

## Human Flourishing, Human Nature, and Practices: MacIntyre's Ethics Still Requires a More Thomistic Metaphysics

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My aim in this paper is to investigate what enables human flourishing from a Thomistic perspective by considering Aquinas' natural inclinations. I will argue that human beings flourish in different ways, depending on their practices. However, not every practice contributes to human flourishing, but only those that are consistent with human nature, which agents grasp through their natural inclinations. To support this argument, I will critically analyze MacIntyre's account, referring mainly to his latest work (2016). MacIntyre has the merit of highlighting the role of practices in human flourishing by considering the narrative dimension in the agents' lives, but he fails to recognize the properly metaphysical framework of human nature, that would be provided by the proper consideration of natural inclinations.

**Keywords:** Alasdair MacIntyre – human flourishing – metaphysics – natural inclinations – practices – Thomas Aquinas

### Introduction

By virtue of what do human beings flourish as human beings? Is there only one way or are there many ways in which agents can flourish? In this paper, following a Thomistic perspective, I will argue that agents flourish if and only if they act in accordance with their natural inclinations, viz. if they consciously actualize the potentialities that they have by virtue of their nature.<sup>1</sup> Although

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<sup>1</sup> The term "flourishing" here does not designate "well-being" in a generic sense, but refers to a notion that was introduced by Anscombe (1958a) and which has become common among those who have reconsidered Aristotelian and Thomistic ethics in the contemporary debate. Indeed, Anscombe was one of the founders of contemporary virtue ethics, in that she has proposed to revitalize Aristotelian ethics. In this way, Anscombe has reintroduced the

natural inclinations are shared by all human beings by virtue of their nature, the way in which agents flourish depends on their practices. So, I will argue that there is not a single way to flourish for human beings, because natural inclinations can be actualized in different ways. I will support my assertions by critically considering MacIntyre's thought.

Firstly (section I), I will analyze Aquinas' conception of natural inclinations. To this end, I will examine Aquinas' account of human nature, because from this account he derives his conception of ethical human agency. In the light of this, I will consider the role of natural inclinations in Aquinas, since they are potentialities that agents have by virtue of their nature and that allow them to flourish through their agency. Secondly (section II), I will argue that although human beings have the same nature, the way in which they flourish, namely the way in which they actualize their potentialities – natural inclinations – varies from place to place, from time to time, from culture to culture, that is, it depends on their practices. Thirdly (section III), I will examine MacIntyre's account. In the first edition of *After Virtue* (MacIntyre 1981), MacIntyre argues for the return of the Aristotelian conception of virtue, but, at the same time, he refuses to accept Aristotle's metaphysical account of human nature. Instead, in the preface of the third edition of *After Virtue* (MacIntyre 2007, x – xi), MacIntyre recognizes the need to refer to a metaphysical account of human nature in order to understand what human flourishing consists of. Moreover, he states that, to do so, it is appropriate to refer to Aquinas. In the light of this, I will analyze MacIntyre's latest published work (MacIntyre 2016) to consider whether he has succeeded in this endeavor. I will claim that his last work has the merit of highlighting the importance of practices, that is, the role of the first-person perspective in human flourishing by considering the narrative dimension in the agents' lives. However, I will argue that his conception is lacking since it fails to recognize the properly metaphysical framework of human nature, that, instead, would be provided by the recognition of the role of natural inclinations.

### **I. Human Nature, Human Agency, and Natural Inclinations**

Aquinas claims that human beings have some natural inclinations that tend towards good in accordance with the first principle of practical reason, which states: "good is to be done and evil is to be avoided [since] all things tend to

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teleological conception of ethical agency that was neglected during the modern era. According to Anscombe, flourishing for agents means acting virtuously, that is, acting in accordance to what is proper to human beings *qua* human beings (Anscombe 1958a, 15).

the good” (Aquinas 2017, I – II, q. 94, a. 2). Aquinas identifies three inclinations towards good proper in human beings (Aquinas 2017, I – II, q. 94, a. 2):

- (i) The first inclination is the inclination that human beings have in common with all living beings, and it is the inclination to preserve their own being;
- (ii) The second inclination is the inclination that human beings have in common with animals, and it is the inclination to preserve their species;
- (iii) The third inclination is the inclination that is proper to human beings, and it is the inclination to rational activity.

Since natural inclinations concern the tendencies that agents have for acting in certain ways, it is appropriate to explain in what human agency consists of, according to Aquinas. Aquinas states that not everything an agent does is a properly human action. Indeed, he distinguishes between actions of human beings (*actus hominis*) and properly human actions (*actus humanus*) (Aquinas 2017, I – II, q. 1, a. 1). Actions of human beings are, for example, the movement of the intestines during the digestion, or the movement of the body following a push. Actions of human beings are not actions that agents do as human beings, because they are not conscious actions, that is, they are not actions done with an intention in view. Instead, human actions are proper to agents as human beings, in that they are the authors and responsible of their actions. For an agent to be the author of her agency, an action should proceed from deliberate will, namely from the agent’s reason and will. In this regard, Aquinas states that “the object of the will is the end and the good. Therefore, all human actions must be for an end” (Aquinas 2017, I – II, q. 1, a. 1): every proper human action is for the sake of some end that seems good to the agent (*ratio boni*).

Aquinas’ conception of human agency was taken up in the contemporary discussion by Anscombe (1957). According to Anscombe, an action is a properly human action – namely an intentional action – if it is possible to identify the reasons for acting that motivate agents to act in view of an end that they consider a good to be pursued. In that way, the role of the first-person point of view is highlighted in human agency, because an action is a properly human action only when agents recognize an end as a good to be pursued.

So, in the Thomistic perspective the sake of the good is what guides human action. But can it be that anything that is considered good is really a good to be desired by human beings? In order to answer this question, I will consider Aquinas’ account of human nature. I will state that only that which

conforms to human nature is a good to be desired by an agent, since it contributes to her flourishing. Indeed, by “good” Aquinas means the desirability of something that is so insofar as it is perfect and actualized, namely insofar as its nature is realized (Aquinas 2017, I, q. 5, a. 1). For Aquinas, human nature is to be considered not only from a biological point of view, but also and mainly from a metaphysical point of view, in relation to the powers whereby human beings are inclined to act in certain ways.

Aquinas claims that human beings are composed of the unity of form – the rational soul – and matter – the material body – (Aquinas 2017, I, q. 76). The rational soul is proper only to human beings; the material body is in common with animals and other substances. Aquinas argues that, by virtue of their nature, human beings have some powers (*the powers of the soul*): vegetative, sensitive, appetitive, locomotive, and intellective powers (Aquinas 2017, I, qq. 77 – 89). The vegetative, sensitive, appetitive, and locomotive powers concern the material body of human beings, because they concern what they have in common with all living beings and animals. Appetitive powers include the will, which, together with the intellect, constitutes the rational powers, that is, the powers that agents possess properly as human beings by virtue of the rational soul. The vegetative, sensitive, locomotive, and appetitive powers concern the first and the second natural inclinations, since they pertain to what human beings have in common with all living beings and with animals; the intellect and the will concern the third natural inclinations, since they pertain to what is proper to human beings, the rational soul. All these powers are interrelated in that they all intervene in the lives of human beings *qua* human beings. According to Aquinas, agents should not act in view of any end that they consider to be good, but they should act in view of their flourishing, that consists in the development of a virtuous conduct by actualizing all their powers under the guidance of the rational ones (Aquinas 2017, I – II, q. 18, a. 5).

Therefore, rationality distinguishes human beings from animals and other substances. The proper end of human beings is to achieve the perfection of the rational activity, and, thus, to act in accordance with the third natural inclination, “for that is good for a thing which suits it in regard to its form; and evil, that which is against the order of its form” (Aquinas 2017, I – II, q. 18, a. 5). However, also the first and the second natural inclinations are human insofar as they are humanized, that is, insofar as the ends to which they tend are rationally pursued through conscious actions (McInerney 1997, 45 – 46): “all the inclinations of any parts whatsoever of human nature, ... in so far as

they are ruled by reason, belong to the natural law” (Aquinas 2017, I – II, q. 94, a. 2). So, the three natural inclinations are human in virtue of the unity of the rational soul and the material body – which together constitute the substance of the human beings – and in virtue of the rational activity – which is proper of human beings because of their form. Thus, natural inclinations consist of powers that agents have because of their nature, by virtue of which they incline towards certain ends or goods that motivate them to act. If human beings act in accordance with all their natural inclinations, under the guidance of their rational powers, they flourish, since they consciously act in order to actualize the potentialities proper to their nature.

Even if human nature is universal – since every agent is composed of the unity of the rational soul and the material body – human beings are not identical to each other. Indeed, each human being constitutes a substance in herself. This is so in virtue of the material body because it is the material body that confers the individuality on human beings. Indeed, it is by virtue of it that agents are placed in the concrete reality in which they experience their natural inclinations.

Now, let us consider in more detail what natural inclinations consist of according to Aquinas (2017, I – II, q. 94, a. 2):

- (i) The first inclination, which is the inclination that human beings have for the preservation of their own being, consists, for example, in the inclination to nourish themselves and to have a place to shelter;
- (ii) The second inclination, which is the inclination that human beings have for the preservation of the species, consists, for example, in the inclination to sexual reproduction and to the education of the offspring;
- (iii) The third inclination, which is the inclination that human beings have as rational beings, consists, for example, in the inclination to know the truth and to live in society with other human beings by exercising their rationality.

It is worth bearing in mind that Aquinas wrote the *Summa Theologiae* in medieval times. Therefore, his work is also a product of his time. However, natural inclinations have a theoretical value that goes beyond historical times (Aquinas 2017, I – II, q. 94, aa. 4 – 5). Indeed, all natural inclinations are disposed to achieve some things to which all agents could tend by virtue of their nature, even if the way in which agents act differs according to the personal experience of single agents and according to the geographical

places, the historical periods, and cultures in which they live, i.e., according to their practices.

## **II. Acting within Practices: How Human Beings Flourish**

But what is a practice? To answer this question, we can firstly refer to Anscombe (1958a, 1958b). According to Anscombe – who follows the later Wittgenstein (1953) – a practice consists in that agents act according to a rule within a context that they share and in which an action acquires a meaning. Thus, a proper human action is always placed within a context that agents understand and in which they can operate. I will argue that agents can act in this context by virtue of their powers, which depend on their nature; namely, they can act by virtue of their natural inclinations. I will claim that only those practices that are in accord with all natural inclinations, by virtue of the unity of the human nature, are desirable.

For example, normally, all human beings have a natural inclination to preserve their own being. To do that, they should feed themselves. Agents can actualize their inclination in a rational way, i.e., in accordance with their nature, or in a non-rational way, i.e., in disagreement with their nature. In this regard, we can take as an example an extreme case like cannibalism. Even if cannibalism is a practice shared by some agents and even if it allows them to preserve their being, nevertheless, it denies others – those who are eaten – to preserve their being. Therefore, it seems that not all practices shared by some agents are to be considered as properly human.

Indeed, in order for an agent to nourish herself in accordance with her nature, she should know the truth about what does or does not constitute an adequate nourishment for her as a human being. For example, an agent who is fond of ice cream will not act appropriately for a human being if she eats ice-cream with every meal. Indeed, this would be detrimental to the preservation of her being. On the other hand, if the agent who is fond of ice-cream becomes aware that eating only ice-cream is harmful to her and a more varied and balanced diet will give her a better chance of preserving her being, and she decides to eat ice-cream only occasionally, she will follow a more suitable diet for a human being. Moreover, for an agent to be able to feed herself properly, this must be favored by the society in which she lives. This happens if society provides her with suitable conditions to nourish herself, such as, in the contemporary society, both a job that gives her a salary to do the grocery shopping, and correct information – e.g., through education – about what is appropriate to eat for human beings also in the light of the

advancement of the scientific knowledge in this regard. In addition, consciously following a balanced diet allows one to act in accordance with the inclination for the conservation of the species, which regards the upbringing of the offspring, if any, or in any case of the children who live in our society and who will enable the human species to continue to exist in the future. Indeed, having a balanced diet would allow one to educate one's children or the children of society to also follow this lifestyle. This does not mean that all agents should eat the same things. Indeed, appropriate foods for human beings can vary from place to place, depending on traditions and on what kinds of food grow in a good way in a certain location (e.g., in Italy agents eat mostly pasta and in China mostly rice).

Thus, agents who live in a certain place and in a certain historical period usually eat some kinds of food that preserve their being in accordance with the practices shared with other agents. Having shared practices depends on agents having the natural inclination to live in a society. By living in a society, agents become aware of what it means to be a human being and how they can act. This shows that, according to the Thomistic perspective, human beings are political and social beings.

However, there are good and bad ways in which a society can be. A good society is one that allows agents to follow their natural inclinations in accordance with their nature. Indeed, a good society gives agents the possibility:

- (i) To follow the inclination to preserve their being, through nourishment and by having a place to shelter;
- (ii) To follow the inclination towards reproduction or education, allowing agents to meet each other, giving families ways to pursue child raising, and providing places and opportunities for education in society;
- (iii) To follow the inclination to exercise their rationality, by knowing the truth and by living in a society.

This means that a good society empowers agents to realize their potentialities, that is, to act in accordance with their natural inclinations. In that way, agents flourish in accordance with their human nature. Moreover, since society is made up of individual agents, it is up to them to act for the common good, that is, for a good that enables all individual agents and thus society at large to flourish. As has been mentioned above, this does not mean that there is only one way to flourish. Indeed, the actions that lead human beings to

flourish may vary from place to place, from historical periods, and from cultures, namely from practices.

### III. MacIntyre and Aquinas' Natural Inclinations

In the contemporary debate, MacIntyre (1981, 1988, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2006a, 2006b, 2016) has massively discussed practices. According to him, only in the context of practices can human beings exercise the virtues. A virtue consists in a habit, which is a stable disposition to act in a certain way, and it is constituted by the conscious repetition of the same kind of action. If an agent acts according to the virtues, she flourishes as a human being.

In the first edition of *After Virtue* (1981), MacIntyre claims that moral philosophy should be practical, and, therefore, it should consist in the study of human agency, by investigating what makes a human being excellent and virtuous. In the light of this, MacIntyre proposes to revitalize Aristotelian ethics. Indeed, according to Aristotle, moral philosophy is practical, and virtues are intellectual and moral excellences that make agents capable of independent practical reasoning: virtue is an excellence proper to the human being who judges well and acts accordingly in the pursuit of ends that seem good to her. For MacIntyre, an excellent and virtuous human being is an agent capable of grasping the good both in a singular practice and in her life considered as a whole. In this regard, MacIntyre also emphasizes that individual excellence requires the individual to belong to a certain community.

*After Virtue* has been criticized, as in it MacIntyre offers an Aristotelian-like virtue ethics, but he refuses to refer to Aristotle's metaphysical account of human nature, and, instead, he advocates a social teleology. Virtue, then, is not defined in metaphysical terms as that which perfects the agent in relation to her human nature, but it is defined in terms of the practical requirements that enable excellence in the agent's participation in particular practices and in her involvement within the community to which she belongs.

However, MacIntyre (2007) stated that after the publication of the first edition of *After Virtue* he became a Thomist, and he realized that the teleology of human agency must recognize the metaphysical foundation in human nature:<sup>2</sup>

When I wrote *After Virtue*, I was already an Aristotelian, but not yet a Thomist .... I became a Thomist after writing *After Virtue* .... In *After Virtue* I had tried to present the case for a broadly Aristotelian account of the

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<sup>2</sup> In this regard, see also MacIntyre's (2008) reply to Kuna (2008).



virtues without making use of or appeal to what I called Aristotle's metaphysical biology. And I was of course right in rejecting most of that biology. But I had now learned from Aquinas that my attempt to provide an account of the human good purely in social terms, in terms of practices, traditions, and the narrative unity of human lives, was bound to be inadequate until I had provided it with a metaphysical grounding. It is only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do. So I discovered that I had, without realizing it, presupposed the truth of something very close to the account of the concept of good that Aquinas gives in question 5<sup>3</sup> in the first part of the *Summa Theologiae* (MacIntyre 2007, x – xi).

But did MacIntyre succeed in doing this? To answer this question, I will not refer so much to the works (MacIntyre 1988, 1990a, 1990b, 1999, 2006a, 2006b) published between the first edition (MacIntyre 1981) and the third edition (MacIntyre 2007) of *After Virtue*, but rather I will refer to the last work published by MacIntyre (2016), which is entitled *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity: An Essay on Desire, Practical Reasoning, and Narrative*. Indeed, this work encompasses the evolution of MacIntyre's thought and the most significant results of his previous works. Here, MacIntyre does not refer exclusively to the Thomistic perspective, but rather to the Aristotelian-Thomistic one. This is so because he recognizes that the Thomistic account builds mainly, even if not only, on Aristotelian philosophy, and that together they form a unique tradition of thought.<sup>4</sup>

In this work, MacIntyre proposes to reconsider the Aristotelian-Thomistic conception, because he sees critical issues in modernity that can be addressed by an Aristotelian-Thomistic point of view. MacIntyre criticizes modernity primarily because it sustains a compartmentalized view of life. Agents do not consider their lives in a unified way, but rather as compartments. In that way, agents act differently according to different areas of life, such as family, school, work, hobbies, friendly or love relationships, etc. Thus, according to MacIntyre, in contemporary society, usually there is no order among the agents' desires, because in each area of life agents have

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<sup>3</sup> Here MacIntyre refers to Aquinas' conception of good, according to which good and being are the same thing, and they differ only conceptually (Aquinas 2017, I, q. 5).

<sup>4</sup> In this regard, MacIntyre argues that Aquinas' account is a synthesis of the strengths of Aristotle and Augustine's philosophies (MacIntyre 1988).

different desires that may not even coincide with the desires that they have in other areas of life. Instead, according to MacIntyre, life must be considered as a unified whole by agents, who should conceive their life in a narrative way as directed towards an end, namely their flourishing.

In the light of MacIntyre's statement in the preface of the third edition (MacIntyre 2007, x – xi) of *After Virtue*, we expect to find in *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* a reference to the metaphysics of the human nature. Therefore, I would like to consider whether MacIntyre recognizes in this work that what agents should desire in order to flourish should be consistent with human nature and with their understanding of human nature through natural inclinations.

In *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity*, MacIntyre argues that, for an agent to flourish, she should understand whether she has good reasons for desiring what she desires:

Agents do well only if and when they act to satisfy only those desires whose objects they have good reason to desire, that only agents who are sound and effective practical reasoners so act, that such agents must be disposed to act as the virtues require, and that such agents will be directed in their actions toward the achievement of their final end (MacIntyre 2016, 243).

According to MacIntyre, human beings flourish in different ways, since there is not a single defined end for all agents. He states that an agent should understand what human flourishing consists of through the narrative of her life, i.e., by considering the historical, cultural, and social context in which she lives and by identifying a meaning to her life, considered as a unify whole, in this context. In fact, according to MacIntyre:

To live well is to act so as to move toward achieving the best goods of which one is capable and so as to become the kind of agent capable of achieving those goods. But there is no particular finite good the achievement of which perfects and completes one's life. There is always something else and something more to be attained, whatever one's attainment. The perfection and completion of a life consists in agent's having persisted in moving toward and beyond the best goods of which she or he knows. So there is presupposed some further good, an object of desire beyond all particular and finite goods, a good toward which desire tends insofar as it remains unsatisfied by even the most desirable of finite goods, as in good lives it does.

But here the enquiries of politics and ethics end. Here natural theology begins (MacIntyre 2016, 315).

Thus, for MacIntyre there is not a single end in human life for all agents; rather, human beings flourish if they act in the direction of the realization of some finite goods that change over the course of their lifetime. Human flourishing consists in agents acting in the direction of some finite goods, while remaining constitutively open to other goods, being aware that there is a good beyond finite goods; a good which cannot be reached by agents, but towards which they must be stretched in order to flourish:

We complete and perfect our lives by allowing them to remain incomplete. A good life is one in which an agent, although continuing to rank order particular and finite goods, treats none of these goods as necessary for the completion of her or his life, so leaving her or himself open to a final good beyond all such goods, as good desirable beyond all such goods (MacIntyre 2016, 231).

But how do we distinguish between which goods constitute good reasons for acting and which do not? MacIntyre credits Aquinas by emphasizing the relevance of the first-person perspective in human agency, given that, in order to act, an agent must be motivated to act by something that she considers to be good. This conception of human agency departs from what MacIntyre calls “expressivism,” according to which anything an agent desires is permissible, just because she approves it and, thus, she expresses her subjective and pre-rational attitude. Instead, MacIntyre, following the Aristotelian-Thomistic view, asserts that it is good to desire only that which enables agents to flourish as human beings. According to MacIntyre, in order to flourish, human beings should understand the possibilities for acting that they have as human beings, and they should understand which, among these possibilities, allow them to flourish, and that means to be able to order desires and goods in a proper way.

But, according to MacIntyre, does ordering desires and goods appropriately mean ordering them according to the natural inclinations that they have by virtue of their nature? He states that human flourishing is different from the flourishing of plants, dolphins, and other living things, by virtue of the rationality that is proper to human beings (MacIntyre 2016, 225 – 226). He claims that there are at least eight human goods that cannot be denied: good health, what makes it possible to maintain an adequate standard of living (food, clothing, shelter), good family relationships, an adequate

education that permits to develop one's powers, a satisfying job, good friends, free time for leisure activities good in themselves, the capacity to rationally order one's life and, consequently, the capacity to learn from one's mistakes (MacIntyre 2016, 222 – 223).<sup>5</sup> From the agreement on these human goods comes the agreement on which virtues enable human flourishing and which evils obstruct it. In this regard, MacIntyre identifies three requirements that enable agents to acquire the virtues that allow human flourishing: reliability, truthfulness, and an ability to imagine alternative courses of action (MacIntyre 2016, 312). Moreover, MacIntyre highlights the importance of a shared deliberation on human goods with other people of the society in order for agents to identify them and then to flourish.

Nevertheless, as we have already observed, even if MacIntyre acknowledges that some goods are undeniable, he still asserts that even if finite goods enable agents to live well, however, none of them should be treated as the ultimate end, because there will always be a good beyond these finite goods. So, he states that for an agent

the nature of her practical reasoning and of the practical reasoning of those in whose company she deliberates has from the outset committed her and them to a shared belief in God, to a belief that, if there is nothing beyond the finite, there is no final end, no ultimate human good, to be achieved. So she may complete her reasoning by discovering that what is at stake in her decisions in moments of conflict is the directedness of her life, if not toward God, at least beyond finitude (MacIntyre 2016, 55 – 56).

According to MacIntyre, this is possible even for those who are not theists. Indeed, this attitude, that consists in stretching beyond finite goods, is defined by MacIntyre as a form of natural theology, because it requires one to renounce to the idolatry of finite goods and to accept that there is something beyond these finite goods. Therefore, MacIntyre does not give a definition of what the ultimate end consists of. MacIntyre states that it is not possible to account for the good beyond finite goods, because to do so would mean to go beyond the boundaries of philosophy and to enter in the realm of theology, even if defined as natural theology in that it does not appeal to a revealed religion.

Aquinas argued that the ultimate goal of human beings is beatitude (*beatitudo perfecta*), that is, the contemplation of the divine, which in worldly life can be attained only imperfectly (*beatitudo imperfecta*). On the other hand,

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<sup>5</sup> This list recalls the list of human goods identified by the New Natural Law theorists, such as, for example, John Finnis (1980).

MacIntyre suggests that there is an ultimate direction for human beings' lives, without explicitly defining in what the ultimate end consists of in order to not go beyond what he retains to be the boundaries of philosophy.

But I think that before referring to theology – even natural theology – we should explicitly refer to metaphysics, to which MacIntyre had appealed in the preface to the third edition of *After Virtue* (MacIntyre 2007, x – xi). Indeed, what seems to be absent in MacIntyre's account in his last published work is the explicit reference to the properly metaphysical dimension of human nature, which, in the third edition of *After Virtue*, he argued had to be considered.

In this regard, I claim that Aquinas' natural inclinations could be reconsidered as the metaphysical criteria that all agents can recognize in their lived experience. Natural inclinations, which, as we have seen, incline towards certain goods in accordance with human nature, define the potentialities that can be actualized by agents in order to flourish. This means that among all the possible actions that agents can do, only some of them allow agents to flourish by virtue of their nature.

How agents actualize their potentialities depends on their practices, that they share with other agents. However, not all practices enable human flourishing. For a practice to allow agents to flourish, it should be in accordance with their nature. How agents flourish depends on which kinds of practices there are in their society. A practice will be good if it allows agents to act in accordance with their natural inclinations. In view of this, it is possible to affirm, in agreement with MacIntyre, the importance of the narrative unity of human beings' lives. Indeed, by virtue of the understanding of life as a whole, all the goods pursued by the three natural inclinations take on meaning within the lives of individual agents. For a society to be good, it must give agents the possibility to exercise their inclinations to live with other agents in a way that allows all of them to flourish. If agents live with other agents in a way that allows them and others to actualize all the three natural inclinations, then they pursue the common good, because they pursue the goods that are shared by all human beings by virtue of their nature. By pursuing the common good, they also pursue their own good and, thus, they flourish as human beings.

#### **IV. Concluding Remarks**

The aim of this paper was to consider the role of Aquinas' natural inclinations for human flourishing by critically considering MacIntyre's account. The result is that, in order to flourish, agents should act in accordance with their natural inclinations. Natural inclinations are potentialities that agents have by

virtue of their nature. Although natural inclinations are shared by all human beings, the way in which agents flourish depends on their practices, that is, on their own lived experiences. So, there is not a single way to flourish for human beings, because natural inclinations can be actualized in different ways. Even if MacIntyre has highlighted the importance of practices in accounting for human flourishing by considering the narrative dimension in the agents' lives, however, he has not recognized the properly metaphysical framework of human nature, that would be provided by the recognition of the role of natural inclinations.

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