enlightenment. In *After Virtue*, he argues that the problem of the moral philosophy of Enlightenment is to try to establish rational foundations for morality. This effort removes morality from society. However, according to him, moral theory and its concepts should not be considered independently of social life. According to him, the Enlightenment project of justifying morality failed and such a project always have to fail; since it excludes teleology, an inseparable component of Aristotle's ethics. In order to understand our current moral notions, one has to trace them historically. Therefore he critically examines the Enlightenment project of justifying morality. His claim is that this project not only failed but it had to fail. MacIntyre not only criticizes the Enlightenment project of defining universal standards for morality but also offers his own alternative.

According to MacIntyre teleology is an important part of Aristotle's entire system of ethics. Teleology, in this sense, is what enables man to evolve from "the man-as-he-happens-to-be" to "as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature" (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 52). For MacIntyre, the transition between the two is possible only by being organically linked to the cultural-historical narrative of the society. If one ignores the role of virtues that give man a direction, but not necessarily of a metaphysical kind, rather a direction determined in and by society's historical telos, then what he will have is just a set of arguments or rules of morality isolated from where it has originated. Thus, MacIntyre argues, Enlightenment project failed necessarily, for it failed to reconcile "is" with "ought", once they reject any telos embedded within society.

As I said before, MacIntyre's overall attempt is to establish a neo-Aristotelian virtue ethics. He considers Aristotle as the representative of a tradition that is very important for the history of moral philosophy. In this respect, he presents Aristotle's ethics and Aristotle's definition of virtue, before he proceeds with his own vocabulary.

According to Aristotle, every activity of human beings aims at a "good", and human beings and other species have a specific nature that has a *telos* which includes the individual's specific aims. Therefore, a "good" is defined in terms of these specific natures and aims. For human beings, Aristotle named "good" as *eudaimonia. Eudaimonia* is defined as "blessedness, happiness, prosperity. It is the state of being well and doing well in being well, of a man's being well-favored himself and in relation to the divine" (Ibid., p. 148).

Virtues are qualities and the experiences of them provide the way of achieving *eudaimonia*. However, virtues are not considered as an instrument to achieve a good for humans. MacIntyre interprets the exercise of the virtues in human life as follows.

[T]he exercise of the virtues is not in this sense a means to the end of the good for man. For what constitutes the good for man is a complete human life lived at its best, and the exercise of the virtues is a necessary and central part of such a life, not a mere preparatory exercise to secure such a life. We thus cannot characterize the good for man adequately without already having made reference to the virtues. (Ibid., p. 149)

According to MacIntyre, Aristotle's view is teleological but not consequentialist. In Aristotle's view virtues depend on each other tightly. Having one virtue requires having other main virtues to achieve the good. On the other hand, Aristotle distinguishes two types of virtues. The first type is called intellectual virtues that represent rational thinking. Intellectual virtues are wisdom, intelligence and prudence that are the consequences of instruction. The second type of virtues is moral virtues, like liberality and temperance. Moral virtues are consequence of habit. Virtues are not inborn, but they are consequences of habitual exercises (MacIntyre, 1966, p. 64). "The contrast with our natural capacities is plain: first we have the natural capacity, and then we exercise it; whereas with virtues we acquire the habit by first performing the acts. We become just man by performing just actions, courageous by performing courageous actions and so on" (Ibid.).

III.   MACINTYRE THINKS ABOUT MORALITY

From this point onward, MacIntyre begins with suggesting his own conception of virtue that is related with notions of internal goods and practice. He defines virtue as "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 good" (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 184). Without virtues "human beings cannot achieve the goods internal to the practices" (Knight, 1998, p. 71). According to MacIntyre, virtues are born and can only be recognized in historically and culturally bound moral narrative. In addition virtues require practices and its standards (Ibid., p. 186). The relationship between virtue and practice is very important for the definition of exercises of virtues in human life. "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" (Ibid., p. 191). By 'practice' he means,

[A]ny coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised 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. (Ibid., p. 187)

Many activities of humans, such as playing game, fishing, science, arts, are practices. For him, virtues must be considered and characterized in terms of practices. He distinguishes between internal and external goods, and human achieve both of them in many activities. However, while achieving external goods, such as "fame, wealth, social status, even a measure of power" (Ibid., p. 189) does not require practices, achieving internal goods requires practices and experiences on an activity. A man has a relevant experience and practice to achieve internal goods. In addition, internal goods are only defined in terms of these practices and having an experience in practices (Ibid.).

A practice involves standards and rules which depend on historical and social background of man. A practice has a history and must be interpreted in terms of authority of standards at that time. In this respect, while external goods can belong to the individual and sometimes refer to an object of the individual's competition, internal goods "are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it

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is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice" (Ibid., p. 190).

Every practice requires a certain kind of relationship between those who participate in it. Now the virtues are those goods by reference to which, whether we like it or not, we define our relationship to those other people with whom we share the kind of purposes and standards which inform practices. (Ibid., p. 191)

MacIntyre defines and explains virtues in community life. He defines some virtues in terms of their relationship to other people with whom we share the standards and purposes of the same practices. For example, the virtues of truthfulness, justice and courage are important to preserve the sustainability of communities and social aims in practice. "If someone says that he cares for some individual, community or cause, but is unwilling to risk harm or danger on his, her or its own behalf, he puts in question the genuineness of his care and concern" (Ibid., p. 192). According to him, without standards of these three virtues, social relationship and its practices cannot be sustained, so he states that these virtues must exist for our social practices, whatever our moral belief or social code may be (Ibid.). At this point, practices can improve in different communities as different social code but virtues must be valued in the community as preconditions of practices. "Practices never have a goal or goals fixed for all time, but the goals themselves are transmuted by the history of activity" (Ibid., p. 194). Therefore, we can see different codes of truthfulness, justice and courage in different communities. The exercise of virtues can be learnt in society that has its own specific structure (Ibid., p. 192-196).

MacIntyre defines virtues in terms of their role or place in practices. Nevertheless, there may be some practices in human life that are evil. According to him, it is possible that evil practices can exist.

It certainly is not the case that my account entails either that we ought to excuse or condone such evils or that whatever flows from a virtue is right. [T]he virtues need initially to be defined and explained with reference to the notion of a practice thus in no way entails approval of all practices in all circumstance. That the virtues are defined not in terms of good and right practices, but of practices, does not entail or imply that practices as actually carried through at particular times and places do not stand in need of moral criticism. (Ibid., p. 200)

He explains person's behavior as "narrative of his life's story from birth to death… [I]n order to understand anyone's behavior it must be placed within some socially recognized form of

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activity" (Carden, 2006, p. 15). Moreover he emphasizes the intentions of person's behavior. According to him, "[u]nderstanding the person's intentions involves placing his activity in a setting" (Ibid.), and he says that "we cannot… characterize behavior independently of intentions, and we cannot characterize intentions independently of the settings which make those intentions intelligible both to agents themselves and to others" (MacIntyre, 1985, p. 206).

IV.   **THE WAY MACINTYRE READS ALTRUISTIC BEHAVIOR PRACTICE**

After this general review of MacIntyre's view and his definition of practice, I want to continue with the importance of his view and definition for altruistic behavior practice. I think that a similarity exists between the exercise of virtues and the appearance of altruistic behavior. Practices are those social possibilities in which altruistic intentions find appropriate conditions to flourish. And, in the same vein, virtues are socially recognized codes that one put in work when these kinds of approved behavior –such as altruism- are observed. Like Aristotelian definition of moral virtues, altruistic behavior can also be interpreted as something that can be improved and sustained through habitual practices.

At this point, I want to refer to MacIntyre's view on the relationship between biology and ethics. He uses the notion of "metaphysical biology" that refers to Aristotelian biology, but he constitutes his account independently of this notion. In his book *Dependent Rational Animals; Why Human Beings Need the Virtues,* MacIntyre points to his discovery on the relationship between biology and ethics and he thinks biological concepts are important to a moral theory. He says,

I now judge that I was in error in supposing an ethics independent of biology to be possible. … [N]o accounts of the goods, rules and virtues that are definitive of our moral life can be adequate that does not explain how that form of life is possible for beings who are biologically constituted as we are, by providing us with an account of our development towards and into that form of life. (MacIntyre, 1999, p. x)

In this work, he points out that there is not a sharp contrast between prelinguistic human behavior and animal behavior and he rejects the idea that accepts language as a radical difference between human and animal. He presents similarities between behavior of human and animal, especially behavior of dolphins and chimpanzees. Stephen Carden (2006) interprets human action depending on MacIntyre's examples on similarities. Carden says "[p]eople often act without thinking, but prove able later to state reasons which led them to act in that way. The fact that they do not formulate a statement of intention before they act does not make their action unintelligible." (p. 17)

For MacIntyre, even non-human conditions for growth and well-being can be imagined. He suggests "a universal conception of flourishing" (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 64) to explain biological basis of virtues that is the same for all species. He applies one and the same concept of flourishing for all species as follows.

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What it is to flourish is not of course the same for dolphins as it is for gorillas or for humans but it is one and the same concept of flourishing that finds application to members of different animal and plant species. And correspondingly it is one and the same concept of needs that finds similar broad application. What a plant or an animal needs is what it needs to flourish *qua* member of its particular species. And what it needs to flourish is to develop the distinctive powers that it possesses *qua* member of that species. (Ibid., p. 64)

According to him, "humans flourish as independent practical reasoners… [H]uman beings need to learn to understand themselves as practical reasoners about goods, about what on particular occasions it is best for them to do and about how it is best for them to live out their lives" (Ibid., p. 67). However, on the other hand, human beings depend on others. The relationship between human and others is necessary for human's flourishing. He presents this dependency on others as follows;

Independent practical reasoners contribute to the formation and sustaining of their social relationships, as infants do not, and to learn how to become an independent practical reasoner is to learn how to cooperate with others in forming and sustaining those same relationship that make possible the achievement of common goods by independent practical reasoners. (Ibid., p. 74)

We need others to acquire virtues and self-knowledge and good life. Being independent practical reasoners and having a good life cannot be considered independently of others. According to MacIntyre, "we continue to the end of our lives to need others to sustain us in our practical reasoning" (Ibid., p. 96). In addition, he says that,

So the practical learning needed, if one is to become a practical reasoner is the same learning needed, if one is to find one's place within a network of givers and receivers in which achievement of one's individual good is understood to be inseparable from the achievement of the common good. Yet this conception of the relationship of the common good to individual goods and of the place of both in practical reasoning is of course very much at odds with some widely influential conceptions of practical reasoning. (Ibid., p. 113)

According to Carden (2006), " MacIntyre's conception of the virtues has then expanded to embrace those traits of character that promote human flourishing in the growth of our rational nature from our animal nature and in our dependency on the acts of giving and receiving that constitute our relations with others" (p. 18). Furthermore, the recognizing of dependency on others produces a

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central virtue that is called "generosity" by MacIntyre (Ibid., p. 19). And then " the virtues of giving- industriousness in getting, thrift in saving, and discrimination in giving- arise as well as the virtues of receiving- gratitude, courtesy, forbearance- and truthful acknowledgement of dependence" (Ibid.).

V.   CONCLUDING REMARKS

It can be clearly seen that, in this work, MacIntyre tends to think our relations to others on the basis of our biological existence. His treatment of virtues does also employ some non-human aspects of togetherness and dependence on others. Our good life or well-being is explained by notion of being independent practical thinker, and common good by engagement with others. In this respect, one might argue that the shift in MacIntyre's exposition of virtues is an apparent indicator of his discovery that altruism is just a necessary end-product of biological history for all species. Especially his notions, "virtues of giving" and "virtues of receiving", can be considered as conditions for altruistic behavior. Although he does not use the term altruism explicitly, I think this interpretation would not contradict with his previously held definitions. From this point of view, virtues can be embodied with practices and practices require others, in other words, society. One can think the same for altruistic behavior; altruistic behavior can be embodied with practices and the practices always require others to improve and achieve their ultimate end. It can be said that, all definitions of altruism, whether they are psychological, philosophical or biological, in human behaviors or animal behaviors depend on the relations with others.

All this shows that, altruistic behavior practice, as a disposition, habit or inner strength, can find its moral connotations in virtue ethics. Furthermore, altruistic behavior seems to evolve and establishes itself as virtues serving to well-being of person and common good.

I have treated altruistic behavior so far as a positive social behavior rather than considering this notion as a rational process or relating it to cognitive components of the human behavior. Altruistic behavior as a positive *prosocial* behavior can be seen as socialization and is an important component of human morality. The important point here is that altruistic behavior should be considered as a biological drive for socialization and cooperation, as a set of biologically driven behaviors that are also encouraged by society, a unity of genetically and historically connected individual organisms.

Thus I have explained altruistic behavior as an unreflective, repeated and habitual action that can lead us to have an alternative perspective in morality. I believe that a different reading of the notion of altruism provides us critical reflections in moral philosophy. Nevertheless, this perspective should not be associated with normative accounts and normative notions of 'moral good' and 'moral bad'. I think human social and moral behaviors are not determined by norms, but they rather

arise spontaneously in the social environment in which individuals exist. Thus, I have sought to read altruism as the basic component of this ethical perspective.

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