it between promise and achievement—between égaliberté and actually existing capitalism. It seems both unnecessary and imprudent not to avail oneself of the critical leverage offered by this tension. Even if one thinks, mistakenly, that the Marxist project is cloud cuckoo-land, why give up on the demand that capitalism live up to its promise of universal liberty and equality? MacIntyre’s own achievement lies in the philosophical acuity and historical intelligence with which he has exposed the constitutive failure of liberal capitalism. His limitation is that he has lost the feel for contradiction so fundamental to the greatness of his two old masters, Hegel and Marx.

MacIntyre and Modernity

SEAN SAYERS

At a time when many professional philosophers in the English-speaking world have all but given up the attempt to think critically and in large-scale terms about the modern world, MacIntyre’s work is defiantly untimely; and it is greatly welcome for that. It is remarkably wide-ranging, comprehensive, and thought-provoking. MacIntyre has been described as a ‘revolutionary Aristotelian’, but that is only part of the picture (Knight 1996; MacIntyre 1998g, 235; Knight 2007, 102–221). His work draws on ideas not only from Marx and Aristotle, but also from analytical philosophy, philosophy of science, and Thomist sources; and it combines these all together to construct a critical response to the modern condition. This has generated important debates among thinkers in all these areas. It is a shame to spoil the party. Nevertheless, in this essay, I criticise MacIntyre’s picture of modernity and argue that these different strands cannot satisfactorily be combined together: ‘revolutionary Aristotelianism’ is an unhappy mix.

MacIntyre’s central philosophical work in ethics and social philosophy has been driven by an agenda that can be traced back to his contribution
to the debates which created the New Left in the 1950s, in which MacIntyre was an important participant (Blackledge 2005; 2006b; 2007a; 2007b). The Communist movement in that period was dedicated to the Soviet cause and dominated by instrumentalist moral thinking of the sort portrayed by Arthur Koestler in *Darkness at Noon* (Koestler 1946). Whatever served the movement was justified by the argument that ‘the ends justify the means’. Many on the left had ceased to believe that the communist cause could be justified in this way, and they had come to the conclusion that Soviet-style communism was morally and politically bankrupt. The most influential response among the New Left was to reaffirm the non-instrumental ethical ideals of Marxism. There was a flowering of Marxist humanist thinking, inspired by Kantian ideas (see Kolakowski 1978, vol. 3).

MacIntyre’s response was different and distinctive (MacIntyre 1998a). He rejected both the instrumentalism of communist orthodoxy and the New Left Kantian humanist alternative. There is no basis on which the choice between them can be settled, he argued; they lead to an interminable series of moral disputes. This situation arises because both approaches separate values from facts, and ethics from social practice, and thereby cut away the ground of shared understandings that must exist if moral differences are to be resolvable. Instead, according to MacIntyre, we must start from the assumption ‘that every morality including that of modern liberalism, however universal its claims, is the morality of some particular social group’ (MacIntyre 1998, 258).

In his subsequent work, MacIntyre has extended this picture. He has come to see the situation on the left as a microcosm of the wider predicament of morality in the modern world. For modernity creates conditions in which there are a number of different and conflicting, commonly held moral positions, and yet in which disputes between them have become unresolvable. MacIntyre’s long-term project has been to describe and explain this moral condition as characteristic of modernity. He does so by contrasting it with the situation in premodern societies. This theme was first mapped out in his *Short History of Ethics*, it is developed more fully in *After Virtue*, and expanded still further in subsequent works (see MacIntyre 1988a).

The story starts with the premodern world of the ancient Greeks. They lived in relatively cohesive and united communities that revolved around shared understandings of social roles and responsibilities, and shared values in terms of which moral disputes could be adjudicated. MacIntyre develops the concept of a ‘practice’ to describe the character of such societies. Participants in a ‘practice’ share common values which are constitutive of it and which define goods that are internal to the practice itself. Moral values in such communities are embodied in the idea of the virtues, understood as excellences in the pursuit of such internal goods. To be virtuous is to fulfill one’s social role well. In this way, values are related essentially to the social relations in which they are rooted.¹

For MacIntyre, Aristotle is the greatest theorist of such practices. He defends the ideal of the ancient Greek polis as a rational political community in which moral differences can be resolved by rational discussion. The tradition of moral and political thinking which he founded continued, with changes and adaptations, to be central right through to the dawn of the modern era (MacIntyre 1994b, 288). In the modern world, however, fixed and given social roles and shared expectations have dissolved. Communities have been fragmented. These changes in the social order have gone together with a fundamental transformation of the role of morality in modern life. A set of shared understandings that can provide the basis on which to resolve moral differences no longer exists.

The Enlightenment involved the rejection of Aristotelianism, not only in the natural sciences but also in ethics and social thought. Enlightenment thinkers attempted to replace Aristotelian virtue ethics, based in practices involving shared understandings, with systems of thought in which values are to be justified through the use of universal reason alone. According to MacIntyre, this project has ‘failed’ (MacIntyre 2006m). The premodern social order has been destroyed, and with it the social basis that once existed for shared understandings and values. In the modern world we retain only the language and the idea of rational moral debate, but the social basis for it in the wider society has been lost: moral differences have become unresolvable.

In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre portrays modernity as the outcome of the fragmentation of earlier communities. The old social order has been

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¹ For the somewhat different conceptions of the virtues developed in the writings of Homer, Plato, and Aristotle, see MacIntyre 1967.
dissolved into a multitude of disconnected atomic individuals. In a number of works since then, however, he has developed a richer and more complex account of modern social relations. Even so, the view that there is no overall context of shared understandings or values, no overall community, remains a constant of his thought. Modern society is composed of a series of compartmentalised subgroups, each with its own roles and values. In different situations and in relation to different groups, the modern individual has different values and standards, detached from each other, without any essential relation or connection (MacIntyre 2006m).\(^2\)

Few of these compartmentalised groups constitute ‘practices’ in MacIntyre’s sense, or deserve the title of ‘communities’. They lack any shared understandings of values, they do not have common conceptions of internal goods or of the virtues. They are governed rather by external ends, especially the end of money-making — the external end par excellence, in that it is a universal end, not specific to any particular practice (Plato 1987, Book 1; Hegel 1991). They are prey to the influence of the market and the overwhelming political power of the modern nation state. These have more and more become the ruling forces of modern life. Thus, in the modern world, genuine practices with shared commitments to internal goods are rare and embattled forms that can be preserved only in limited and isolated areas of activity. MacIntyre’s favoured examples include small fishing crews, family farms, and academic communities of scholars (MacIntyre 2006b, 156; MacIntyre 1994b, 288, 302). But in most areas of life, money and power exercise a dominating influence, imposing a regime of external goods and instrumental values.

What is to be done? Though MacIntyre is profoundly critical of modernity, he is not at all optimistic about the possibility of change for the better in the future. However, he is not a conservative either, as is sometimes charged. Although his ideal of rational community is drawn from Aristotelian sources and is based on an idea of community derived from the ancient Greek polis, there is no suggestion in his work that he believes that we can or should return to that way of life. He thus gives a profoundly pessimistic account of our modern predicament (MacIntyre 1985a, ch. 18; 1984; Wartofsky 1984).

II

Although MacIntyre is a fundamental critic of modernity in this way, it is difficult to see how this brand of Aristotelianism can properly be described as in any sense ‘revolutionary’. MacIntyre describes his philosophy as a form of ‘utopianism’. Some see it as implying a ‘prefigurative’ form of politics. Given MacIntyre’s pessimism, however, it is not clear how it can be utopian, or what politics it prefigures. Putting the issue of revolutionary credentials aside, what are we to make of MacIntyre’s critique of the moral predicament of modernity? This is based on the premise that moral values are related to the social situation in which they are formed. This provides an illuminating and valuable method of approach for the critique of modernity and for an understanding of the modern liberal values. For these values too, he insists, emerge from the particular social relations of liberal modernity (MacIntyre 1998, 258).

However, MacIntyre’s specific account of liberal modernity and the modern moral predicament is more problematic. He portrays the development of modernity in what I shall argue is a one-sided way. He sees modernity as a purely negative phenomenon, as the outcome of the destruction of the earlier united form of community and the moral order based upon it. The communal practices on which the morality of the virtues was based are replaced by the purely external and instrumental ways of thinking of the market. In moral terms, as MacIntyre sees it, modernity is thus a purely negative and destructive phenomenon.

This picture is questionable. The impact of modernity has been more complex and contradictory than MacIntyre’s analysis suggests. The destruction of the premodern community of shared understandings is, indeed, one aspect of the process. However, there is a positive side to these developments as well. The emergence of modernity has also involved the construction of a new social and moral order. It cannot be understood as a purely negative process of fragmentation and destruction. It also involves the creation of new forms of social relation and

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2. For a thought-provoking defence of the compartmentalisation of modern life, see Fish 2007.
new—liberal—values connected with them: values of liberty, equality, individuality, and tolerance. It involves the development of a social order in which differences in many areas of life are relatively more tolerated and accepted, a world of greater individuality and liberty.

According to MacIntyre, the destruction and dissolution of traditional social relations creates the modern atomic individual separated from all communal relations and values. This is, indeed, the way things appear. As Marx observes, `in this [modern] society of free competition, the individual appears detached from the natural bonds etc. which in earlier historical periods make him the accessory of a definite and limited human conglomerate' (Marx 1973a, 84). However, as Marx goes on to argue, these appearances need to be questioned. For modern society is, in reality, a highly developed and complex social order, and not, as MacIntyre suggests, the result of the mere fragmentation and dissolution of social relations.

The more deeply we go back into history, the more does the individual . . . appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole. . . . Only in the eighteenth century, in `civil society', do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes, as external necessity. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social . . . relations. The human being is in the most literal sense a zoon politikon [political animal], not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society. (Marx 1973a, 84–85)

The modern form of individuality and the liberal outlook associated with it are products of the world of liberal modernity, the world of the free market (i.e., capitalism) and the liberal state (Sayers 2007).

As MacIntyre rightly stresses, and as Marx of course also argues, these forces at the same time also restrict freedom and stifle the very forms of individuality that they create. However, my point is that their effects have not been entirely negative. And unless the contradictory character of their impact is grasped, it is impossible properly to understand or criticise them.

III

It will be said that MacIntyre acknowledges these points and does not, in fact, treat liberal modernity in purely negative terms as the mere absence of social relations and shared values, as I am charging. For example, MacIntyre has explicitly come to acknowledge that liberalism itself is a moral 'tradition' in which there is a measure of agreement and shared assumptions that, ideally at least, ought to be able to provide a framework for discussion and disagreement that can lead to the development of a shared tradition of values. Knight makes this point well in his account of MacIntyre's philosophy.

Liberalism, having originally challenged the authority of tradition in the name of a universalising Reason, has now itself been transformed into a tradition. It is a tradition of reasoning that legitimates the institutions of state and capitalism and, in turn, is sustained by them. . . . We do not live after the fragmentation of tradition per se but after the displacement from dominance of one socially embodied tradition by another. (Knight 1998, 21)

However, what MacIntyre gives with one hand in this regard he tends to take back with the other. Even though he recognises that liberalism is a 'tradition', he treats it as an 'incoherent' tradition, as Knight goes on to add—a tradition in which shared values are lacking and in which moral disputes are terminable, and this is because it arises from a fragmented and compartmentalised social order.

MacIntyre describes liberal modernity as constituted by a series of 'agreements to disagree' (MacIntyre 1994b, 292). This is accurate enough, provided that both aspects of this description are properly acknowledged. However, MacIntyre's stress is typically placed on the disagreements and differences in modern life, rather than on the agreement also acknowledged in this description. The idea that modernity involves a set of 'agreements to disagree' implies a common structure of relations, in which individual freedom is tolerated and the resulting differences are accommodated. This is the positive side of what appears negatively as the fragmentation and compartmentalisation of liberal modernity (Hegel 1991, 220–39).
Even in the most liberal society, it should be added, the agreement to disagree operates within limits and applies only to particular issues. Moreover, such limits are not clear-cut or fixed; they are the subject of ongoing dispute. Debates about how these limits can be specified have been central to the liberal tradition of moral and political thought, as MacIntyre is aware: communitarians and liberals, supporters of capitalism and socialism, have been divided by their answers to these questions. Nevertheless, fragmentation and compartmentalisation of this sort—areas of liberty and privacy in which disagreement and an absence of shared understandings can prevail—are an essential feature of liberal modernity. And within the liberal tradition there has been broad agreement that liberty and tolerance of differences are of importance and value. That is to say, there has been broad agreement in the liberal tradition that the compartmentalisation that MacIntyre criticises should rather be cherished and protected (Mill 1962; Fish 2007).

This is what constitutes the value of tolerance, a value that has played a central role in liberal social thought. In a recent thought-provoking essay (MacIntyre 2006a), MacIntyre makes it clear that he, too, values tolerance and agrees with the common liberal view that some limits to tolerance are necessary. However, for MacIntyre, tolerance is a virtue primarily because it furthers rational discussion, its limits should be set accordingly. Tolerance, he maintains, should be subordinated to the end of fostering 'shared understandings' (MacIntyre 2006a, 223).

What MacIntyre envisages is suggested by his discussion of the university in *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*. Before reforms in the nineteenth century, university membership was subject to moral and religious tests, which excluded Catholics, Jews, agnostics, and others, and imposed a moral and religious consensus. 'The preliberal modern university was a university of enforced and constrained agreements' (MacIntyre 1990a, 230). Today, by contrast, there is no consensus, and the university has become a place with an 'institutional tolerance of limitless disagreement' (MacIntyre 1990a, 225). What MacIntyre advocates instead is the university as a forum where different traditions of enquiry would be required to argue with each other in an attempt to resolve their differences by rational debate. What he envisages is 'the university as a place of constrained disagreement, of imposed participation in conflict, in which a central responsibility of higher education would be to initiate students into conflict . . . in which the most fundamental type of moral and theological disagreement was accorded credit' (MacIntyre 1990a, 230–31).

The liberal notion is quite different. It advocates tolerance so that there can be realms of difference, spheres of non-discussion, areas of privacy, 'compartments', if you like, where individuals and groups can hold their own views and pursue their own practices in their own ways, without having to justify them or conform to the values or understandings of others. For MacIntyre, this is a recipe for social fragmentation; whereas for the liberal, MacIntyre's insistence on 'shared understandings' and the rational resolution of differences can all too easily lead to intolerance. What from the one perspective is the fragmentation and compartmentalisation of modernity is from the other the toleration of differences. These are simply different sides of the same coin: different ways of seeing the same social phenomenon.

IV

I have been arguing that modern society is not the result of mere fragmentation. Rather, it has its own positive and distinctive structure. Similarly, the modern liberal individual is not a mere atom but rather the product of particular social conditions, and so too for liberal values.

The liberal philosophers of the Enlightenment, from Locke to Kant, thought that they were contributing to the creation of a form of society in which economic relations were founded on agreement and mutual contract, governed by a liberal democratic state whose authority was based on free consent. This state of affairs would lead to the realisation of the values of liberty and equality, and to a free and equal community in which moral disputes could be resolved by rational discussion and debate.

It is evident that these hopes have not been fulfilled in modern liberal societies. Modern societies are beset by conflicts and by real moral and political differences, which cannot be resolved in purely rational or philosophical terms (MacIntyre 1998g, 243). In this way, MacIntyre is
right to say that the Enlightenment project has failed. The Enlightenment values of liberty, equality, and community have not been secured by the creation of modern liberal society. It seems evident that they cannot be realised by reason alone, as the philosophers of the Enlightenment hoped. The world created by their policies is not a world of reason, but rather the modern individualistic and compartmentalised sort of society described by MacIntyre and Marx. In such societies, as MacIntyre says, communities have been destroyed and life is increasingly dominated by money and political power. These are somewhat vague phrases, but what they refer to is clear enough. Marx describes it more specifically as capitalism (the dominance of the free market) and the form of political power that supports it: the bourgeois state.

For MacIntyre, the market and the state are purely coercive and negative forces which destroy the possibility of the sort of rational community in which alone a conception of the virtues can survive. As we have seen, he believes that such communities can now exist only in small embattled enclaves, walled off, insofar as is possible, from the forces that threaten to subvert and destroy them.

There is some truth in this account, but again, it is too one-sided: the picture is not as purely negative as MacIntyre suggests. The impact of modernity has been more complex and contradictory than MacIntyre allows (see Sayers 1998, 79–91). It may be the case that modern communities involve the common values and shared understandings that MacIntyre celebrates. However, for the most part they were also aristocratic and hierarchical social orders. The advent of the market imposes an instrumental outlook, but it also brings liberation from the subordination and privilege of earlier societies. Relative to what it replaced, the market has an equalitarian impact. It introduces a system of social relations which allows for a degree of autonomy and individuality. Relative to the conditions in the premodern world, it constitutes, in some important respects, an advance.

However, this is not the end of the story. Although there are liberating and egalitarian aspects to modernity, particularly when judged in comparison with premodern conditions, it is also true that liberal society has failed to realise the promises that its Enlightenment architects held out for it. As the power of the market and the liberal state have increased, they have come, more and more, to restrict the very freedoms and negate the forms of equality that they created.

In this respect MacIntyre is right, the market and the dominant form of political power of liberal modernity have become increasingly malignantly in the modern world, penetrating and perverting all areas of life, and threatening to corrupt and destroy communal practices and relations of trust and mutual understanding where they still exist. However, this does not necessarily mean that the hope of realising liberal values should be rejected, or that the Enlightenment project should be abandoned altogether as a failure. On the contrary, liberal modernity, which gave birth to the project of freedom and equality, has ultimately been unable to provide the conditions for its realisation. But these values and aspirations still remain. The Enlightenment project is unfinished. And the standpoint from which these judgments should be made is not that of a premodern Aristotelian idea of community, but rather of the possibilities for its realisation that are immanent in the present (Sayers 1998, 111–48).

V

To illustrate some of the points that I have so far been making in rather abstract and general terms, I will focus on a particular example: the academic community. For MacIntyre, this is a prime case of an area of life which can be and often is governed by shared understandings and by values that are internal to the practice of academic life itself. It seems to me that MacIntyre’s picture of the academic world as a ‘community of scholars’ is rather idealised. It has not been much like that, at least within the span of my memory. In any case, there can be little doubt that in recent years the scholarly world has been increasingly threatened by instrumental values, by the external goods of money and power.

This threat is clear for all to see in the regime imposed on universities in Britain since 1992 by the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), superseded in 2008 by the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Both are attempts to create artificial market conditions in the area of research funding. The research ‘outputs’ (i.e., publications), external research grants,
and research activities of every participating department are graded by panels of 'experts' on a quantitative scale. The purpose of this massive operation is to provide criteria for allocating funds according to the standard of the work being produced.\(^3\) As a result, the scholarly work of thinking and writing has been ruthlessly subordinated to the external ends of being rated well in the RAE or the REF, of obtaining external grants and other 'indicators of esteem', of gaining promotion, and so forth. MacIntyre's critique of the way in which money and power have come to tyrannise over modern life applies here perfectly. Nevertheless, one should step back and consider how far his philosophy actually provides a satisfactory basis for understanding and criticising the present situation in British universities.

As MacIntyre's approach suggests, the values associated with the RAE and REF need to be understood in the context of the social and economic conditions in which they have developed. The RAE and REF are primarily mechanisms for the distribution of university 'research' funding.\(^4\) The research rating system was introduced in 1992 to replace the previous arrangement, in which government money was distributed to the universities via a small, unelected group of 'the great and the good' called the University Grants Committee (UGC). This committee operated in an opaque and unaccountable way. The system was based on 'trust'. It worked on the assumption of 'common values' and 'shared understandings'. This functioned reasonably well when the university sector was small and relatively homogeneous up to the late 1960s.

Until then, philosophy in British universities, to take one example, was a small and relatively united subject. It was also extraordinarily narrow and limited. It was entirely dominated by the analytical approach, with the focus mainly on epistemology, ethics, and logic. Continental philosophy, critical social thought, and areas such as political philosophy and aesthetics were marginalised and all but excluded. As long as this situation remained unchallenged, there could be, and there was, a large measure of agreement about what was important in the subject and about how funds should be distributed, and there was a sufficient measure of trust that an unaccountable body like the UGC would do the job satisfactorily.

This system came under increasing strain with the rapid expansion of the university sector in the 1960s. Subjects such as philosophy grew and attracted a greater diversity of teachers, many of whom had been students in the radical years of the 1960s. The analytic orthodoxy began to be challenged. The subject started to fragment, as different ideas and approaches gained adherents and demanded recognition. The cosy little academic community of philosophy was broken up. Perhaps in some respects this was regrettable, but I do not think one should spend much time lamenting its demise. The stranglehold over British philosophy of a narrow and intolerant analytical orthodoxy had to be challenged if freedom to explore other ideas and approaches was to become possible.\(^5\)

The period of rapid expansion and fragmentation of the university sector in the 1960s was soon followed by savage funding cuts in the 1970s. A means of allocating increasingly scarce resources was needed that would carry more authority and trust across the sector than did the establishment cosiness of the UGC. The RAE was devised to fulfill this role. It purported to give a quantified and 'objective' measure of research quality, and thus to provide a transparent and open basis for determining funding allocation. Individuals and departments in all institutions—elite and non-elite alike—were to be enabled to obtain research funding if their work was demonstrably of sufficient 'quality'.

The whole exercise is a sham. Judgments of the 'quality' of philosophical work cannot be 'objective' in this way, nor can they be reduced to a quantitative measure. As the subject has become more fragmented the assessment process has had to be made more complex, but at the same time it has become less credible. At the end of the day, the judgments on which research ratings rest are still made by the small and unelected

\(^3\) In principle, this may appear fair and reasonable, but it has not worked out like that in practice (see Sayers 1997).

\(^4\) The very idea of a separate element of funding for 'research' was a product of the mechanisms introduced with the RAE.

\(^5\) The journal Radical Philosophy, of which I was one of the founders in 1972, played a significant part in this change.
groups who constitute the various subject 'panels', groups that are still often unrepresentative of the subjects over which they preside. The outcome of this absurdly cumbersome and costly exercise is, however, entirely predictable: namely, to concentrate the available funding in a predetermined little group of privileged institutions. In other words, although the research rating system is marginally more transparent and more equalitarian than the old UGC, in effect it has simply re-created in a different guise mechanisms remarkably like those it was supposed to replace.

On top of that, the system has other, perhaps unintended, but far more harmful and distorting effects on intellectual life right across the academic community. It has encouraged an artificial and one-sided emphasis on so-called 'research' (i.e., publication and research funding), to the detriment of teaching. Research has been made into an instrumental activity aimed at inclusion in the REF, and teaching—the essential activity of universities—has been devalued and sidelined. Moreover, the whole regime has had a disastrously conservative impact, discouraging work on anything innovative, risky, critical, or regarded as 'marginal', for fear that it will not rate well in REF terms. These pressures mean that philosophical work in the academy, rather than being a 'practice' in MacIntyre's sense that embodies and expresses the internal goods of scholarly thought, has been made into an activity pursued largely for the external goods of REF ratings and research funding, all in the context of an artificially created market.6

MacIntyre's criticisms of modernity describe this situation all too well. His philosophy provides the basis for a powerful condemnation of the instrumentalism that has thus been brought into academic life. However, it is less helpful when it comes to understanding the complexities of the situation or identifying ways to change it for the better. MacIntyre's ideal of small, embattled groups of true scholars, pursuing the internal goods of intellectual life and preserving themselves against the forces of money and power, is not helpful. The academic community is not like that. It probably never has been. In any event, it has not been able to remain an enclave, immune from the pressures of the modern world.

In some important respects, moreover, that should not be something to regret. The pressures of modernity have not been entirely harmful. They have also created the conditions in which diversity can exist. This tolerance of different approaches has meant that the subject has become fragmented and compartmentalised; but it would be a mistake to look back wistfully to the old days. The research rating regime has been obliged to acknowledge the variety of philosophical work now going on in a way that the old 'shared understandings' of the UGC era simply did not.7

I certainly do not intend to suggest that the REF has been a good thing for intellectual life. Far from it. But I am trying to show that the impact of the forces that led to it has been more complex and contradictory than MacIntyre's philosophy suggests. The freedoms it has been obliged to allow to different approaches are at the same time seriously threatened by the pressures towards conformity that are also inherent in it. This situation is not adequately described by MacIntyre when he says that the modern university is a place of 'unconstrained and limitless absence of agreement' (MacIntyre 1990a, 225).

MacIntyre envisages that the university might become an arena of discussion and argument between rival traditions. Ideally, it should be possible to achieve this, and to have a unified intellectual community in which different approaches participate in a common debate. However, such a community of 'shared understandings' has proved very difficult to create, at least in philosophy. In its absence, diversity and freedom have been achieved only through the compartmentalisation of the subject, in which different traditions coexist in mutually hostile and noncommunicating isolation.

This outcome may not seem very different from MacIntyre's vision of small enclaves preserving themselves against the pressures of modernity.

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6. Ironically, the real market in publications—the academic book trade, which is determined by considerations of what sells, rather than by the imprimatur of an elite panel—has proved considerably more open, progressive, and responsive to new developments in philosophy (Sayers 1997).

7. I am grateful to Jan Derry and Andrew Chitty for help in thinking out this line of argument.
What I am arguing, however, is that MacIntyre’s picture of modernity is fundamentally flawed. For it is the very forces of modernity that have created the conditions for the diversity of approaches and these enclaves in the first place.

VI

The practical implications of this are that the areas of freedom to pursue critical work that exist within the system need to be defended and, where possible, expanded—if necessary by creating and defending a compartmentalised space in which they can be carried on. MacIntyre is far more pessimistic. He sees little prospect for this, nor any possibility of change for the better in the modern world. Any hopes of realising liberty, equality, or community now or in a future society are illusory. The ideals which inspire radical liberalism, socialism, and communism, have failed. The market and the state have come to dominate and to exercise their corrupting influence throughout modern life. Moral values can be preserved and defended only in small enclaves, protected from effects of market and state, where there can be shared understandings and rational deliberation about values (MacIntyre 1998g).

The critique of the impact of the market and the state that leads MacIntyre to these conclusions is usually associated with socialism, but it is widely shared by many liberals and other sorts of radicals. However, such critics have generally had a different response to the problems of liberal modernity. They are reluctant to give up the Enlightenment project and to reject liberal modernity altogether in the way that MacIntyre advocates. On the contrary, they remain committed to the central aspirations of the Enlightenment. Like MacIntyre, however, they believe that the market and the capitalist state have become the main force standing in the way of their realisation. To preserve and extend the liberal values of the Enlightenment, they maintain, the market and the state must be curbed and brought under social control. For these values can now be realised only by an economic, social, and political transformation, which will take us beyond free market capitalism and beyond the boundaries envisaged by traditional liberalism.

Although MacIntyre had some sympathy with these views in his early years, when he was active on the left, he no longer has any time for them. Now he is convinced that no change for the better is possible. With the failure of Soviet communism, all hope of socialism and with it of radical social change has been refuted and discredited: ‘Marxist politics have failed’ (MacIntyre 2006i, 153). His assumption seems to be that the Soviet system and the other forms of Marxism that vied with each other in the last century are the only possible forms of communist politics, and that Marxism is now finished as a political force. In this respect, he appears to agree with those who hold that with the collapse of Soviet-style communism, we are at the ‘end of history’. This is what leads to the profound pessimism that pervades MacIntyre’s thought. All we can do is resign ourselves to the present situation and defend moral values in small embattled enclaves, where possible.

At least in the academic world, I have argued, even this minimal defensive project is misconceived. It has not been possible to defend the old ‘community of scholars’ against the forces of the market and the state; it is questionable whether that is even desirable. The academic world has become fragmented and compartmentalised, but that is no reason for MacIntyre’s pessimism. For this very compartmentalisation has created what spaces there are for critical and radical thought in the universities. And such spaces still remain, even in the world of research ratings. MacIntyre’s work is itself a small proof of this. The opportunities for critical work, such as they are, need to be defended and expanded, not negated and denied.

Similarly, in the larger political world, there are grounds for thinking that MacIntyre is mistaken in taking the failure of the Soviet system and the collapse of the socialist movement elsewhere as the final proof that there is no way forward. The contemporary world is riven with conflicts and contradictions, it is volatile and unstable. There is no good reason to believe that history has come to an end with capitalism and liberal democracy. If humanity does not destroy itself first, change is not only possible but likely.

Although volatility and crisis may lead to change, they are not by themselves sufficient to bring about a better world. For this, human agents with the will and capability to construct a new and better order
are also necessary. There are few signs of these yet appearing. The industrial proletariat of the advanced industrial societies, in whom Marx rested his hopes for a better future, are a diminishing group who do not seem destined to fulfill this role. In any case, capitalism is now a global system. The forces for radical change appear more likely to originate in the third world and to take a different form than classical Marxism envisaged. Some commentators, such as Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, look to an amorphous 'multitude' of the dispossessed and downtrodden to fulfill the role of revolutionary agents (Hardt and Negri 2000; 2005). The seeds of such forces may exist among them, but they will need to become much more united, conscious, and better organised if they are to fulfill this role. There is little evidence of this happening to date. Nevertheless, people all over the world want a better way of living than global capitalism can provide, and that is surely possible. It seems reasonable to believe that these aspirations will lead, sooner or later, to the emergence of more effective forces of opposition: perhaps in the underdeveloped world, and perhaps also by the imperatives created by imminent environmental catastrophe. Along these lines, I believe, we can look for a perspective that is both more hopeful and better justified than MacIntyre's pessimism.

In *After Virtue*, Alasdair MacIntyre argues that Nietzsche's philosophy of unmasking is the ultimate moral philosophy of modernity, the moral philosophy that exposes the true nature of modern moral discourse. In short, the emotivist language of modern Western culture tends to conceal the manipulative modes of social relationships. Nietzsche saw clearly the perpetually conflicting but denied wills behind civilised bourgeois modes of life, the conflicts that are concealed by universalist moral language (MacIntyre 1985a, ch. 9). Along with Nietzsche, Marx was the other major modern student of conflict. Where Nietzsche worked etymologically and genealogically among the historically formed conflictual modes of

1. I thank professors Timo Airaksinen and Matti Sintonen for their comments on earlier versions of this essay. The discussions of the essay are developed further and related to questions concerning the role of empirical research in my Finnish paper "Vieraantuminen käytännössä kapitalistisessa yhteiskunnassa" (Alienation from Practices in Capitalist Society), forthcoming in *Tiede & edistys*. 