

## THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ETHICS IN THE ARISTOTELIAN TRADITION IN EUROPE: MACINTYRE AND IRWIN\*

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### RESUMEN

El artículo compara dos concepciones de la historiografía de la ética en la tradición aristotélica. En primer lugar se intenta dar una explicación de “historiografía de la ética” y de “tradición aristotélica”. Luego se explican las diferencias entre las ideas historiográficas de dos de los más ilustres teóricos en este campo: MacIntyre e Irwin. Para explicar la posición de MacIntyre, se empieza con *A Short History of Ethics* and se concluye con *God, Philosophy, Universities*. Para analizar el pensamiento de Irwin se toma en consideración *The Development of Ethics*.

Sostengo que MacIntyre e Irwin conciben la Historia de la ética como el desarrollo de una subdisciplina de la Filosofía llamada ética. A través de la exposición se explican los orígenes de la tradición aristotélica desde Sócrates a Aristóteles, y cómo San Agustín, Santo Tomás y Suárez tienen un diferente rol en las concepciones de MacIntyre y de Irwin. Finalmente, los argumentos tomistas de MacIntyre y los neo-aristotélicos de Irwin son comparados durante la época moderna y contemporánea. El artículo concluye explicando algunas similitudes entre ambos filósofos para construir una Historiografía general de la ética.

*Palabras clave:* Ética, Historiografía, Tradición Aristotélica.

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## ABSTRACT

MacIntyre, Irwin This paper compares two conceptions of Ethical Historiography in the Aristotelian Tradition. First of all, it provides definitions of “Historiography of Ethics” and “Aristotelian Tradition”. Then it goes on to explain the differences between the historiographical ideas of the leading philosophers in this area: MacIntyre and Irwin. To explain the conception of MacIntyre, it starts with *A Short History of Ethics* and finish with his *God, Philosophy, Universities*. In order to comment on Irwin’s thought, it analyses his lengthy masterpiece *The Development of Ethics*.

I claim MacIntyre and Irwin conceive History of Ethics as the development of the sub-discipline of Philosophy called Ethics. Throughout the exposition it explains the origins of the Aristotelian tradition (from Socrates to Aristotle) and how in Stoicism Augustine, Aquinas and Suárez have a different role in MacIntyre’s and in Irwin’s approaches. Finally, the Thomistic arguments of MacIntyre and the Neo-Aristotelian claim of Irwin are compared throughout the Middle Ages and the Modern Era. The paper concludes by explaining some resemblances between the two philosophers in order to construct a general “Historiography of Ethics”.

*Key words:* Ethics, Historiography, Aristotelian Tradition, MacIntyre, Irwin.

In this article I will compare two conceptions of Ethical Historiography in the Aristotelian Tradition in Europe. First of all, I will define “Historiography of Ethics” and the “Aristotelian Tradition”. Then I will go on to explain the differences between the ideas of two prominent philosophers in this area: MacIntyre and Irwin. In order to explain the conception of MacIntyre I start with his *A Short History of Ethics*<sup>1</sup> and finish with his *God, Philosophy, Universities*<sup>2</sup>, while in order to comment on Irwin’s thought I will analyze only his lengthy masterpiece *The Development of Ethics*<sup>3</sup>.

1 A. MACINTYRE, *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Indiana, 1998.

2 A. MACINTYRE, *God, Philosophy, Universities. A Selective History of Catholic Philosophical Tradition*, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.

3 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007-2009, I (From Socrates to the Reformation), II (From Suárez to Rousseau), III (From Kant to Rawls). A long review article about three volumes is R. RAMIS-BARCELÓ, “La historia de la ética (y del derecho natural) según Terence Irwin”, en *Pensamiento*, 67 (2011), 347-365.

## I. HISTORIOGRAPHY OF ETHICS

Furay and Salevouris define historiography as “the study of the way history has been and is written”<sup>4</sup>. Historiography of Ethics may be understood in four ways: first, as the study of the history of the sub-discipline of history, known as the “History of Ethics”, including its disciplinary methods and theories and also the study of its own historical development; second, as the reading that ethicists perform on their own history, in relation to general history; third, as the history of the development of the sub-discipline of Philosophy called Ethics, and finally the reading that ethicists carry out of their own history, independently of the general History or of Philosophy.

While many possible definitions exist, in my view there are only two appropriate understandings of “Historiography of Ethics”: the second and the third options. The second is a History of Ethics written according to cultural background of each period. Irwin calls it ‘Cantabrigian History’<sup>5</sup> and J. B. Schneewind is perhaps the most distinguished representative of this sort of view.

I claim that MacIntyre and Irwin conceive the History of Ethics as the development of the sub-discipline of Philosophy called Ethics. They do not avoid the cultural influences of each period, but rather concentrate their historical research on a dialogue between Ethics and the rest of Philosophy. In his entry “Histories of Moral Philosophy”, MacIntyre (according to Irwin) explains the relationship between Ethics and Theoretical Philosophy (Psychology, Sociology, Epistemology, Metaphysics, and so on as follows.)

Recent work on the history of moral philosophy has raised more sharply than ever before the question whether it can be adequately narrated in independence of the history of philosophy in general and there is strong evidence to be cited on both sides of the question. T. H. Irwin in *Aristotle's First Principles* (Oxford, 1988) has presented an account of Aristotle's arguments and theses about the good, the virtues, and political association, according to which those arguments and theses are underpinned by and need to be made intelligible in terms of Aristotle's metaphysical and psychological conclusions<sup>6</sup>.

The first work that the History of Ethics covered as a part of the History of Philosophy was *Lessons on the History of Philosophy* by Hegel. In this work, Hegel describes the evolution of Ethics as part of the History of Philosophy. But from that moment onward Ethics did not form part of the History of Philosophy

4 C. FURAY - M. J. SALEVOURIS, *The Methods and Skills of History: A Practical Guide*, Arlington Heights, Ill. Harlan Davidson, Inc., 1988, 223.

5 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, o. c., 10.

6 A. MACINTYRE, “Histories of Moral Philosophy”, en T. HONDERICH (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, 356-360.

because each part of Philosophy starts independently. From Hume to Moore, Ethics -as a sphere of knowledge- lost its traditional links with Theoretical Philosophy. Hume claimed that from “ought” it is not possible to derive “is”, and Kant separated with extreme clarity the spheres of knowledge and decision. Indeed, Ethics in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century attained an important level of autonomy<sup>7</sup>, but its roots and relations with metaphysics and epistemology disappeared.

The most important reference in “Historiography of Ethics” throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries was Sidgwick because he studied Ethics historically and systematically with a view independent from epistemology and metaphysics. Sidgwick provided the methodology and the main points in the History of Ethics. *Outlines of the history of ethics for English readers*<sup>8</sup> by Sidgwick was, in fact, the hallmark historiographical reference for English scholars, but its influence was not very deep in the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> Century due to the fact that the analytic movement cancelled out the historical influence in ethical thought. The following paragraph by Schneewind is useful here:

For Sidgwick, one point of the function of the historiography of ethics was to show that there really was -that there always had been- the discipline of moral philosophy; it therefore should have a secure place in the curriculum. Today, I think, we need a different service from study of the history of moral philosophy. We need it to show us how moral philosophy at different times has served different practical purposes. Historicizing the past of the discipline raises questions about what is being done now. Is the debate about deontology, consequentialism, and now virtue ethics still worth continuing? Or are there other issues that might well be addressed? Can moral philosophy address the larger issues of the time? Or is it at best part of the training for the new casuistry of applied ethics?<sup>9</sup>

The Historiography of Ethics has changed deeply over the past fifty years, but the analytic approach to Ethics from Moore to Hare did not modify the conception of History of Ethics that was established at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> Century. In the prevailing collective view, the historiographical works by Sidgwick and neohegelians kept their places in the canonic conception of the “History of Ethics”. It is possible to say that in 1960 there was no need to update the Historiography of Ethics, because the analytic philosophy had shown as that it was impossible to understand “the language of morals<sup>10</sup>” and according to “naturalistic fallacy” all philosophers from Greece to 20<sup>th</sup> Century were misguided. The

7 J. B. SCHNEEWIND, *The Invention of Autonomy. A History of Modern Moral Philosophy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

8 H. SIDGWICK, *Outlines of the history of ethics for English readers*, London, Macmillan, 1886.

9 J. B. SCHNEEWIND, “Teaching the History of Moral Philosophy”, en *Essays on the History of Moral Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009, 144.

10 R. M. HARE, *The Language of Morals*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995.

“History of Ethics” was the story of a mistake, the development of a general confusion that reigned until recent times.

Certainly, the “History of Ethics” was an abandoned topic in British and Scottish philosophy from Bradley and Green to MacIntyre. In fact, MacIntyre was able to take his place as the rebuilder of the “Historiography of Ethics” in 1966 precisely because nobody cultivated it. Utilitarians, emotivists or prescriptivists considered that the basis of correct Ethics (without “naturalistic fallacy”) was from Hume onwards. MacIntyre reconstructed Historiography in two ways: first of all, he did so by destroying the “naturalistic fallacy” and showing that Hume sometimes incurred in it<sup>11</sup>; and secondly, MacIntyre illustrated that “the good’ had in fact been defined in Greece from Homer to Aristotle<sup>12</sup>. For a contemporary reader, *A Short History of Ethics* seems to be a very repetitive book, insisting on the definition of “the good”. Nevertheless, MacIntyre aims to find a therapy against Moorean interpretation.

In all likelihood *A Short History of Ethics* presents one of the two most important claims for the rehabilitation of practical reason. It embodies the recuperation of the History of Ethics connecting Greeks with Moderns. The other claim was made in *A Theory of Justice* by John Rawls, the author with whom Irwin concludes *The Development of Ethics*. These authors represent the contemporary roots of the Historiography of Ethics.

## II. ARISTOTELIAN TRADITION

MacIntyre and Irwin defended that “Historiography of Ethics” is contained within a historical sub-discipline of Ethics, and that it is, at the same time, a sub-discipline of Philosophy. During the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries Ethics was divorced from Epistemology and Metaphysics. For this reason, it was an ahistorical and antitheoretical discipline, dominated by sentiments, desires or imperatives. There were no reasons for action, and the connexion between knowledge and decision failed.

11 See A. MACINTYRE, “Hume on «is» and «ought»”, en *Against the Self-Images of the Age: Essays on Ideology and Philosophy*, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1978, 113. “His work is full of anthropological and sociological remarks, remarks sometimes ascribed by commentators to the confusion between logic and psychology with which Hume is so often credited. Whether Hume is in general guilty of this confusion is outside the scope of this paper to discuss. But so far as his moral theory is concerned, the sociological comments have a necessary place in the whole structure of argument. Consider, for example, Hume’s account of justice. To call an act ‘just’ or ‘unjust’ is to say that it falls under a rule. A single act of justice may well be contrary to either private or public interest or both”.

12 A. MACINTYRE, *A Short History of Ethics*, o.c., 3-12.

MacIntyre and Irwin return to Greece in order to show that from Homer to Aristotle, Biology, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Psychology and Ethics were connected, and that there are reasons for action. Both contemporary professors conceive that a complete Historiography of Ethics starts in Greece and that therein can be found the seeds of the European Tradition. In fact, their view emphasises that from Homer to Aristotle a tradition was formed and the Macedonian philosopher represents the climax of this historical development.

MacIntyre starts with Homer, involving the epic poetry in the origins of Ethics. Irwin, following Vlastos<sup>13</sup>, considers that Western Ethics began with Socrates<sup>14</sup>. In fact, *The Development of Ethics* provides a broader analysis of Socratic Ethics and can be divided into two main topics: first of all, a formal claim is presented to show how Ethics is cultivated according to a dialectical debate; secondly, a material thesis is laid out, showing that the complete goal of Philosophy is to provide reasons for acting and reaching happiness.

It is obvious that both assertions are recognised by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle. For MacIntyre and Irwin, these three philosophers are members of the same tradition. In Ethics, the main differences between Plato and his disciple are minimal if, for example, we compare them in both Epistemology or in Aesthetics<sup>15</sup>. From Jaeger onwards, most relevant Aristotelians recognise the continuity of Ethics between Plato and Aristotle: Düring, Berti or Couloubaritis follow this line of thinking.

Two claims of Socratic Ethics are formulated and improved in the classical expositions of Aristotle, mainly the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Aristotle clarified the status of Ethics and its connections with Biology, Epistemology, Metaphysics, Psychology, as Irwin shows in his *Aristotle's First Principles*<sup>16</sup>, and MacIntyre obviously accepts this argumentation<sup>17</sup>. In his defence of Aristotelianism, Irwin enforces Naturalism as the main characteristic of Aristotelian tradition.

Aristotle, by linking Biology and Psychology to Theoretical and Practical Philosophy, laid the foundation for his thinking on Naturalism, thus making his

13 G. VLASTOS, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, Ithaca, Cornell UP, 1991, 200-232.

14 T. IRWIN, *Plato's Ethics*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1995, 75. "He [Socrates] claims that since he wants to be as virtuous as he can be and has no desire for anything that conflicts with being virtuous, he suffers no loss of happiness, and hence no harm, if he loses any of the supposed 'goods' that the virtuous person has to forgo. Socrates might also fairly claim that the virtuous person is less liable to frustrated desire than a non-virtuous person, since a non-virtuous person is liable to failures that do not affect a virtuous person".

15 See I. DÜRING, *Aristoteles. Darstellung und Interpretation seines Denkens*, Heidelberg, 1966.

16 T. IRWIN, *Aristotle's First Principles*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1988.

17 A. MACINTYRE, "Histories of Moral Philosophy", en *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, o.c., 359.

Ethics cognoscitive, objective and rational. This justifies the reality of a group of basic goods which provides for the consequence of happiness and the existence of a Natural Law in order to protect these goods in human societies. It is then a teleological approach, one which develops Ethics based on natural inclinations of human beings.

So far we have defined “Aristotelian”, that it is only a part of the terminology we are using. The other part is “Tradition”, which was studied in great detail by MacIntyre and Irwin. In the 1970’s, MacIntyre claimed that traditions were inadequate, but in the late 1980’s the issues making them inadequate were remedied by solving the problems of other traditions<sup>18</sup>. In the 1990’s Irwin makes use of the same sense of tradition that he employs in his *The Development of Ethics*. Both philosophers are engaged with the Aristotelian tradition<sup>19</sup>.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre is Aristotelian; he does not embrace Thomism. The attributes of his Aristotelianism are essentially the cognoscitivism of the good and the importance of it for the reasons of action. Irwin agrees with this vision and explains the basic elements of the Aristotelian Tradition, highlighting the importance of Naturalism and the teleological importance of *eudaimonia*<sup>20</sup>.

MacIntyre and Irwin are of the same mind in regarding the roots of the Aristotelian Tradition and the projection of these roots to the Middle Ages.

18 A. MACINTYRE, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1988, 12. “A Tradition is an argument extended through time in which certain fundamental agreements are defined and redefined in terms of two kinds of conflict: those with critics and enemies external to the tradition who reject all or at least key parts of those fundamental agreements, and those internal, interpretative debates through which the meaning and rationale of the fundamental agreements come to be expressed and whose progress a tradition is constituted”.

19 A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*, o.c., 59. “Within the Aristotelian tradition to call x good (...) is to say that it is the kind of x which someone would choose who wanted an x for the purpose for which x’s are characteristically wanted. To call a watch good is to say that it is the kind of watch which someone would choose who wanted a watch to keep time accurately (rather than, say, to throw at a cat). The presupposition of this use of ‘good’ is that every type of item which it is appropriate to call good or bad - including persons and actions - has, as a matter of fact, some given purpose or function. To call something good therefore is also to make a factual statement. (...) Within this tradition moral and evaluative statements can be called true or false in precisely the way in which all other factual statements can be so called”.

20 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, I, o.c., 4. “[Aristotle] defends an account of the human good as happiness (*eudaimonia*), consisting in the fulfilment of human nature, expressed in the various human virtues. His position is teleological, in so far as it seeks the basic guide for action in an ultimate end, eudaemonist, in so far as it identifies the ultimate end with happiness, and naturalist, in so far as it identifies virtue and happiness in a life that fulfils the nature and capacities of rational human nature. This is the position that I describe as ‘Aristotelian Naturalism’, or ‘traditional Naturalism’. We can follow one significant thread through the history of moral philosophy by considering how far Aristotle is right, and what his successors think about his claims”.



Aquinas is seen as the climax of this Tradition because he is able to join Augustinian Christianity with the legacy of Aristotle. Nevertheless, some differences are relevant when comparing Irwin and MacIntyre. In the following pages I will concentrate on historiographical disagreements.

### III. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THEIR HISTORIOGRAPHICAL CLAIM

The main difference between MacIntyre and Irwin is that the former is antimodern and the latter understands certain Modernity as a projection of the Aristotelian tradition. Both authors basically agree on matters from Aristotle to Aquinas as is shown in their acceptance of the Platonic and/or Aristotelian agreement on Stoicism and on Augustine. Plato and Aristotle are both rationalists and Socratics, and the differences between them are conveniently overlooked. Aristotle subsumes the rationalism and the idealism of Plato, and this Naturalism emphasises the most distinguished explanation of the Socratic tradition. Aquinas represents the pinnacle of the Aristotelian tradition for his addition of Christian virtues to the Pagan elements of Aristotle.

For Irwin, the Aristotelian Tradition is understood as an apology of rationality and prudence against sentimentalism, voluntarism and scepticism. Irwin speaks of the Aristotelian Tradition (if I can reformulate Popper's title) as "The Rationalism and its Enemies". It is also clear that, categorically speaking, Stoics are rationalists<sup>21</sup>, while Epicureans are voluntarists and sentimentalists. Augustine throughout the Reformation has been understood as the source of some voluntarist interpretations and Irwin enforces this rational dimension<sup>22</sup>.

MacIntyre did not place any importance on the Medieval Era in his *A Short History of Ethics*, but his recent books have corrected this notion by presenting

21 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, I, o. c., 308: "[Aristotle] argues that rational agents are rightly held responsible for their voluntary actions because these are actions of agents who are capable of rational deliberation and election. The Stoics go further, and insist that we are responsible for those actions that actually express – either by reflexion on appearances or by simply going along with them – the outlook that is embodied in the agent's elections (as Aristotle understands them). This further element in the Stoic position modifies and develops Aristotle, but it does not depart sharply from his position. Later expositors of Aristotle's position are right, therefore, to mention assent".

22 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, I, o. c., 412: "We have no reason, therefore, to attribute voluntarism to Augustine. He emphasizes the role of the will in free and responsible action because he believes that non-rational desires can move us to free action only with our consent; he does not claim that the will moves us independently of the greater apparent good. He accepts Stoic intellectualism and avoids voluntarism" [...] "The will is free in relation to the passions in so far as it is capable of consenting or not consenting to the actions suggested by the passions. The will is not similarly free in relation to the apparent good, but Augustine does not suggest that this lack of freedom involves any lack of the freedom relevant to responsibility".



Thomism as his ideological option<sup>23</sup>. For Irwin, Aquinas considerably enriched the Aristotelian legacy and improved on Aristotle<sup>24</sup> as well; MacIntyre also agrees on this. The difference between the Northern Irish and the Scottish philosophers is that the former understands Aquinas as a progression from Aristotle, but Aquinas does not represent the best historical conception, as MacIntyre argues<sup>25</sup>.

This is, perhaps, the first difference: for Irwin the Development of Ethics is dialectical and comprehensive and Aquinas represents an improvement in the Aristotelian legacy, but not the pinnacle. He views Aquinas as one of the highest points in their tradition, but certain philosophical problems changed and the Aristotelian legacy continued to be focused on voluntarism. For MacIntyre, on the other hand, Aquinas is the best source of Aristotelian tradition and provided great enrichment to the philosophy of Aristotle<sup>26</sup>; the rest of the members of this tradition are not equally rich and thoughtful.

Both professors are of the same mind in their rejection of Franciscanism. Scotus and Ockham represent the explosion of voluntarism in the face of Aquinas' rationality. Luther was criticized by Irwin as an advocate of Franciscan irrationality (but not as an Augustinian). Neither Machiavelli or the other philosophers of the Renaissance are given any importance in *The Development of Ethics* because their attacks against Aristotle and Aquinas were unsuccessful.

Nevertheless, in the Renaissance and the rest of the Modern Era there is a cluster of ways (sentimentalism, egoism, rationality, scepticism, etc.) that have strong connections among them from the end of the Scholastic period to Kant. Schneewind illustrates this in his *The Invention of Autonomy*, the contextualist History of Ethics that finally points to Kant as the end and culmination of Modernity.

23 See A. MACINTYRE, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, *passim*, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry. Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition*, Indiana, University of Notre Dame Press, 1990; and *God, Philosophy, Universities. A Selective History of Catholic Tradition*, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2009.

24 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, I, o. c., 642-652.

25 See also A. MACINTYRE, *Dependent Rational Animals, Why Human Beings Need the Virtues?*, Illinois, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle, 1999.

26 A. MACINTYRE, "Nietzsche or Aristotle?", en *The American Philosopher: Conversations with Quine, Davidson, Putnam, Nozick, Danto, Rorty, Cavell, MacIntyre, and Kuhn*, interviewed by G. Borradori Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994, 264-265. "It is in these terms that Aristotelianism failed with respect to key parts of its physics and biology, but succeeded in vindicating itself rationally as metaphysics, as politics and morals, and as a theory of inquiry. If this is so, then Aristotelianism has been shown in at least these areas to be not only the best theory so far, but the best theory so far about what makes a particular theory the best one. At this point, it is rational to proceed in philosophy as an Aristotelian, until and unless reasons are provided for doing otherwise".

During the Modern Era MacIntyre points to two significant ways of thinking: first of all, the study of Aristotelianism (basically in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*) and later the synthesis of the Catholic tradition (in *God, Philosophy, Universities*). Within this tradition, there are two different lines of reasoning: on the one hand, the study of Aristotelian Naturalism, and on the other hand, the development of Thomism in the Catholic tradition.

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* a continuity from Aquinas to Hume can be seen, showing the agreement of Hutcheson, Stair and Hume with the Aristotelian tradition. What exactly is this agreement? A considerable number of contributors to the Scottish Enlightenment were educated in the Aristotelian tradition and accepted that human beings had antecedents for action such as sentiments, passions or reasons that motivated their action. Nevertheless, around 1780 the Aristotelian Psychology and Anthropology were transformed into a transcendental and abstract conception, and from then onwards the decisions of human beings were deemed not to have any antecedent<sup>27</sup>.

The change started to take place with Hume, Reid and Kant. While Hume represents the last of Aristotelians describing human beings as animals with passions, sentiments or desires, Reid and Kant portrayed man as a transcendental being who does not have any antecedent of action but only transcendental imperatives. For MacIntyre, Kant's Anthropology is the opposite of the Aristotelian outlook because it is not based on the nature of human beings, but on a transcendental idea. Therefore, the MacIntyre's first historiographical claim reveals a continuity from Aquinas to the Scottish Enlightenment and a deep break taking place around 1780<sup>28</sup>.

Let us now turn to the development of Catholic Tradition. MacIntyre explains its rise through the continuity or discontinuity of Thomism throughout Modernity. The philosopher exhibits a critical view of the Modern Era and Modernity because of the Roman Catholic Church's abandonment of Thomism and the ensuing "divorce" between Philosophy and Theology. Thus, MacIntyre describes a continuity from Aquinas to the Spanish Scholastics, the subsequent decadence and later the period from Descartes, Arnauld and the like to the Neothomism of Newmann and of Pope Leo XIII<sup>29</sup>.

Comparing the two alternative viewpoints, it is clear that MacIntyre considers that there was a fracture in the Modern Era with Aristotelianism and with Thomism. Aristotelianism ends when the transcendental philosophy starts and

27 A. MACINTYRE, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, chapter XVI.

28 A. MACINTYRE, "How Moral Agents Became Ghosts: Or Why the History of Ethics Diverged from that of the Philosophy of Mind", en *Synthèse*, 53 (1982), 295.

29 A. MACINTYRE, *God, Philosophy, Universities*, 105 ss.

Thomism concludes primarily after the Spanish Scholastics and Descartes, and it reappears in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. For MacIntyre, during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries Thomism lost importance in secular philosophy, being replaced by Aristotelialism, which maintained its place as a defender of Naturalism against Hobbesian egoism until Kant and Reid.

The second difference between Irwin and MacIntyre in this epoch is their evaluation of the late Scholastic or Spanish Scholastic thinkers. For MacIntyre, the continuity of Thomism is evident in the Order of Preachers, particularly in the works of Vitoria and Las Casas. They developed Aquinas' line of thinking on Ethics and Natural Law, rejecting other voluntaristic elements<sup>30</sup>. Nevertheless, Suárez synthesized voluntarism and rationalism and the Thomism's naturalistic claim was distorted.

Unlike MacIntyre, Irwin begins his conception of Modern Ethics using an Aristotelian schema, identifying Suárez as a follower of the Aquinas' and Aristotle's tradition<sup>31</sup>. While Scotus and Ockham oppose the will with the rationality of Aquinas, Suárez represents, at the beginning of Modernity, the vindication of Aquinas' legacy against the ideals of the Reformation and of the Franciscans. Suárez is the *mise à jour* of Aquinas, but his philosophy -mainly when Aquinas is silent- does share certain elements of voluntarism. Consequently, for Irwin Suárez can be placed at the origins of the Aristotelian tradition in the Modern Era, whereas for MacIntyre this point represents the beginning of the fall of Thomism.

The third difference is that MacIntyre uses but does not discuss the Historiography of Ethics, while Irwin considers and reflects on it. For example, the volume that Irwin devotes to the Modern Era discusses at length the historiographical categories of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.<sup>32</sup> Particularly, he reinterprets the conception of Barbeyrac -the most important Ethics historian in the 1700s- and discusses the divisions, lineages and filiations of the great classic of Ethics in the 1800s: Sidgwick's *Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers* (1886).

30 A. MacIntyre, "Wahre Selbsterkenntnis durch Verstehen unserer selbst aus der Perspektive anderer", en *Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie*, 44 (1996), 675.

31 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, vol. II, chapters 30-31. About this volume see R. Ramis-Barceló, "History of Modern Ethics and Rational Natural Law", en *History of European Ideas*, 36 (2010), 266-271.

32 A. MACINTYRE, "Histories of Moral Philosophy", 357. "In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries episodes in the history of moral philosophy are sometimes treated not primarily in terms of this division into periods, but rather in terms dictated by some philosophical scheme informed by its author's own larger purpose".

In fact, the classical historiography of Barbeyrac -as it is traditionally used- has explained how “the honour of emancipating Moral philosophy from Scholasticism belongs to Grotius”.<sup>33</sup> Irwin rethinks these sorts of topics and reconstructs an Aristotelian History of Ethics: when other historians celebrate the emancipation from Aristotle, Irwin (and MacIntyre too) complain of the rejection of the Naturalism, based on *eudaimonia* and rationality.

Irwin shows Hobbes’s thought to be an anti-scholastic philosophy, but he understands that Hobbes was in debt to scholastic thought; despite this, he does not compare his views with the views of his predecessors. Irwin delves into the works of Hobbes in great detail, his main purpose being to show the incongruence of his ideas: Hobbes does not posit a new method in Moral philosophy; nonetheless he proclaims the newness of Moral obligation to non-moral psychological facts about motivation. The absence of teleology and rational Aristotelian psychology drives Hobbes to fail in his reduction.<sup>34</sup>

The rest of the book elaborates on the contrast between Hobbesian tradition and the Scholastic tradition. When faced with Aquinas and Suárez, the Hobbesian influence shows the non-natural way, leading the rest of Modern Moral Philosophy to be understood as the dialectical battle between two opposing methods: the failed model of passions and the psychology of Hobbes and the naturalistic defence of rationality and *eudaimonia*.

Irwin focus his explanation on the British Moral tradition, with a discussion of the categories of 19<sup>th</sup> Century Moral philosophy historians: “Selby-Bigge divides British moralists between Hobbes and Hume into ‘sentimentalists’ and ‘individualists’”.<sup>35</sup> Irwin considers this distinction and he adds his unique point of view on this tradition as well as some exceptions to it. It seems as this particular debate occurred only in Britain, but in France, Germany and Italy, philosophy of very similar frameworks were also the subject of intellectual dispute.<sup>36</sup>

Nonetheless, it is true that in Britain the differences between the two traditions were deeper and more representative than on the Continent. In my opinion, the chapter devoted to “British moralists”<sup>37</sup> is one of the most important in the book because Irwin explains the main issues in this debate: dependent vs.

33 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, II, o. c., 71.

34 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, II, o. c., 178. He sums up his considerations on Hobbes: “If he had succeeded in his vindicating reduction, he would have discovered the nature of moral virtues and our reasons for practising them, by reference to an account of human motives that does not itself rely on any normative non-psychological assumptions about morality or about rationality”.

35 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, II, o. c., 204.

36 See R. MÜNCH, *The Ethics of Modernity*, especially chapters 3-5.

37 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, II, o. c., ch. 38.

independent morality, voluntarism vs. intellectualism, rationalism vs. orthodoxy and rationalism vs. egoism. While in the later Medieval tradition the main debate was Aquinas vs. Franciscanism (rationalism vs. voluntarism), in Modernity voluntarism was transformed into sentimentalism, egoism, etc.

The Aristotelian Moral tradition has “sensitive enemies”, and Irwin remarks on the tensions and the metamorphosis of Aquinas’ and Scotus’ schemas in Modern Moral Philosophy.<sup>38</sup> For Irwin, the explanation of Moral thought is the development of Naturalism versus the sensitive Psychology, and modern morals are a continuation of the debate between Aristotle and other Greek schools; Stoics vs. Epicureans, Aquinas vs. Scotus and Suárez vs. Hobbes. Therefore, Modern Moral Philosophy is a prolongation of the Ancient and Medieval discussions. However, for MacIntyre the Aristotelian framework is mainly present in the Scottish Enlightenment<sup>39</sup>. Irwin on the other hand, leaves the outlines provided by Modern Aristotelian Philosophy and adds Cambridge’s Platonists to this line of thinking, which ends with Joseph Butler, an author who is not accorded much importance in MacIntyre’s works.

The fourth area of disagreement can be seen in the philosophers treatment of Hume. Irwin examines his ideas with serenity and respect, and he calls attention to the differences and similarities with his predecessors. The pages devoted to Hume are a synthesis of all the British Moral tradition and Irwin contrasts Hume’s Moral Philosophy with the forerunners in this area, mainly Hobbes and Hutcheson. One of the high points of Hume’s explanation is his analysis of the “is and ought” question, a central problem in subsequent ethical theory.<sup>40</sup> In these pages Irwin reconstructs the roots of Hume’s philosophy and eventually the rational elements that he accepted.

For MacIntyre, Hume has the last philosopher that accepted Aristotelian Anthropology, an idea that Irwin cannot completely accept. Despite MacIntyre’s personal evolution<sup>41</sup>, Hume has always been understood as an advocate of Naturalistic Philosophy. With Hume, despite his “Anglicizing Subversion”<sup>42</sup>, the Ethics based on Naturalistic Anthropology coming to an end. Following MacIntyre’s ideas, even Hobbes or Mandeville consider the Aristotelian man, but Kant configures another Anthropology based on a “transcendental subject”.

38 See the historiographical approaches in A. PAGDEN (ed.), *The Languages of Political Theory in Early-Modern Europe*, Cambridge, CUP, 1987.

39 A. MACINTYRE, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, o. c., 256-259.

40 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, II, o. c., 614-617.

41 See A. MACINTYRE, “Hume on «is» and «ought»”, en *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, 109-124 and *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, o. c., ch. XVI.

42 A. MACINTYRE, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, o. c., ch. XV.

The fifth area of divergence is on Kant. Irwin's reading of Kant is risky because it attempts to show how the formal system is consistent with Aristotelian Naturalism, though the way this is done is different. Following, *inter alia*, Grisez<sup>43</sup>, Irwin sees how in Kant the tension between natural inclination and obedience in recent times has pointed to a universal Teleology that develops the fundamental features of human beings<sup>44</sup>. Kantians say, not unreasonably, that the reading of Kant is forced, to the point of being excessively deformed or even unrecognizable.

On the one hand, Irwin, demonstrates how Kant connects with the rationalist line of Butler, Reid and Price, and Suárez<sup>45</sup> in turn. On the other hand, he argues that Kant neither disagrees with the Stoics<sup>46</sup> nor with the virtue ethics of Aristotle and Aquinas. They all indicate a final teleology pointing to the good, a telology that is not at all incompatible with Aristotelian Eudaimonism<sup>47</sup>. Irwin affirms that Kant's criticism of Hobbes, Hutcheson and, later, Hume did not affect the Naturalism of classical thinkers, embodied primarily by Aquinas and Butler.

MacIntyre rejected the agreement between Aquinas and Kant, but in recent times this seems to have changed a bit<sup>48</sup>, especially in *After Virtue*, when MacIntyre defended the non-universalizable Moral, wherein Kant was the opponent of Aristotelian philosophy. But when MacIntyre develops the Moral virtue and the necessity of founding Natural Law in practices, it is possible to find agree-

43 G. GRISEZ, "Kant and Aquinas: Ethical Theory", en J. DUNN - I. HARRIS (ed.), *Great Political Thinkers 4: Aquinas*, Cheltenham, England, Edward Elgar, 1997, 206-240.

44 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, III, o. c., 48. "Morality is concerned with the interests of persons, and especially with the impact of actions, states of character, and so on, on the interests of persons. If we conceive these interests as simply the satisfaction of inclinations, apart from their relation to the person whose interests they are, we will endorse a utilitarian conception of the morally appropriate end, and suppose that we promote a person's interest by satisfying inclinations. Kant, however, believes that rational agents care about their own interest because they are agents with a specific identity and specific aims apart from any particular collection of inclinations. The agents who have this aims, as opposed to the aims themselves, deserve respect".

45 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, III, o. c., 7ss.

46 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, III, o. c., 72-74.

47 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, III, o. c., 58. "We would be entitled to mark a sharp contrast between Aristotle and Kant on the place of the emotions in moral virtue if each accepted an extreme claim, so that (i) Kant believed that emotions have no part in virtue, and (ii) Aristotle believed that virtue requires the right emotions, even when they are not up to us. Neither Kant nor Aristotle, however, accepts the extreme claim; acceptance of it would cause serious difficulties for the rest of their positions. A reasonable assumption about the adaptability of emotions reconciles the Kantian and the Aristotelian positions".

48 See A. MACINTYRE, "Truthfulness and lies: what we can learn from Kant", en *Ethics and Politics, Selected Essays*, (Cambridge, CUP, 2006), 122-142. L. S. CUNNINGHAM (ed.): *Intractable Disputes About the Natural Law. Alasdair MacIntyre and Critics*, Indiana, Notre Dame University Press, 2009.



ment between Kant and Naturalism on universalism. Natural Law is universal and it is the basis to solve all moral disagreements<sup>49</sup>. I think that in this way it is also possible to solve some aspects of the historiographical disparity between Irwin and MacIntyre.

Nevertheless, the problem is not only the rationality or the universality, but also the psychological and anthropological basis of Ethics. The Naturalistic Ethics -developed on Natural Law that protects basic goods and shows the practices of virtue- is structured on naturalistic Psychology and Anthropology. MacIntyre cannot accept the transcendent basis of subject and -like Foucault- claims that Kant and Reid do not explain the human being as a natural creature, but as a ideal model.

For Irwin, the Aristotelian tradition and Kant are partners in the same way: in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century Kant held the torch of reason that had sustained Aristotelianism throughout the preceding centuries. And Kantianism and Aristotelianism are united in their opposition to their enemies. According to Irwin these are Machiavelli, Luther, Calvin, Montaigne, Arnauld, Gassendi, Hobbes and Mandeville, who hold radically wrong ideas opposed to those of Suárez, Cudworth, Leibniz, Butler, Rousseau and others. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the “Kantian tradition” extended from Kant to Hegel, Green and Bradley and partially to Sidgwick, who is associated with the Aristotelian tradition in the development of rational Ethics<sup>50</sup>.

For Irwin, Aristotelian Naturalism, after his marriage with Kant and Hegel was the unique “Rational Tradition” able to provide a voice of reason against irrationalism. I am afraid that MacIntyre believes Irwin adapted Aristotelian Naturalism to Kant’s view by lowering his expectations for Aristotelian Naturalism (defined previously as the mixture of teleological *eudaimonism* and the dialectical –Socratic- method for reasonably searching for it) from the 18<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. For MacIntyre, the exigencies of Naturalism are embodied in Psychology and Anthropology, and consequently from the 18<sup>th</sup> Century onwards he claims that there was a return to Ancient Era and the Middle Ages.

For MacIntyre, the Scottish Enlightenment has lost its characteristic rationality and already holds a naturalistic conception. For example, Hutcheson or Hume are not rationalists like Butler or Cudworth but these four philosophers agree in their conception of human nature. They are naturalists in the sense that all have accepted that Ethics needs an evaluative judgment on the antecedents of human action (sentiment, passion, deliberation, and so on) while the subjec-

49 See A. MACINTYRE, “Intractable Moral Disagreements”, en L. S. CUNNINGHAM (ed.): *Intractable Disputes About the Natural Law. Alasdair MacIntyre and Critics*, o. c., 20-24.

50 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, III, o. c., ch. 84 and 85.



tive man does not concede any importance to these antecedents<sup>51</sup>. However, the relevant point here is the ideal absence of all antecedents. For subjectivists each action only should be motivated by the end and the obedience to categorical imperative for reaching it.

Not only do the philosophers diverge on rationality, but on another area as well: the sixth difference I shall comment on is their treatment of Reid. For MacIntyre, Reid<sup>52</sup> is already a non-naturalist and his Ethics is based on a ideal subject. Even so, Irwin claims the philosophy of Reid has much in common with Aristotelianism<sup>53</sup> because his Moral Philosophy is reminiscent of Latin Stoicism in its emphasis on the agency of the subject and self-control. Whereas MacIntyre eliminated the development of Moral Aristotelianism in the Scottish Enlightenment, Irwin understands this figure as an update to the Aristotelian Tradition (showing, for example, the connections with Ancient Philosophy).

Irwin is able to join Aristotelianism with Kant and this problematic union continues throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Hegel's Aristotelian roots are recognised by both MacIntyre and Irwin. The former was quite close to Hegel when he was a student at the start of his academic life because he linked Hegel with Marx. The young MacIntyre considers Hegel and Marx capable of providing reasons for acting (based on historical development and political compromise)<sup>54</sup>. Actually MacIntyre deems both philosophers to be important guides to show how ancient societies, based on ethical harmony, lost their place in the Modern Era.

Irwin joins the Aristotelian tradition (including Kantianism and Hegelianism) to Bradley and Green who connect it with the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Hence it is possible to reconstruct a path into 19<sup>th</sup> Century that arrives at C. I. Lewis and other philosophers<sup>55</sup>. In order to amplify this path, Irwin discusses the divisions, lineages and filiations of Sidgwick and concludes that they are not entirely opposed to Aristotelian Naturalism. Historiographically, while Sidgwick conceived of Modernity as a stage that had surpassed the Middle Ages, which had tried a failed combination of Aristotle and Christianity,<sup>56</sup> Irwin considers that the Socratic tradition was present in the Medieval world, and Modernity is only a continuation of the same problems present in the 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> centuries.

51 A. MACINTYRE, "The antecedents of Action", en *Against the Self-Images of the Age*, o. c., 191-210.

52 A. MACINTYRE, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, o. c., 325-336.

53 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, II, o. c., ch. 62-63.

54 A. MACINTYRE, *Marxism and Christianity*, New York – Duckworth – London, Schocken Books, 1968. See also R. RAMIS-BARCELÓ, "MacIntyre y el marxismo: Historia, compromiso y razones para la acción", en *Crítica. Revista Hispanoamericana de Filosofía*, 43 (2011), 77-87.

55 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, III, o. c., chapter 89.

56 H. SIDGWICK, *Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers*, o. c., 134ss.

In Sidgwick can be found the seventh disagreement. This is because MacIntyre may accept that Sidgwick is not a classical Utilitarian like Bentham, but Irwin rather labels him a *quasi* Aristotelian. MacIntyre believes Sidgwick is quite far from Naturalism. MacIntyre and Irwin are in greater agreement on the material conception of Ethics provided in *The Methods of Ethics* than the historiographical claim contained in *Outlines of the History of Ethics for English Readers*. For Irwin, Sidgwick is an eclectic who combines deontology, common sense and utilitarianism, but he is not an enemy of Aristotelian Naturalism<sup>57</sup>.

Both professors agree on valuing Kierkegaard in the History of Ethics as a proponent of the Christianity that rose out of consequentialism or the utilitarian mind. However, I can find an eighth disagreement on Nietzsche. In *After Virtue* MacIntyre narrates a historiographical account of Ethics as a competition between Ancients (Aristotelians) and Moderns (the Enlightenment) and the referee is Nietzsche<sup>58</sup>. The German Philosopher is the judge and the competition only can be won by one of them. Irwin does not give much importance to Nietzsche in Ethics because the critique that he makes may be carried by Naturalism.

While the match according to MacIntyre is -following Hegel- a dialectical battle between the Ancients and Moderns<sup>59</sup>, for Irwin this combat is between rationalists and antirationalists (i.e. voluntarism, egoism, scepticism, etc.) And Nietzsche is only an irrationalist that impugned the basis of preceding Ethics from Socrates to Kant. To this MacIntyre replies that Aristotle and the Aristotelian tradition remained untouched. For MacIntyre, Nietzsche is the best critic of Modernity (understood as Kantianism and Utilitarianism) and Aristotelian tradition remains unaffected.

Both professors agree against the philosophy of Moore. MacIntyre censured *Principia Ethica* throughout his career and Irwin rejects Moorean ideas. When Irwin finishes his discussions he says that “this chapter on Moore has been rather negative”<sup>60</sup>. I can sum his reasons: first of all, Moore’s works are a non-articulated defence of utilitarianism; later, his rejections stem from the naturalist fallacy and the open question argument, which are problems that Moore

57 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, III, o. c., 426. “His defence of utilitarianism rests partly on a detailed discussion of the morality of common sense. He intends his analysis to seem plausible even to non-utilitarians, and to convince them that utilitarianism is the most plausible theoretical development and revision of common sense”.

58 A. MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*, o. c., chapter 10.

59 See also A. MACINTYRE, *A Short History of Ethics*, o. c., 85-86.

60 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, III, o. c., 661.

cannot accurately explain. Finally Moore's ideas are not accepted because his notions on Naturalism do not affect the main basis of naturalistic tradition.

Irwin enlarges the naturalistic tradition following Green, Bradley, and Lewis and argues that German Neo-Kantianism and Phenomenology are basically in agreement on Naturalism. MacIntyre appreciates Husserl's and Heidegger's viewpoints but in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century he points to the influence of Wittgenstein, a philosopher that Irwin does not include in Aristotelian Naturalism. This is the ninth disagreement between MacIntyre and his Oxford colleague.

For Irwin, there is a convergence between Neo-Kantianism and Naturalism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century<sup>61</sup>. The line concludes with Rawls, or rather with Vlastos, the most direct influence that Irwin has. From Vlastos, he takes the Socratic tradition and from Rawls the recuperation of practical reason from Kant. In the Historiography of Ethics, Irwin chooses to mix Naturalism and the Socratic vision of Vlastos with Rawls' Kantianism and to maintain that these are compatible.

I have said that the ninth disagreement is on Wittgenstein. MacIntyre does not join the Aristotelian tradition with Kantianism. For MacIntyre, Hegel and Marx have a link with classical philosophy according to which they defend the community as opposed to the individualism of Modernity. For MacIntyre, the *Invention of Autonomy* (to make use of Schneewind's title) is a process of individualism that concludes with the subjectivism from Kant onwards. The best way to return to Naturalism is to review Thomism. For this reason, during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century MacIntyre tries to connect the Thomist tradition of Universities with the Renaissance of Catholic Universities and the thought of Mercier and Newmann<sup>62</sup>.

Nevertheless, MacIntyre is not completely Anti-Modern because he searches for a line connecting Thomism (as an enriched version of Aristotelian Naturalism) with the mysticism that rejects deontologism and consequentialism; he is able to join the action with the explanation of antecedents. MacIntyre

61 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, III, o. c., 891. "We have no good reason, therefore, to dismiss Aristotelian Naturalism from consideration. We saw that it was a mistake to dismiss it on the false assumption that 17<sup>th</sup> –Century science had discredited it. It would equally be a mistake to dismiss it on the false assumption that 20<sup>th</sup> Century meta-ethics or metaphysics has discredited it. If we review Aristotelian Naturalism in the light of the arguments discussed in this chapter, we find good reasons to take it seriously. It deserves to be regarded as a viable participant in the prolonged dialectical argument that Socrates began".

62 A. MACINTYRE, *God, Philosophy, Universities. A Selective History of Catholic Tradition*, o. c., 139ss.

unites Neo-Thomism, the Phenomenology of Husserl, Heidegger and Gadamer with the philosophy of the Second Wittgenstein<sup>63</sup>.

MacIntyre follows Anscombe in her use of Wittgenstein as a link between Thomism and Contemporary Philosophy. Anscombe opens up the possibility of recovering the Aristotelian tradition according to the Second Wittgenstein, and MacIntyre (like Geach or Philippa Foot) brings this into this play. For Anscombe it is necessary to return to a naturalistic morality of virtue that has been substituted by duty<sup>64</sup>: Ethics should be based on natural inclinations of human beings; impersonal and frosty imperatives should be avoided.

Irwin is quite sympathetic to this sort of Aristotelian Naturalism but his conception is broader than MacIntyre's: Irwin embraces Neo-Kantianism for its recovery of practical reason, which had been forbidden from Moore to Rawls. *A Theory of Justice* recovered the importance of Ethics and it is here that Irwin concludes his historical journey with Rawls. This is the last point of disagreement (the tenth). MacIntyre does not accept Rawls as a philosopher close to Aristotelian Naturalism, and throughout his works he rejects the reconstruction of justice by Rawls. MacIntyre claims justice is not to be the most important virtue and affirms that, according to Rawls, it is impossible to learn this virtue through a dialectical process, because justice for Rawls it is only a political question<sup>65</sup>.

Irwin claims Rawls deserves a place in the history of Aristotelian Naturalism because he agrees on some aspects with Aristotle and the Idealists<sup>66</sup>, mainly on his recuperation of justice. As it arrives at Rawls, the History of Ethics

63 A. MACINTYRE, *God, Philosophy, Universities. A Selective History of Catholic Tradition*, o. c., 178. "It would be a Thomistic account in its overall understanding of truth and of our relationship to God as both first and final cause, but it would need to integrate into its detailed treatments of such topics as the limits of scientific explanation, the body-soul-mind relationship, the acquisition of self-knowledge and the overcoming of self-deception, and the social dimensions of human activity and enquiry, insights, analyses, and arguments drawn from Catholic thinkers as various as Anselm and Scotus, Suarez and Pascal, Stein and Marcel and Anscombe, and indeed from such seminal non-Catholic thinkers as Kierkegaard, Husserl, and Wittgenstein".

64 G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern moral Philosophy", en *Philosophy*, 33 (1958), 26. "Concepts of obligation, and duty -moral obligation and moral duty, that is to say- and of what is morally right and wrong, and of the moral sense of 'ought,' ought to be jettisoned if this is psychologically possible; because they are survivals, or derivatives from survivals, from an earlier conception of ethics which no longer generally survives, and are only harmful without it".

65 A. MACINTYRE, "Justice: A New Theory and Some Old Questions", en *Boston University Law Review*, 52 (1972), 330-334.

66 T. IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics*, III, o. c., 892. "Rawls is sympathetic in certain respects both to Aristotle and to the idealists. His account of the good tries to show how some Aristotelian and idealist views can be reconciled with a firmly Kantian view that gives strict priority to the right. A discussion of this aspect of his position may help us to decide whether Green may not be right after all in his views about the connexions between Kantian and Aristotelian views".

progressively adjusts to the philosophical problems of our era. Irwin finally considers *The Development of Ethics* as the dialectical advance of rationality against his enemies, and Rawls confirms that practical reason has a commitment to Socratic dialectic and is not the opposite of Aristotelian Naturalism.

Finally, I would say Irwin and MacIntyre agree on a non-political outlook of the History of Ethics. For them, a naturalistic Ethics, based on virtue and justice can be naturally extended to Law. For this reason, the Aristotelian Tradition does not observe Ethics as a sub-discipline of Politics, but as a Historical sub-discipline of Philosophy that leads to Natural Law. This is another area of agreement between Aristotelianism and Kant, as Irwin claims.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

I have discussed several agreements and ten areas of disagreement between the philosophers MacIntyre and Irwin. Their conceptions of Aristotelian Naturalism bear a number of similarities with each other, and from Socrates to Aquinas their ideas are virtually identical. Nevertheless, there are three main areas in which the professors are in disagreement. In sum, these are, first, the accumulative character of the History of Ethics; second, the dialectic Modern/Antimodern movement in the History of Ethics; and lastly the precise nature of the “Aristotelian Tradition”.

Unlike MacIntyre who searches for discontinuities and disagreements and claims Naturalism can solve them, Irwin underscores the continuities and agreements throughout the History of Ethics. The Socratic tradition is a battle of rationality and dialectic against the irrationality. Finally Irwin stresses that throughout History a well-designed concurrence of reason has always appeared, as do the apology of virtues, justice and the inclinations of human beings against egoism, lack of consideration for others and scepticism.

For MacIntyre, Aristotelian Naturalism has an unambiguous profile that is not only the concurrence of reason and the importance of practices and inclinations of self, but also the anthropological and psychological connexions of Ethics. In fact, Irwin adopts a less demanding vision of Aristotelian Naturalism because he identifies it with the Socratic Tradition. Certainly, it is true that Aristotelian Naturalism is a relevant part of this Tradition, but the features of the Socratic tradition are not as concrete as the Aristotelian ones.

The Socratic Tradition is the development of the “capacities of rational nature” and the connexions between knowledge and action. And Aristotelianism, according to the works of Aristotle, is most concrete in its conception of the human nature. Irwin defines his proposal as a mixture between the Socratic

Tradition and Aristotelian Naturalism because it contains a potent recipe for explaining the History of Ethics.

This powerful combination deserves a general agreement with great philosophers of all ages. With those philosophers that are clearly Aristotelians (such as Aquinas, Suárez, Leibniz, Butler, etc.) Irwin emphasises their Aristotelian features and when they are Platonists (e.g. Augustine or Cudworth) or Rationalists without a clear adscription (Kant), Irwin highlights their links to the Socratic tradition. This is not a distortion of History by Irwin, but rather a *soft* version of Aristotelianism that aims to search for agreements throughout the different centuries.

In contrast, MacIntyre advocates a hard version of Aristotelianism, which does not conform at all to the subjectivity of the Modern Era. According to MacIntyre, Aristotelianism is the key to perfecting the Socratic Tradition and Thomism is the key to perfecting Aristotelianism. Consequently, determining the agreement or disagreement of a doctrine with Aristotelianism ought to be done by contrasting it with Thomism.

For MacIntyre, Thomism is the best development of Aristotelianism because it explains how human beings are and how these human beings get in touch with Nature better than other doctrines. Thus, Thomism is characterized by objectivity; the explanation of natural inclinations of human beings is the opposite of subjectivism or scepticism.

This subjectivism may be disguised as voluntarism, egoism or selfishness but it always develops the non-objectivity of moral judgements because subjectivism allows qualities such as idealism, self-interest and abstraction to appear. Aristotelianism is a realistic philosophy (as are Anthropology, Psychology, Biology, and others) which does not deserve to be governed by a brand of Ethics that divorces human beings from their natural inclinations. Aristotle demonstrated this ideal and Aquinas clarified it even further.

For this reason, Aristotelianism has great differences not only with Machiavelli or Hobbes, but also with Kant or Hegel. It is true that the Aristotelian Tradition cannot accept Hobbesian ideas and MacIntyre stated human beings can learn from Kant. Aquinas and Kant are in agreement on some topics but, for MacIntyre, there are more disagreements than accords; and this is a basic idea for developing a History of Ethics.

Finally, MacIntyre solves his problems with Modernity by partially agreeing with Moral Law by Kant but he is in even greater agreement with Wittgenstein who makes a case for refusing Modernity. The Second Wittgenstein, combined with Phenomenology, deserves agreement with the Aristotelian tradition. For MacIntyre, agreement with Wittgenstein is easier than with Kant or

Idealists and in this way the relationship between Aristotelian Naturalism and the Modern and Contemporary Philosophy is shown.

By way of conclusion, MacIntyre and Irwin have perhaps the most powerful readings of the History of Ethics and they show that Aristotelian Tradition can successfully explain *The Development of Ethics*. Comparing the main works of both professors we can find a number of both conformities and disagreements that can help us to understand and discuss a complete Historiography of Ethics.