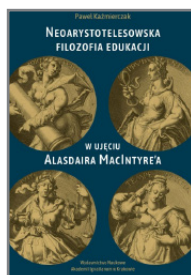


Bartłomiej Zdzisław Krasny  
ORCID: 0000-0003-4140-0003  
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow

## Virtues in Education

Paweł Kaźmierczak, 2019, *Neoarystotelesowska filozofia edukacji w ujęciu Alasdaira MacIntyre'a* [*The Neo-Aristotelian Philosophy of Education According to Alasdair MacIntyre*], Krakow: Ignatianum University Press, 240 pages

Paweł Kaźmierczak undertook the task of reconstructing the Aristotelian concept of virtue ethics through the lens of the thought of one of the most outstanding contemporary philosophers, Alasdair MacIntyre, and transferring it to the philosophy of education. This was a challenge in the true sense of the word, because he had to tackle three impressive minds in his efforts: in addition to the philosophy of Aristotle and MacIntyre, he also referred to the theories of Saint Thomas Aquinas. It was also a challenge from the perspective of the contemporary, postmodern reluctance to draw on traditional or classical systems, in particular axiological and theistic philosophies, which postmodernists accuse of harmful authoritarianism. It is in this context that the review of this academic publication should be placed. The book is a polemic with contemporary concepts that take as a starting point the expressivist and liberal ways of human functioning in the world. Kaźmierczak confronts these philosophical (mainly ethical) approaches by contrasting them with MacIntyre's outlook on morality.



SPI Vol. 23, 2020/1  
ISSN 2450-5358  
e-ISSN 2450-5366

However, the first challenge, no less important than those above, was to properly define specialized concepts, mainly pedagogical ones, in order to avoid the semantic chaos surrounding the world of academic pedagogy. Thus, the author's systematization and clear definition of the rudimentary concepts (pedagogy, education, and self-education) that are necessary in order to understand MacIntyre's thoughts deserve special mention. Also, the categorization of individual pedagogical subdisciplines which the author refers to (philosophy of education/philosophical pedagogy, general pedagogy, and upbringing theory) gives a clear view on how he approaches the issues presented in the work. The very terms mentioned above reveal that Kaźmierczak's research is interdisciplinary and combines philosophical and pedagogical themes.

The book can be divided into two parts. The first part, an introduction to the philosophy of the Scottish philosopher, lays out the most important biographical contexts and gives an account of the genesis and evolution of his thoughts and their reception (chapters 1–3, although the third chapter already contains some elements of MacIntyre's views on education). The second part (chapters 4–6) focuses mainly on pedagogical topics, and will be of greatest interest to educators. However, if an impatient readers omits the first three chapters, they will inevitably sever the educational concepts from the context in which they are embedded and this context is extremely important for MacIntyre. It is therefore necessary to delve into the philosophical notions of the thinker to understand the subsequent reconstruction of his pedagogical views.

Kaźmierczak's goal is to find answers to two categories of questions: 1) on the good of the individual and 2) on the way to achieve that good (pp. 9–10). Answers to the first category of questions should be sought in Aristotle's concept of virtues and MacIntyre's reconstruction of it, while for the second type of question we must turn to educational issues, because "a life devoted to the pursuit of good is a good life; a good education is the preparation for it. Therefore, the proper introduction to pedagogical issues is an analysis of the concepts of good, a good life, and a good education" (p. 21). Kaźmierczak's considerations revolve around these three notions.

He begins his analysis by expounding three concepts which demonstrate different approaches to good, a good life, and a good

education. First of all, he enters into a polemic with liberal ideas, with an Enlightenment pedigree, which are rooted in the concept of a broadly defined individualistic approach to life. Then, he moves on to grapple with the expressivist (emotive) concept of good, a good life, and a good education in order to present - at the end of this chapter - these three concepts from the perspective of the titular theory.

The second chapter is a biographical description of the Scottish philosopher. However, this is not a typical biography, because the author uses Sławomir Sztobryn's strategy of "pedagogical biodoxography," which means "a simultaneous and interdependent description of the course of life and work of an author or group of authors living today or in subsequent generations, from the point of view of an external observer" (p. 51). MacIntyre's work is presented through the prism of some important events in his life. This is an interesting part of the book, which allows the reader to identify with the philosopher to some extent and recalls interesting facts from his life, e.g., the reasons he did not write a doctoral dissertation.

The next section deals with the current philosophical and pedagogical reception of Alasdair MacIntyre's concepts translated into Polish. Kaźmierczak indicates both the scholarly criticism of the Scottish thinker and the positive reception of his work. The extensive presentation of the publications on MacIntyre's philosophy and a critical discussion of some of his theories deserve recognition.

Chapter 4 talks about MacIntyre's approach to anthropological issues. Here, the author discusses three aspects of the pursuit of human good: metaphysical, rational, and biological. It is from these three aspects that Kaźmierczak derives the teleology of education in terms of MacIntyre's philosophy.

The next chapter is wholly devoted to educational issues. In this part, the scholar presents in more detail the key concepts of heteroeducation and autoeducation, which are precisely defined in the introduction. In both cases, it is worth noting the lucid and unambiguous presentation of what is valuable, in MacIntyre's opinion, in education and how it should be pursued.

The last part of the book is an outline of three essential aspects of MacIntyre's thought in the framework of education, i.e., rational moral practice, community traditions, and narrative patterns of behavior. Kaźmierczak showed the meaning of these terms by

quoting them literally (pp. 42–43). MacIntyre understands practice as “any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended” (MacIntyre, 1996, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, Warsaw, p. 338). A living tradition, in turn, is “a historically extended, socially embodied argument and an argument precisely about the goods which constitute this tradition” (MacIntyre, 1996, p. 396). Finally, the narrative, “is the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life ... The unity of a human life is a unity of a narrative quest ... Quests sometimes fail, are frustrated, abandoned, or dissipated into distractions; and humans lives may in all these ways also fail. But the only criteria for success or failure in human life as a whole are the criteria for success or failure in a narrated or to-be-narrated quest” (MacIntyre, 1996, p. 390).

This part of the book first overviews the impact of the most important institutions that determine the quality of rational moral practice. The author lists the institutions of the family, school, university, and an “educated audience.” Afterwards, he familiarizes the reader with the concept of the educational value of tradition, which dialectically constitutes narratives within the community.

Kaźmierczak finishes his work by stating that “the arguments contained in the book ... have shown the validity of MacIntyre’s educational concept” (p. 210). We must agree with this conclusion. MacIntyre’s philosophical thought is relevant today because morality derived from the Enlightenment tradition and the resulting practices cannot be justified on their own grounds, because they are still only a collection of concepts and practices taken out of context.

I believe a certain flaw of the text to be the lack of comprehensive polemics with the idea of classical liberalism, mentioned several times, which in its essence does not necessarily contradict MacIntyre’s ideas. However, its absence is understandable because of the length of the book and the need to adhere to a specific formula. However, this leaves a lot of room for further comparative studies of these two philosophical outlooks.

The esthetic value of this book also merits praise. The hard, navy blue cover decorated with beautiful paintings of Jacob de Gheyn and Philips Galle depicting the symbolism of virtues, with the addition of cream-colored pages, allows the reader to interact with real art.

To sum up, Paweł Kaźmierczak's book brings extraordinary intellectual value to Polish pedagogical thought (as well as to philosophy) and can become genuine inspiration for large-scale analyses of Alasdair MacIntyre's work from the perspective of education.

### ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Bartłomiej Krasny, MA  
Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow  
Faculty of Pedagogy  
Institute of Educational Sciences  
e-mail: bartlomiej.krasny@o2.pl