MacIntyre and Hegel on the possibility of resolving philosophical disagreements

Tony Burns
University of Nottingham, UK

Abstract

This article examines the views of Hegel and Alasdair MacIntyre regarding philosophical disagreements, whether or not they can be resolved and if so how. For both thinkers such a disagreement is thought of as taking place between the advocates of two theoretical positions which are opposed to one another. Each party subscribes to a way of thinking about the issue under discussion which appears to be logically incompatible with the views of the other. We seem therefore to have to make an either-or choice between them. In the case of all philosophical disagreements, therefore, the same questions arise. Is the contradiction in question real, or merely apparent? Can it be resolved? If so, what exactly is involved in such a resolution? Is some form of theoretical compromise, between these two extremes possible? Is there a third-way, a both-and approach, which in some way combines the strengths of each and the weaknesses of neither, or which seeks in some way to balance their respective strengths and weaknesses of each against those of the other? The article suggests that MacIntyre differentiates between two types of philosophical disagreement. In the case of the first, the ideas associated with the two opposed positions are incommensurable. We must, therefore make an either-or choice between them. In the case of disagreements of the second type, the ideas in question are not incommensurable. In these cases, therefore, it is possible for them to be combined or synthesised. The article argues that MacIntyre's approach to this second type of philosophical disagreement has an obvious affinity with what is often thought to be that of Hegel. In the words of Richard J. Bernstein, it is 'quasi-Hegelian'. It is therefore fruitful to compare and contrast the views of these two thinkers on this issue.

Corresponding author:
Tony Burns, School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham, University Park, Notitngham NG7 2RD, UK.
Email: tony.burns@nottingham.ac.uk

Introduction

There is relatively little literature which discusses the relationship in general which exists between the ideas of Alasdair MacIntyre and those of Hegel. It is only in his earlier writings that he discusses Hegel and his ideas at any length. There is a discussion of Hegel's ethics in *A Short History of Ethics*, which was published in 1967. There is also an account of Hegel's metaphysics in a volume entitled *Herbert Marcuse: An Exposition and a Polemic*, published in 1970. However, with the exception of an essay in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, which MacIntyre edited in 1972, he was interested in Hegel and his ideas in these earlier works mainly because of the influence that Hegel had on Marx and Marxism, which was the real focus of MacIntyre's attention at that time. The later MacIntyre is not usually associated with the philosophy of Hegel nor is this surprising. For MacIntyre does not say very much at all about Hegel in his later writings. As Richard J. Bernstein has noted, 'Hegel is not really discussed and is barely mentioned' in *After Virtue* (Bernstein 2017 [1984]: 314). Robert Pippin has also referred to MacIntyre's 'somewhat unusual reticence about Hegel' in that book. This reticence is unusual because 'given the tenor, the tone, and the method of *After Virtue*, Hegel's is a name that ought to spring to mind immediately' (Pippin 2015: 241).

It seems fair to say that MacIntyre's attitude towards Hegel has been ambivalent. There are occasions when he has been, let us say, less than enthusiastic about Hegel and his ideas. For example, in 'The *Theses on Feuerbach*: A Road Not Taken', which he published in 1994, MacIntyre argued that what he has in mind by life in a community-oriented 'practice' stands in 'sharp contrast' to the individualistic or egoistic nature of 'the practical life of civil society'. This might well be thought to be an Hegelian idea. There are echoes here of what Hegel has to say about the notion of 'civil society' in his *Philosophy of Right* (1979 [1821]: §§182–256, 122–55). Nevertheless, MacIntyre insists that this 'is a contrast which is best expressed in Aristotelian rather than in Hegelian terms' (MacIntyre 1998 [1994]: 225). In the same essay, MacIntyre defends the idea of an ethical Marxism. Again, however, he maintains that the ideas with which such a reading of Marx and Marxism are associated are best 'expressed in an Aristotelian vocabulary', because 'Hegel's idiom is just not adequate to the task' (MacIntyre 1998 [1994]: 226).

Despite MacIntyre's stated reservations about Hegel, Gordon Graham, has criticised him for what he alleges to be his Hegelianism, of which Graham disapproves. According to Graham, MacIntyre offers his readers 'a very sophisticated form of what in Hegel is generally agreed (sic) to be confusion' (Graham 1996: 164). Similarly, in his contribution to a debate between MacIntyre and Richard J. Bernstein in the journal *Soundings*, David A. Hoekema argues that although it is true that MacIntyre 'does not posit a grand world-historical stage on which *Geist* interrogates itself and moves inexorably forward', nevertheless there are definite 'traces of a Hegelian understanding of philosophy' in

MacIntyre's writings' (Hoekema 2017: 346). Like Graham, Hoekema considers this to be a weakness in MacIntyre's work and not a strength. He refers somewhat disparagingly to the 'odour' of Hegelianism in MacIntyre's thought. Neither Graham nor Hoekema think that Hegel and his views are to be taken at all seriously.

MacIntyre's response to these criticisms has been a defensive one. He evidently has no desire to be tarred by the brush of Hegelianism. Indeed, against Graham, he has insisted that in fact his own philosophical approach is 'irredeemably anti-Hegelian'. This is so, he argues, because he emphatically rejects Hegel's 'notion of an absolute standpoint. independent of the particularity of all traditions' (MacIntyre 1996: 295).

In a piece devoted to Hegel, entitled 'Hegel on Faces and Skulls', which he published in 1972, MacIntyre observes that 'the belief that all the sequences of history constitute a single movement towards the goal of a consciousness of the whole that is absolute spirit' was 'certainly held by Hegel himself to be the key to his whole doctrine' (MacIntyre 1972: 235). This is a belief that MacIntyre emphatically rejects. And yet in the same article, MacIntyre also maintains that at least 'some of Hegel's other theses as to human history', those that interest him most, 'do not seem in any way to entail his doctrine about the Absolute'. Consequently, he argues, 'to be unwilling to admit the truth of that doctrine ought not' prejudice us 'against Hegel's other claims' (MacIntyre 1972: 235). Of particular interest here is the attitude of both Hegel and MacIntyre towards philosophical disagreements.

A number of examples of such philosophical disagreements are alluded to in MacIntyre's writings. In the field of epistemology, there is the debate between the proponents of objectivism and relativism, which he discusses in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* In the case of ethics and politics, a second disagreement, which is also considered in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*, is that between Plato and the Sophists. This is a variant of what is usually referred to as the nature versus convention debate in classical Athens. A third disagreement is that between the proponents of liberal morality and Stalinism which MacIntyre considers in his 'Notes from the Moral Wilderness' (1958–59). A fourth is the debate between cosmopolitanism and patriotism, which MacIntyre discusses in his essay 'Is Patriotism a Virtue?' (MacIntyre 1984). A fifth is the debate which lies at the heart of MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, between Aristotle and his neo-Aristotelian followers, on the one hand, and Nietzsche and latter day proponents of Nietzscheanism, especially postmodernists and poststructuralists, on the other (MacIntyre 1990 [1981]: 109–20). Finally, there is the disagreement, also considered in *After Virtue*, between Jean-Paul Sartre and Erving Goffman regarding the nature of the self (MacIntyre 1990 [1981]: 31–32, 213–14, 216, 220–21).

The issue in all of these examples is the following. In each case, a disagreement is thought of as taking place between people who stand at the opposite ends of a theoretical spectrum. Each subscribes to a way of thinking about the issue under discussion which appears to contradict, or to be logically incompatible, with the views of the other. Each of these theoretical approaches is the polar opposite of the other. We seem therefore to have to make an either-or choice between them. In all of these cases, therefore, the same questions arise. Is the contradiction in question real, or merely apparent? Can it be resolved? If so, what exactly is involved in such a resolution? Is some form of theoretical

compromise, between these two extremes possible? Is there a third way, a doctrine which in some way combines the strengths of each and the weaknesses of neither, or which seeks in some way to balance their respective strengths and weaknesses against one another? If it is presented in this way, the issue of how we should approach the philosophical disagreements which are identified by MacIntyre has an obvious affinity with the philosophy of Hegel. Indeed, it lies at the very heart of that philosophy as it is often understood.

The discussion which follows has a simple structure. It has two parts. In the first, I consider what Hegel has to say about philosophical disagreements in general. In the second, I turn to consider the views of MacIntyre regarding the questions identified above. There are occasions when MacIntyre distances himself from the approach to philosophical disagreements which is often associated with the philosophy of Hegel. However, there are also occasions when he does not. Indeed, as both Robert B. Pippin and Richard J. Bernstein have pointed out, his own approach to at least some of the debates identified above is strikingly similar in at least some respects to that of Hegel as commonly understood. It is 'quasi Hegelian' (Bernstein 1991: 21).

The fact that MacIntyre says different things about philosophical disagreements and the possibility of their resolution at different times raises the question of the consistency of his views regarding this issue. Does MacIntyre contradict himself when discussing it? This is not necessarily so. Rather, MacIntyre assumes that there are two different types of philosophical disagreement. In cases of the one type, he thinks that the disagreement can be resolved, in what some would regard as an Hegelian manner, whereas in those of the other type, he thinks that it cannot be[1].

Part One

Hegel on philosophical disagreements

In his *Shorter Logic,* Hegel distinguishes between what he calls the faculty of the 'Understanding' and the faculty of 'Reason' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §80, 214). He associates the faculty of the Understanding with traditional Aristotelian, formal logic and its three fundamental 'laws of thought' or of reasoning, namely, the law of identity, the law of non-contradiction and the law of the excluded middle (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §115, 167). This is different from 'speculative logic', which, although it 'contains all previous Logic and Metaphysics', and 'preserves the same forms of thought' within itself, nevertheless also goes beyond them, thereby 'remodelling and expanding them with wider categories' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §9, 13).

Hegel contrasts the approach that is adopted by the faculty of the Understanding, with its emphasis on its 'abstractions', with an alternative indeed an opposite approach, which he characterises as that of dialectical or 'negative reason', which he associates with his own speculative metaphysics. This alternative approach considers things in their interconnectedness, or in the relationships in which they stand to other things, all of which are regarded as component part of an over-arching totality or whole. However, Hegel does not identify his own approach with that of negative reason. Rather, he associates it with what

he refers to as 'positive reason'. This goes beyond the standpoint of both the faculty of the Understanding, which considers things in their isolation and separateness, and that of negative reason, which sees things in their interconnectedness, whilst at the same time incorporating these two opposed theoretical approaches within itself (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §§79–82, 112–21). In Hegel's own words, 'logical doctrine has three sides: (α) the Abstract side, or that of understanding; (β) the Dialectical, or that of negative reason; (γ) the Speculative, or that of positive reason' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §79, 212).

According to Hegel, the faculty of the Understanding, because it deals in abstractions, 'sticks to fixity of characters and their distinctness from one another'. The entities which are thought of by the faculty subsist independently of other things, and are not necessarily related to other things. On this view, 'every such limited abstract', or each individual thing, is treated as 'having a subsistence and being of its own' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §80, 113). Hence, the 'main characteristic' of the Understanding is 'to make abstract identity its principle'. Instead of thinking concretely, this approach is 'stuck fast on an abstract, identity' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §36, 162).

Hegel contrasts this approach with that of negative reason, and therefore also of the positive reason of speculative metaphysics, which as we have seen encompasses negative reason as well as the insights of the Understanding. The central feature of that alternative approach is to consider things in their connectedness, as being necessarily related to one another, as component parts of an over-arching totality or whole. Hegel argues that 'the purpose of philosophy has always been the intellectual ascertainment' of things as being connected in this way. 'Everything deserving the name of philosophy', he claims, 'has constantly been based on the consciousness of an absolute unity where the understanding sees and accepts only separation' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §213, 276).

Hegel suggests that, in the case of all things, we should think in terms of the category of 'individuality' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §163, 226). This amounts to thinking of them as an 'actuality', for, he argues, 'individual and actual are the same thing' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §163, 226). To say this, however, is to say that we should think of an individual thing as a 'concrete' entity (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §31, 51; §§34–38, 54–63; §48, 78; §§79–80, 113, 115; §86, 125; §88, 132; §94, 138; §98, 144; §125, 181; §143, 202; §164, 228; §172, 237; §227, 285; §231, 287). We should not therefore think of it as a mere or empty 'abstraction' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §35, 55; §§36–37, 58–60; §38, 63–64; §80, 112, 115; §82, 119–20; §119, 174). He also states that each individual thing should be regarded as a 'totality' or whole which possesses two component parts (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §32, 52–3; §125, 286; §135, 191; §193, 256–7). These, he says, are polar 'opposites' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §119, 173–74).

Hegel argues that 'every actual thing' is to be thought of as involving the 'coexistence' of two 'opposed elements.' It is a 'concrete unity of opposed determinations' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §48, 78; §119, 174). Hegel also claims that 'all concrete things' contain or involve a combination of two 'moments,' or constituent parts, which he characterises as 'universality' and 'particularity' respectively (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §163, 226; also §24, 39–40; §163, 226; §164, 228–29).

The notion of 'polar opposites' is central to Hegel's understanding of the concreteness of individual things. As we have seen, he regards each individual or actual thing involves

'the coexistence of opposed elements' or the 'unity of opposed determinations.' Each of these 'moments' is understood in its relationship to the other. Each is thought of as involving the negation of the other. Hegel argues, therefore, that these two component parts of a concrete individual necessarily stand or fall together. They cannot exist independently of one another. He states that 'though the two 'moments' or factors present themselves as distinct, still neither of them can be absent, nor can one exist apart from the other' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §12, 16–17). Hence, also it is not possible to conceptualise the one apart from the necessary relationship in which it stands to the other. In Hegel's words, neither of these two polar opposites 'has an existence of its own in proportion as it is not the other. The one is made visible in the other, and is only in so far as that other is'. Thus, each of them 'is stamped with a characteristic of its own only in its relation to the other' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §119, 276). They are 'intrinsically conditioned by one another, and *are* only in relation to each other' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §119, 278).

Hegel maintains that, for this reason, despite their opposition to one another, we may say that these two polar opposites 'are at bottom the same', because 'the name of either might be transferred to the other'. To employ a term that is used by the philosopher of science T. S. Kuhn, they are commensurable Kuhn 1970 [1962]: 150, 189–90, 201–02). As Yevgeny Zamyatin has put it, in an essay on the science fiction of H. G. Wells, the only difference between them is that one of them carries a '+' sign, whereas the other carries a '-' sign (Zamyatin 1991 [1922]: 286–87), For example, Hegel states that 'debts and assets are not two particular, self-subsisting species of property'. For 'what is negative to the debtor is positive to the creditor' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §119, 278). Hegel concludes that 'the Speculative stage' in the history of philosophy, or the 'stage of Positive Reason', necessarily 'apprehends the unity' of these component parts 'in their opposition' to one another (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §82, 119).

What Hegel means by 'dialectics' or thinking dialectically is connected to his view that all concrete things are constituted by component parts which are polar opposites. At times he says that these two elements of a concrete individual 'contradict' or stand in a relationship of 'contradiction' to one another. For this reason, he claims, 'contradiction is the very moving principle of the world' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §119, 174). He insists that 'to see that thought in its very nature is dialectical, and that, as understanding, it must fall into contradiction', or 'the negative of itself', is 'one of the main lessons of logic' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §11, 15). He also argues at one point that 'in the Dialectical stage' the 'finite characterisations' or abstractions of the faculty of the Understanding 'supersede themselves and pass into their opposites' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §81, 115). He notes Immanuel Kant's view that thinking dialectically demonstrates that 'every abstract proposition of understanding, taken precisely as given, naturally veers round into its opposite' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §81, 117).

So far as our understanding of the different outlooks which are involved in philosophical disagreements is concerned, Hegel emphasises that a dialectical approach, as adopted by speculative metaphysics and its positive reason, is associated with a tendency 'by which the one-sidedness and limitation of the predicates of Understanding is seen in its true light' (1975 [1830]: §81, 116). He argues that the aim of positive reason is to avoid 'adopting one-sided forms of thought', which are, 'rigidly fixed by understanding', by

thinking concretely about the various philosophical approaches that are available to us (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §98, 244). He insists that 'a one-sided proposition', or way of thinking, 'can never even give expression to a speculative truth'. For example, if we say that 'the absolute is the unity of subjective and objective', then 'we are undoubtedly in the right'. However, he also maintains that this assertion would be partial or 'one-sided' if we were to 'enunciate the unity only and lay the accent upon it, forgetting that in reality the subjective and objective are not merely identical but also distinct' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §82, 121). One of the core principles of Hegel's own approach to questions of philosophy is that such partiality or one-sidedness is something to be avoided. In speculative philosophy, it is somehow or other transcended or overcome.

Hegel considers the approach that is adopted by the faculty of the Understanding to be 'dogmatic', precisely because 'it maintains' what he refers to as 'half-truths', in 'isolation from one another' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §32, 53). The positive reason of speculative philosophy, on the other hand, demonstrates that 'it can reach beyond the inadequate formularies of abstract thought'. Hegel repeats his assertion that the abstract concepts of the Understanding are regarded as being 'separated from one another by an infinite chasm, so that opposite categories can never get at each other'. Against that view, he argues that 'the battle of reason', and therefore also the aim of speculative philosophy, is 'the struggle to break up the rigidity to which the understanding has reduced everything' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §32, 53).

As a consequence of this, Hegel emphatically rejects what he refers to as 'either-or' thinking. This is something which he associates with the faculty of the Understanding, and which he contrasts with the 'both-and' approach of dialectics or negative reason, and consequently also with that of the positive reason and speculative metaphysics. 'Instead of speaking by the maxim of Excluded Middle (which is the maxim of abstract understanding)', he argues, 'we should rather say: Everything is opposite'. For 'neither in heaven nor in Earth, neither in the world of mind nor of nature, is there anywhere such an abstract "either-or" as the understanding maintains'. This is so precisely because 'whatever exists is concrete, with difference and opposition in itself' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §119, 278). Hegel emphasises what he considers to be the ethical or political implications of such an approach. 'It is', he says, 'the fashion of youth to dash about in abstractions'. Against such an outlook, he argues, 'the man (sic) who has learnt to know life steers clear of the abstract "either-or," and keeps to the concrete' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §80, 216–17).

There is disagreement amongst commentators over the question of whether, in Hegel's opinion, the contradictions which he associates with his polar opposites can be combined in some higher level synthesis. When discussing this issue, Gustav E. Mueller has argued that the notion of 'thesis-antithesis-synthesis' that is often attributed to Hegel's philosophy is nothing more than a 'legend' (Mueller 1958). In one sense, Mueller has a point. Hegel does not use this phrase explicitly. And yet, despite this, the expression thesis-antithesis-synthesis does capture and express something important about Hegel's dialectical approach to philosophical disagreements. One might say that the idea is present, even if the phrase is not. There is nothing wrong with the notion of attributing the notion of a theoretical synthesis to Hegel. One question here is what according to Hegel this means, what it involves, and how this synthesis is to be achieved? Another is whether

Hegel considers the contradiction which exists between his opposed points of view to be a real contradiction or only an apparent one?

The above account deals with Hegel's views regarding how philosophers should set about attempting to gain knowledge of the world around them. However, the same principles also have an application to the study of philosophy itself, when it is turned in on itself, as a possible object of knowledge. We have seen that, according to Hegel, positive reason necessarily deals with things which are concrete. He maintains that 'what philosophy has to do with is always something concrete' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §94, 238). For 'the true is always concrete', or 'speculative' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §31, 51). Hegel also says that 'Truth' is 'no abstraction, but concrete universality' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §61, 95). Consequently, he argues that true philosophy must constitute a 'system' of inter-related ideas. This is one of the things Hegel has in mind when he talks about the need to think concretely. In his words, 'the thought which is genuine and self-supporting', as true philosophy should be, must itself 'be intrinsically concrete' (Hegel 1975 [1830], §14, 19).

According to Hegel, all of the ideas introduced above apply to our understanding of the history of philosophy, as the pursuit of knowledge or Truth. In the *Shorter Logic*, Hegel states that 'in the history of philosophy' we find that philosophy 'assume[s] the shape of successive systems'. Philosophy 'is seen to unfold itself in a process from the abstract to the concrete'. In that history, he argues, 'the earliest systems are the most abstract, and thus at the same time the poorest', whereas the later ones, culminating in his own philosophy, are richer, because they are more concrete (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §86, 27–28). Hegel suggests that in the history of philosophy progress is made. Change for the better takes place. Later systems of thought are an improvement on earlier ones, because they are closer to what he considers to be the absolute Truth. Hegel evidently thought that this absolute Truth is captured and expressed by his own philosophy. Until humanity has arrived at that point, which is the final end or goal of the history of philosophy, the object of knowledge, or the thing that is studied by philosophers, is considered 'not as a concrete whole, but only under certain abstract points of view' (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §35, 158).

It does not seem inappropriate to use the word 'tradition', in something like the MacIntyrean sense, when talking about Hegel's views regarding the history of philosophy. There is indeed, in his opinion, what might be called *the* tradition of philosophy. However, it is important to note that for Hegel, unlike for MacIntyre, there is only one philosophical tradition, of which the different philosophies which are present in earlier and later stages of that tradition's historical development are the component parts.

The fact that Hegel's approach towards philosophical questions is an historical one has led commentators to associate his philosophy and political thought with the notion of historicism (Beiser 1993; Popper 1966a, b [1945]; Popper 1969 [1957]). The ideas discussed in this section are central to Hegel's historicism, as I understand it. However, contrary to the view of Paul Hamilton in his *Historicism* (Hamilton 2003: 2), this should not be identified or confused with relativism, in either its epistemological or moral versions. So far as the history of philosophy is concerned, Hegel's historicism is best thought of as an attempt to mediate between the two abstract and extreme theoretical positions, or polar opposites, of epistemological objectivism and epistemological relativism. For Hegel, on this reading of his views, historicism and relativism are not at all the

same thing. Rather, they are related to one another as a whole is to one of its component parts.

For critics of Hegel such as Karl Popper Hegel's commitment to historicism is a weakness in his thought. It is one of their reasons for criticising him. Against that reading of Hegel, it might be suggested that although Hegel is indeed an historicist, in some sense of the term, nevertheless those who rightly characterise him in this way do not have in mind what Popper does when he talks about it in his *The Poverty of Historicism* (Popper 1969 [1957]). Nor in their view is the point of attaching this descriptive label to Hegel to criticise him.

Part Two

Alasdair MacIntyre on philosophical disagreements

Alasdair MacIntyre discusses the nature of philosophical disagreements and the possibility of their resolution on a number of occasions, but especially in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (MacIntyre 1989: 75–81, 349–69). When talking about this issue, he suggests that there are two types of philosophical disagreement. In cases of the first type, MacIntyre argues that we must make an either-or choice in favour of one or the other of two competing, opposed and mutually incompatible theoretical approaches which are deployed by the parties involved. In cases of the second type, he argues that what is required is a both-and approach rather than an either-or one. In such cases, MacIntyre thinks, in what some people would regard (rightly or wrongly) as an Hegelian or quasi-Hegelian manner, that we should attempt somehow to combine the two sides which are opposed to one another, with a view to steering a *via media* between them. It is on those other occasions that MacIntyre comes closest to what is often thought to be a position that is definitive of Hegelian philosophy.

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre uses the nature versus convention debate in classical Athens, specifically the disagreement between Plato and the Sophists, as an example to illustrate his views regarding the nature of the first type of philosophical disagreement. This includes the disagreement between the followers of Aristotle and the followers of Nietzsche today, which MacIntyre discusses in chapter 9 of *After Virtue* (MacIntyre 1990 [1981]): 109–20; see also Bernstein 2017 [1984]; Hoekema 2017 [984]; MacIntyre 2017 [1984]; Maggini 2020; Pippin 2015).

When talking about the disagreement between Socrates and the character Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias,* MacIntyre observes that although Socrates refutes 'the central theses of Callicles', he does so 'by arguing from premises and on the basis of presuppositions' which Callicles rejects and which no 'follower of the sophistic movement could have had any good reason to accept'. According to MacIntyre, 'the premises and presuppositions of the Platonic account certainly entail the falsity of any sophistic view and vice versa'. However, he goes on, 'neither account is able to supply sufficient reasons for any sophisticated adherent of the opposing view to admit that a refutation has occurred' (MacIntyre 1989: 75). MacIntyre argues that this debate between Plato and the sophists has a parallel in debates within 'contemporary moral philosophy'. For there also we find

an inability on either side of a particular debate 'to produce what their opponents could recognize as a refutation of their position'. Consequently, their also we find an 'inability' on the part of the advocates of 'rival moral philosophies to resolve *their* disagreements' (MacIntyre 1989: 75–76).

MacIntyre says of philosophical disagreements of this first type that although, in a manner of speaking, they might be said to concern 'one and the same subject matter', nevertheless, with respect to that subject matter, they invariably involve 'two mutually incompatible sets of statements each able to withstand refutation in its own terms', and 'neither able to refute the other in terms that would be acceptable to the protagonists of that other' (MacIntyre 1989: 75). In other words, these two approaches are 'incommensurable', in the sense in which T. S. Kuhn employs that term. In his debate with Richard J. Bernstein, MacIntyre talks in this connection about 'the either-or' of the competing intellectual traditions which he discusses in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?,* with their 'incommensurability', an incommensurability which, he argues, 'stubbornly resists dissolution' into the ensuing harmony of a 'synthetic both-and' (MacIntyre 2017 [1984]: 320). I shall return to this later on.

As noted earlier, the notion of the incommensurability of two opposed ways of thinking is central to the view of the history of science that is advanced by T. S. Kuhn in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. It is in that text that Kuhn introduces his readers to the idea that disputes in science might be associated with competing explanatory 'paradigms' the core assumptions of which are incommensurable (Kuhn 1970 [1962]: 150, 189–90, 201–02). MacIntyre has discussed the ideas of Kuhn at some length (MacIntyre 2006: 3–23). His attitude towards Kuhn and his ideas is ambivalent. He is far from being uncritical of Kuhn's understanding of the history of scientific knowledge. Nevertheless, MacIntyre acknowledges that 'Kuhn's work', suitably 'criticized', does provide 'an illuminating application' for his own approach to issues in the philosophy of science (MacIntyre 2006: 15). In particular, Kuhn must be given 'the fullest credit for recognizing in an original way the significance and character of incommensurability' (MacIntyre 2006: 16).

Like that of Kuhn, MacIntyre's understanding of the notion of incommensurability is that if two opposed sets of beliefs are indeed incommensurable then they have nothing at all in common with one another, other than a shared commitment to the principles of formal logic. There is no common ground at all that might provide the basis for an agreement or a compromise between them. They cannot even agree upon the terms that are to be used in order to formulate the nature of their disagreement. Consequently, one must either choose one or the other, but not both, precisely because they are logically incompatible. In order to illustrate this, Kuhn uses well-known examples taken from Gestalt psychology, for example, the shifts of perception (and conception) which are associated with the 'duck-rabbit' image, or that of the 'young woman-old woman' (Kuhn 1970 [1962]: 85, 102, 111–13, 120–22, 150–51, 204).

What MacIntyre has to say about the philosophical disagreement between the proponents of epistemological objectivism and relativism may serve to illustrate the issues involved when discussing philosophical disagreements of this first type. When talking about this particular philosophical disagreement, MacIntyre associates objectivism with

the notion, often associated with the philosophy of Plato, that there is such a thing as a 'timeless, impersonal, and non-perspectival truth' which could provide the basis for discussion of any philosophical problem, a truth which both parties to the disagreement are seeking (MacIntyre 1989: 81). We may refer to this as Truth, with a capital letter 'T'. Like Plato, MacIntyre associates the assumptions of objectivism with those of mathematics. Morality as objectivists understand it, he maintains, involves the pursuit of objective truths which are assumed to possess universal validity (MacIntyre 1984: 8).

MacIntyre contrasts objectivism with relativism. He associates relativism (both cognitive and moral) with the philosophy of Nietzsche, especially with Nietzsche's view that 'there are no facts, only interpretations' (Nietzsche 1968 [1887]: §481, 267). On that view, relativists hold that there is no objective truth, or Truth with a capital letter 'T'. There is only what seems to be true, or what 'appears to be the case to someone or other', who is looking at a philosophical problem from a particular perspective or point of view (MacIntyre 1989: 79). Hence, there are only a number of different bodies of 'truths', with a small case letter 't'.

MacIntyre associates the different perspective or points of view from which philosophical problems might be considered with what he refers to as intellectual 'traditions'. His views regarding the incompatibility of intellectual traditions, in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (MacIntyre 1989), are again similar to those of T. S. Kuhn, in his *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn 1970 [1962]). MacIntyre suggests that his intellectual traditions are similar to paradigms, in the sense in which Kuhn employs that term (Kuhn 1970 [1962]: 10–11, 37, 41–42, 85, 113, 122, 176–91). His use of the word 'tradition' emphasises the idea, which is also present in Kuhn's work, that paradigms are systems of inter-related ideas which have a history.

Two points require emphasis here. The first is that in MacIntyre's opinion there is more to an intellectual tradition than a particular framework of ideas or beliefs. In his disagreement with Richard J. Bernstein, MacIntyre insists that neither practices nor traditions should be thought about solely in intellectual terms. Rather, we should think sociologically about the traditions he has in mind. They are, he suggests, 'rooted in' the ways of life of the members of particular communities (MacIntyre 2017 [1984]: 323). The second point is that, as the word 'tradition' suggests, MacIntyre thinks historically when talking about the theoretical perspectives which he has in mind. Insofar as they are associated with a system of ideas or beliefs, they change or evolve over time, as new ideas are added to them, or the existing ideas which are associated with them are reinterpreted and thought about in a new way.

In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre refers to 'the relativist challenge', which 'rests upon a denial that rational debate between and rational choice among rival traditions is possible' (MacIntyre 1989: 352). According to MacIntyre, Nietzsche and other relativists (including T. S. Kuhn) hold that judgements relating to questions of truth or to matters of fact are always 'made from some point of view' or other. They are made by those who are looking at a philosophical problem from the standpoint of a particular paradigm or intellectual tradition. They are, therefore, inevitably partial or one-sided. MacIntyre claims that according to relativists, 'any attempt to speak in a way that overcomes' this 'relativity and one-sidedness' is 'foredoomed to failure'. Given that 'no

thesis can be advanced but from some particular standpoint', it follows that 'there is no way of exempting oneself from the partialities and one-sidedness' of particular traditions (MacIntyre 1989: 79). Although MacIntyre does not make the point himself, we may say that if relativists are right, then Hegel must be wrong. For as we have seen the whole point of philosophy, according to Hegel, is to overcome the partiality or one-sidedness of two polar opposite points of view.

MacIntyre associates relativism with the denial that there is such a thing as objective truth and falsity. He argues that according to objectivists, in order to provide a rational demonstration of the superiority of one intellectual tradition in comparison with its rivals, it would be necessary to establish 'the logical incompatibility of the theses asserted and denied' within these rival traditions. The basic assumption that is made by objectivists is that 'if the theses of one such tradition were true, then some at least of the theses asserted by its rivals were false' (MacIntyre 1989: 352). MacIntyre argues that one way of responding to the argument of the objectivist, which is set out by their relativist opponents, 'is to withdraw the ascription of truth and falsity' to the systems of belief which are associated with the opposed intellectual traditions, 'at least in the sense in which "true" and "false" have been understood so far', that is to say, objective truth and falsity (MacIntyre 1989: 352).

Given the assumptions which are made by objectivists, if a particular disagreement were to be resolved, it would be necessary to establish, by an appeal to relevant arguments and evidence, which of its two participants has captured and expressed *the* truth of the matter. This requires that there should be at least some common ground between their respective approaches. The participants in a philosophical disagreement must make the same assumptions and share the same vocabulary. They must stand on the same conceptual terrain. The nature of their disagreement is simply that one of them affirms to be true something which the other denies, and vice versa. In short, it requires that the two opposed ways of thinking are not incommensurable.

MacIntyre points out that according to relativists, 'no issue between contending traditions is rationally decidable' in this way by an appeal to relevant evidence. For relativists, there 'can be no rationality as such', and 'every set of standards, every tradition incorporating a set of standards, has as much and as little claim to our allegiance as any other' (MacIntyre 1989: 352). MacIntyre refers in this connection to 'the relativist challenge'. This rests upon 'a denial that rational debate between and rational choice among rival traditions is possible'. For 'if there is a multiplicity of rival traditions, each with its own characteristic modes of rational justification internal to it, then that very fact entails that no one tradition can offer those outside it good reasons for excluding the theses of its rivals'. However, if this is the case, then 'no one tradition can deny legitimacy to its rivals' (MacIntyre 1989: 352).

MacIntyre acknowledges that 'competing traditions' can and do 'share some standards'. For example, they will 'agree in according a certain authority to logic both in their theory and in their practice'. Nevertheless, he argues, that 'in which they agree is insufficient to resolve' their disagreements about other, substantive issues. For each of these traditions 'has its own standards of reasoning', and each 'we can have no good reason to give more weight to the contentions advanced by one particular tradition than to those

advanced by its rivals' (MacIntyre 1989: 351–52). In other words, they do not share enough common beliefs in order to be able resolve the disagreement between them.

MacIntyre's Lindley lecture 'Is Patriotism a Virtue?' is of interest here. There MacIntyre refers to a philosophical disagreement between the proponents of two opposed 'moralities', which he refers to as 'liberal morality', on the one hand, and 'patriotism' on the other. He portrays liberal morality in entirely universalistic terms and argues that it deals in abstractions. For that reason, it is closely associated with cosmopolitanism. He regards patriotism as the polar opposite of liberal morality and associates it with communitarianism. As such, it is entirely particular or particularistic in terms of its underlying assumptions. MacIntyre argues in this lecture that 'the central claims made on behalf of these two rival modern moralities cannot both be true'. He maintains that the 'moral standpoint', as liberal thinkers understand it, and the 'patriotic standpoint' are 'systematically incompatible' (MacIntyre 1984: 5); and again, a little later, that 'a morality of liberal impersonality and a morality of patriotism' are and 'must be deeply incompatible' MacIntyre 1984: 18). Consequently, he argues, we must make an either-or choice between them.

MacIntyre considers the two opposed moralities of liberalism and patriotism to be incommensurable, in the sense in which Kuhn employs that term. He suggests therefore that there are no underlying beliefs which they might be said to share, and which provide the basis for a possible resolution of their disagreement. Hence, also, there is no possibility of reaching any consensus between their advocates. What we have here, MacIntyre argues, 'are two rival and incompatible moralities, each of which is viewed from within by its adherents as morality-as-such, each of which makes its exclusive claim to our allegiance' (MacIntyre 1984: 11).

One implication of a commitment to relativism, as MacIntyre understands it, is that the 'truths' which are associated with two irreconcilable intellectual traditions could not possibly be synthesised of combined into to some third approach which steers a middle course between them, in the manner of Hegel, at least on one commonly held reading of Hegel's views. Rather, if we compare the two approaches with one another, we are left with an impasse or a dilemma, with no possibility of any resolution between its two sides. In the case of the philosophical disagreement between liberalism and patriotism, echoing Hegel's views regarding the nature of the moral dilemmas which are central to ancient Greek tragedy (Hegel 1975 [1807]: §§471–73, 284–86; Hegel 1962: 280–81), MacIntyre states that, 'each party' to this particular disagreement is 'in the right against the other' (MacIntyre 1984: 17).

T. S. Kuhn suggests in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* that the conceptual frameworks which are associated with the different paradigms of the various disciplines in the natural sciences are 'constitutive of nature' (Kuhn 1970 [1962]: 109). He invites his readers to take seriously the proposal, often associated with social or linguistic constructivism, that scientists who adopt different paradigmatic approaches are not merely disagreeing with one another about the nature of one and the same world. Rather, they must be thought of as living in 'different worlds' (Kuhn 1970 [1962]: 111, 118, 120–21, 150). MacIntyre's remarks about this issue are not entirely consistent. Nevertheless, in 'Is Patriotism a Virtue?' at least, if not elsewhere, he argues in a similar way. He rejects the

view that the moralities of liberalism and patriotism are two 'rival accounts' of the same thing, as if 'there were some independently identifiable phenomenon', namely, 'morality', that is 'situated somehow or other in the social world waiting to be described more or less accurately by the contending parties' (MacIntyre 1984: 11). For thinking about their disagreement in this way assumes that the parties to it believe themselves to be, and actually are, living in the same moral world, and are simply disagreeing with one another as to how it might best be understood.

MacIntyre takes a similar line when talking about rival intellectual traditions in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* Again like T. S. Kuhn, he argues that the participants to philosophical disagreements should be thought of as living in different worlds. In words which echo those of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, MacIntyre says that we should not think of 'rival traditions' as being 'mutually exclusive and incompatible ways of understanding one and the same world' (MacIntyre 1989: 352). For that way of thinking about their disagreement assumes that their respective points of view do have things in common with one another, and are not therefore incommensurable. Rather, again, we should think of their proponents as if they were living in different worlds. In MacIntyre's own words, we should 'understand them' to be 'providing very different' perspectives for 'envisaging the realities about which they speak to us' (MacIntyre 1989: 352).

When making this remark, MacIntyre implies, like Kuhn before him, that it is possible to make sense of the view that there is not just one reality. Rather, we may talk about there being multiple realities. He too therefore appears sympathetic, at least on this occasion, to the principle of linguistic constructivism, as opposed to that of scientific realism. This is ironic, as scientific realists associate constructivism with philosophical idealism, something which MacIntyre has always sought to distance himself from, for example, in his reply to Richard J. Bernstein (MacIntyre 2017 [1984]: 321–23). It must be conceded, however, that when discussing Kuhn's ideas in his essay on 'Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science', MacIntyre is far more sympathetic towards the assumptions of scientific realism than he is elsewhere (MacIntyre 2006: 21).

So far as questions of ethics and politics are concerned, MacIntyre's claim that the two opposed moralities of liberalism and patriotism, or liberalism and communitarianism, are incommensurable and cannot be combined or synthesised is very different from that of Hegel. I have argued elsewhere that Hegel's political thought is an intellectual project which, whether one is talking about the politics of persons (identity politics) or that of principles, seeks to synthesise or combine in some way the two opposed principles of universality and particularity (Burns 1995; 1996; 2013; 2014). In Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, the universal or universalist side of things is associated with the notion of 'abstract right', which Hegel discusses in Part One of that work. For Hegel, the principles of abstract right are what other theorists consider to be principles of natural law (Burns 1995; 1996). The particular or particularist side of things is discussed in Part Three of the *Philosophy of Right*. Hegel associates this with ethics, or the normative customs and conventions which are unique to particular societies and cultures and which differentiate them from other societies and cultures.

Hegel's political thought may be regarded as a modern restatement of one of the issues about which there was philosophical disagreement in the nature versus convention debate in classical Athens. In Hegel's view, however, the normative standpoints of universalism and particularism are not incommensurable or logically incompatible. With respect to this issue, unlike MacIntyre, Hegel adopts a both-and approach. This seeks to combine, by differentiating between two different levels of abstraction, the insights which are associated with the two polar opposites of nature and convention. For Hegel, the civil laws which are associated with the constitution of a given society are concrete entities. As such, they are combinations of a universal and a particular. They are associated with the principle of universality-and-particularity, or identity-and-difference. For Hegel, one of the components of a principle of civil law, the universal component, may be said to be natural, whereas the other component, which is particular, is conventional. In all of this, Hegel might be regarded as adopting an approach which is fundamentally Aristotelian (Burns 2000; 2011).

Another example of a philosophical disagreement that is discussed by MacIntyre is that between the views of Aristotle and Nietzsche regarding questions of morality or ethics which is discussed in Chapter 9 of *After Virtue* (MacIntyre 1990 [1981]: 109–20). This is the subject of a debate between MacIntyre and Richard J. Bernstein, to which Robert B. Pippin might be thought to have also contributed, albeit earlier (Bernstein 2017 [1984]; MacIntyre 2017 [1984]; Pippin 2015; see also Hoekema 2017). When discussing the views of Aristotle and Nietzsche, MacIntyre suggests that we are confronted with an 'either-or' choice between two incompatible approaches and that 'there is no third alternative' available to us (MacIntyre 1990 [1981]: 118). This, MacIntyre argues, amounts to a choice between a 'premodern view', namely, that of Aristotle, and a modern one, or the view which he associates with 'modernity', as represented on this occasion by the philosophy of Nietzsche.

Robert B. Pippin, in his 'Alasdair MacIntyre's Modernity', picks up on the fact that MacIntyre presents his readers with an either-or choice between the views of Aristotle and those of Nietzsche. In his opinion, this approach is 'counter-intuitive' (Pippin 2015: 238). He argues that this 'disjunction' is 'not well formed and is too exclusive' (Pippin 2015: 239; also 244–45). He points out that, according to MacIntyre, 'no third alternative' is possible. Against that view, Pippin insists that there just *is* 'a third alternative', which is 'occasionally mentioned by MacIntyre', namely, that provided by the philosophy of Hegel (Pippin 2015: 241). Consequently, Pippin argues that when discussing this issue, we need 'some sort of dialectical approach like that pioneered by Hegel' (Pippin 2015: 252). Such an approach would seek to 'demonstrate' the 'mutual interrelatedness of the notions' which are involved in this particular philosophical disagreement, and in philosophical disagreements, more generally. It would also, in the manner of Hegel, seek to 'deny any claim' of their alleged 'incommensurablity' (Pippin 2015: 250).

Richard J. Bernstein, in an article entitled 'Aristotle or Nietzsche: Reflections on MacIntyre's *After Virtue*,' has also subjected MacIntyre's views regarding this issue to criticism (Bernstein 2017 [1984]). Like Pippin, Bernstein notes that according to MacIntyre, the approaches adopted by Aristotle and Nietzsche cannot be combined. Hence, we must make an either-or choice between them (Bernstein 2017 [1984]: 314–15).

Writing from a standpoint that is informed by an engagement with Hegel's philosophy, Bernstein criticises MacIntyre for his commitment to either-or thinking. Like Pippin, Bernstein argues that what is required here is that we should attempt to go beyond thinking in either-or terms about this particular philosophical disagreement. We need a third-way approach which seeks to combine the insights of these two thinkers, which like Pippin he does not consider to be incommensurable. Bernstein maintains that engaging more positively with Hegel and his ideas could make a valuable contribution to such a project, both in terms of its substantive content and in terms of its argumentative form. In Bernstein's own words, 'in appealing to Hegel I do not want to suggest that Hegel "solved" the problem of Aristotle versus Nietzsche'. However, 'I do want to suggest that Hegel formulated, and perceptively understood, the problem' which central to MacIntyre's political thought (Bernstein 2017 [1984]: 314). Bernstein criticises MacIntyre for not taking this possibility seriously enough.

In his reply to Bernstein, MacIntyre observes that the notion of a possible 'theoretical reconciliation' between two opposed and apparently irreconcilable ways of thinking is central to Bernstein's thought. He also observes that Bernstein has a tendency to think about philosophical disagreements in dramaturgical terms. Plato's dialogues provide a good illustration of this. Within these philosophical debates, MacIntyre argues, typically, 'two or more' philosophical 'characters' are 'brought on stage' and 'the apparently incompatible character of their views is then exhibited with great clarity'. Consequently, MacIntyre points out, 'we seem to be confronted with an unavoidable choice, an either-or'. However, in the end, 'a reconciliation is after all effected and instead of the either-or of conflict we have a both-and', and therefore also 'a new harmony' (MacIntyre 2017 [1984]: 319). Although MacIntyre does not refer explicitly to Hegel in his reply, I suggested earlier that this idea often thought to be a core component of Hegel's philosophy.

Having attributed this idea of 'synthesis as harmony' to Bernstein, MacIntyre goes on to criticise Bernstein (and by implication Hegel, on one reading of his views) for holding it. He talks in this connection about the either-or choice which he thinks must be made between the competing and mutually incompatible intellectual traditions, as discussed in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* It is in his reply to Bernstein that, again apparently following T. S. Kuhn, MacIntyre refers to the 'incommensurability' of these two contradictory points of view. It is this, he argues, which 'stubbornly resists dissolution' into the supposed ensuing harmony of Bernstein's (and Hegel's) 'synthetic both-and' way of thinking (MacIntyre 2017 [1984]: 320). Bernstein's critique of MacIntyre relies heavily at times on an appeal to the insights of Hegelian philosophy. In his reply to Bernstein, MacIntyre does not refer explicitly to Hegel by name. Even so, it seems clear that an engagement with Hegel and his ideas does stalk in the background of their disagreement.

I turn now to consider MacIntyre's views regarding the second type of philosophical disagreement mentioned in the Introduction to this article, according to which he thinks that there are at least some cases of philosophical disagreements which are in principle resolvable, that the opposed points of view with which they are associated are not incommensurable, and that a both-and approach to them is both possible and desirable. It is

when MacIntyre argues in this vein that he comes closest to a position which is similar to that of Hegel, and which some commentators consider to be Hegelian or quasi-Hegelian.

One example of MacIntyre's occasional enthusiasm for the both-and thinking which is usually associated with dialectics, and hence also the philosophy of Hegel, can be found in his Lindley Lecture 'Is Patriotism a Virtue?' There, despite having insisted that liberal morality and patriotism are incompatible with one another, MacIntyre also says that, when comparing and contrasting these two moralities, 'we shall do well to proceed dialectically', in what some would regard as an Hegelian manner (MacIntyre 1984: 11). Such a 'dialectical strategy', he says, involves focussing on 'the issues about the importance of which both sides agree and about the characterisation of which their very recognition of disagreement suggests that there must also be some shared beliefs' between them (MacIntyre 1984: 11).

Another example of this second type of disagreement is what MacIntyre says about the nature of the self in *After Virtue*. There he compares and contrasts the views of Jean-Paul Sartre and Erving Goffman, which he regards as being polar opposites of one another (MacIntyre 1990 [1981]: 31–32, 213–14, 216, 220–21). He argues that each of their approaches to understanding the modern self is inadequate because it is partial or one-sided. Sartre's concept of the self is based on the principle of universality-without-particularity, whereas that of Goffman is based on that of particularity-without-universality. MacIntyre suggests that each of these opposed approaches has something valuable to offer. Indeed, they might fruitfully be thought of as supplementing one another. What is required, therefore, is a third alternative which would attempt a theoretical synthesis of them both. MacIntyre's own approach is based on the assumption that we should think about the self in both-and rather than either-or terms, as a universal self (Sartre) in combination with a particular one (Goffman). This way of thinking has an obvious affinity with the philosophy of Hegel. It might be said to be dialectical, in the sense which Hegel has in mind in his *Shorter Logic* (Hegel 1975 [1830]: §§79–82, 113–21).

A third example of both-and as opposed to either-or thinking can be found in MacIntyre's essay 'Notes from the Moral Wilderness' (MacIntyre 1998 [1958-59]). There MacIntyre opposes two different moralities, or two different ways of thinking about morality, which he refers to as 'Stalinism' and 'liberal morality', respectively. He says that the task of his essay is to consider 'the question of whether there can be an alternative to the barren opposition' liberal morality (with its commitment to 'moral individualism') on the one hand and 'amoral Stalinism' on the other) (MacIntyre 1998 [1958-59]: 36). In this essay, MacIntyre argues that Stalinism is a deterministic doctrine which regards the 'historical process' as being 'automatic', and considers 'moral values' to be 'encapsulated solely in history'. As such, the approach to moral questions that is adopted by Stalinism may be sharply contrasted with that liberal morality. The liberal 'moral critic', MacIntyre argues, rejects the assumptions of Stalinism, but in so doing commits the opposite error. This is so because 'for moral values encapsulated solely in history he (sic) substituted moral values wholly detached from history' (MacIntyre 1998 [1958-59]: 40). MacIntyre's response to this debate between Stalinism and liberal morality is to argue that there is 'a third alternative' which is available to the moral critic, namely, 'a theory which treats what

emerges in history as providing us with a basis for our standards, without making the historical process morally sovereign or its progress automatic' (MacIntyre 1998 [1958-59]: 40). It is third alternative which MacIntyre considers to be an authentically Marxist approach to the normative questions of morality.

A fourth example of this second type of philosophical disagreement (and of both-and thinking) also involves the debate between objectivists and relativists, but thought about in a way that does not involve our having to make an either-or choice between them. MacIntyre suggests in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* that what he refers to as traditionalism might be regarded as an attempt to steer a middle course between the two extremes of objectivism and relativism. MacIntyre does reject one form of objectivism. At least he rejects the Platonic belief in eternal, timeless, unchanging truth, whether in ethics and politics or more generally, for example, in science and mathematics, although he seems at times to assume its validity in the case of formal logic. He has far more sympathy for relativism than he has for that particular form of objectivism. On the other hand, however, he occasionally distances himself from relativism also. For example, he argues in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* that relativism is 'fundamentally misconceived and misdirected' (MacIntyre 1989: 353). This remark suggests that, when advocating traditionalism, MacIntyre assumes that it is possible to reconcile the only apparently conflicting positions of objectivism and relativism. It implies that MacIntyre is not always opposed to the both-and thinking that is usually associated with the philosophy of Hegel.

One issue here is whether MacIntyre's traditionalism, like Hegel's historicism, is itself objectivist, albeit in a different sense from that which is associated with Platonism, or indeed with liberal morality. For if traditionalism is to be regarded as a theoretical synthesis of objectivism and relativism, within which each of these two polar opposites is somehow preserved, then it follows that traditionalism must itself be regarded as being based, at least in part, on a commitment to objectivism, in some sense of the term.

Gordon Graham has suggested that MacIntyre sometimes embraces both-and rather than either-or thinking. He argues that in *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* MacIntyre attempts to steer a middle course between the position that is adopted by the encyclopaedists of the Enlightenment, on the one hand, and that of Nietzschean genealogy, on the other. In Graham's account of his views, MacIntyre assumes there that the approach that is adopted by the former 'is unrealistically ahistorical', whereas the approach of the latter is that of 'an historical relativist'. Against both of these opposed positions, Graham argues, MacIntyre holds that 'there is a third possibility', namely, 'that of the traditionalist' (Graham 2003: 28).

Graham maintains that there is a similarity between the assumptions which underpin MacIntyre's commitment to traditionalism and those which underpin Hegel's commitment to historicism. Hence, for MacIntyre, traditionalism and relativism are not the same thing. However, MacIntyre's attempt to defend this view, together with his claim that there is a third-way which mediates between the extremes of objectivism and relativism, is not successful. Graham maintains that this is so because what MacIntyre refers to as traditionalism, is not in his opinion significantly different from relativism. On close examination, Graham argues, it collapses into relativism.

Given the four examples of both-and thinking cited above, it is not too surprising that Richard J. Bernstein has acknowledged that, despite MacIntyre's proclivity for either-or thinking in *After Virtue,* and his stated reservations about Hegel and his ideas, there is at times something Hegelian or, in Bernstein's words, 'quasi Hegelian', about MacIntyre's approach to the understanding of at least some philosophical disagreements and the possibility of their resolution (Bernstein 1991: 21; see also Bernstein 2017 [1984]: 314–15; Maggini 2020: 171fn4). What Bernstein has in mind here is MacIntyre's occasional tendency, when discussing a particular philosophical disagreement, to suggest that there may be a third-way doctrine which seeks to synthesise or somehow combine two opposing points of view, retaining the strengths of each and the weaknesses of neither. Bernstein claims that, 'in his critical reconstruction of the virtues', MacIntyre is either unaware of, or for some reason unwilling to explicitly acknowledge, how much at times he 'appropriates' from the Hegelian tradition of thought (Bernstein 2017 [1984]: 315).

Conclusion

MacIntyre has tendency, especially in his later writings, to downplay the significance of Hegel and his ideas, both for the history of philosophy in general, and for his own philosophical beliefs in particular. For whatever reason, in a number of different ways, he has distanced himself from Hegel. Either he criticises Hegel when he does talk about him, or (more recently) he ignores him altogether. As both Robert B. Pippin and Richard J. Bernstein have noted, explicit references to Hegel's views are conspicuous by their absence in *After Virtue.* Nevertheless, as Bernstein and Pippin have claimed, and as I have also attempted to show, in the case of at least some philosophical disagreements MacIntyre's argumentative strategy at times is similar to that which is often associated with Hegel.

It must be conceded, however, that this affinity between the views of MacIntyre and those of Hegel, although undoubtedly of interest, could be coincidental, or unintentional. One might also argue, perhaps, that it is somewhat superficial. On that view, the idea of synthesising or combining opposed points of view is a common sensical one. Indeed, despite Hegel's efforts to distance himself from the standpoint of common sense, his own views on this issue amount to no more than a philosophically sophisticated defence of that common sense view. The existence of this affinity is not therefore sufficient to justify the conclusion that MacIntyre either should or could plausibly be regarded as an 'Hegelian' thinker. All of this may be accepted. Even so, it seems to me that this is an issue that is well worth exploring and that Bernstein and Pippin are right to draw it to our attention.

There is a lot more that could be said about the relationship which exists between the thought of MacIntyre and that of Hegel. Of particular interest here is what MacIntyre has to say about the possibility of progress being made in the ongoing rational enquiry that is associated with and takes place between the participants of or working within a particular intellectual tradition (MacIntyre 1989: 79–81; MacIntyre 2006: 20–22; MacIntyre 2017 [1984]: 319–21). In *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?,* somewhat like Hegel before him, MacIntyre associates the idea of progress with a situation in which the partiality or one-sidedness of a way of thinking that is adopted in a lower or earlier stage of

a particular process of historical development within a given tradition is somehow transcended or overcome at a later or higher stage of development.

What MacIntyre says about this issue, touches on a question which is discussed by both T. S. Kuhn in the Postscript to *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Kuhn 1970 [1962]: 174–210) and also by Sir Karl Popper in his *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (Popper 1972a, b [1963]). This is the question of how a relativist, or indeed a MacIntyrean traditionalist, can account for the possibility of progress being made within a particular intellectual tradition, whether in science or in philosophy. One problem here is that relativists are unable to invoke the notion of objective truth (absolute knowledge), or 'the Truth', as the final end or goal towards which the participants within a given intellectual tradition are approaching, even if, as Karl Popper has suggested, it is not certain that they will ever arrive at their destination (Popper 1972c [1963]: 216–17, 225–26, 228–29).

Regarding this particular issue, MacIntyre's views are arguably closer to those of Karl Popper than they are to those of T. S. Kuhn. It is historicist in something like the sense in which Popper's views regarding the history of science is historicist. For, surprising though it might seem, Popper's views regarding the possibility of scientific progress are similar to those of Hegel on the history of philosophy. N. Yulina, in an article entitled 'Popper's Implicit Hegelianism', has noted the affinity between the views of Popper and those of Hegel on this issue (Yulina 1984). This is ironic, given Popper's attack on the notion of historicism in *The Poverty of Historicism*. However, a discussion of MacIntyre's views on that subject requires a closer analysis, which must be left for another occasion.

Note

ORCID iD

Tony Burns https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2259-499X

References

Beiser, F. C. 1993. "Hegel's historicism." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel, edited by Frederick C. Beiser*, 270–300. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bernstein, Richard J. 1991. "Philosophy, history and critique." In *Richard J. Bernstein, The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity/ Postmodernity*, 1–30. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Bernstein, Richard J. 2017 [1984]. "Nietzsche or Aristotle: Reflections on Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*." *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 100, no. 4, 293–317.

Burns, Tony. 1995. "Hegel and Natural Law Theory." *Politics* 15, no. 1: 27–32.

Burns, Tony. 1996. *Natural Law and Political Ideology in the Philosophy of Hegel*. Aldershot: Avebury Press.

Burns, Tony 2000. "Aquinas's two doctrines of natural law." *Political Studies* 48, no. 5, 929–946.

Burns, Tony. 2011. *Aristotle and Natural Law*. London: Continuum Books.

Burns, Tony. 2013. ""The Right to Have Rights": Slavery, Freedom and Citizenship in the Thought of Aristotle, Hegel and Arendt." In *Culture and Civilization, Volume V, Cosmopolitanism and the Global Polity*, edited by Gabriel R. Ricci, 181–207. Rutgers University: Transaction Publishers.

Burns, Tony. 2014. "Hegel and Global Politics: Communitarianism or Cosmopolitanism?" *Journal of International Political Theory* 10, no. 3: 325–44.

Davis, Laurence, and Peter, Stillman, eds. 2005. *The New Utopian Politics of Ursula K. Le Guin's the Dispossessed*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Graham, Gordon. 1996. "MacIntyre's Fusion of History and Philosophy." In *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, edited by John Horton and Susan Mendus, 161–75. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Graham, Gordon. 2003. "MacIntyre on History and Philosophy." In *Alasdair MacIntyre*, edited by Mark C. Murphy, 10–37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hamilton, Paul. 2003. *Historicism*. London: Routledge.

Hegel, G. W. F. 1962. Hegel on Tragedy, edited by *Anne Paolucci and Henry Paolucci*. New York: Doubleday.

Hegel, G. W. F. 1975 [1816]. *Logic: Being Part One of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. W. Wallace, Foreword J. N. Findlay. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Hegel, G. W. F. 1977 [1807]. *Phenomenology of Spirit, trans. A. V. Miller, foreword J. N. Findlay*, trans. W. Wallace, Foreword J. N. Findlay. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hegel, G. W. F. 1979 [1821]. *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hoekema, David A. 2017. "Reasons, Traditions and Virtues: Bernstein's Critique of MacIntyre." *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal* 100, no. 4: 337–352.

Horton, John, and Mendus, Susan, eds. 1996. *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Knight, Kelvin, ed. 1994. *The MacIntyre Reader*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Kuhn, T. S. 1970 [1962]. "Postscript-1969". In *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd Ed. Enlarged, 174-210. *International Encyclopaedia of Unified Science, Foundations of the Unity of Science*, Volume II, no. 2. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1970. *Herbert Marcuse: An Exposition and a Polemic*. London: Fontana.

MacIntyre, Alasdair, ed. 1972. *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*. New York: Doubleday.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1974 [1967]. *A Short History of Ethics: A History of Moral Philosophy from the Homeric Age to the Twentieth Century*. London: Routledge.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1984. *'Is Patriotism a Virtue?' The Lindley Lecture, 26th March, 1984*. Kansas, KS: Department of Philosophy, University of Kansas.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1989. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* London: Duckworth.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1990 [1981]. *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*. London: Duckworth.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1996. "A Partial Response to My Critics." In *After MacIntyre: Critical Perspectives on the Work of Alasdair MacIntyre*, edited by John Horton, and Susan Mendus, 283–304. Cambridge: Polity Press.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1998 [1958-59]. "Notes from the Moral Wilderness." In *The MacIntyre Reader*, edited by Kelvin Knight, 31–52. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 1998 [1994]. "The *Theses on Feuerbach*: A Road Not Taken." In *The MacIntyre Reader*, edited by Kelvin Knight, 223–34. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 2006. *Ethics and Politics, Selected Essays,* Volume 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 2006. *Selected Essays*, Volume 1, *the Tasks of Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 2006. *Selected Essays*, Volume 2, *Ethics and Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 2006. "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science." *Selected Writings*, Volume I, *the Tasks of Philosophy*, 3-23. Cambridge: Cambrdge University Press.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 2006 [1972]. "Hegel on Faces and Skulls." In *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, 219–36. reprinted *Selected Essays*, Volume 1, pp. 74-85.

MacIntyre, Alasdair. 2017 [1984]. "Bernstein's Distorting Mirrors: A Rejoinder." *Soundings: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 100, no. 4, 318–328.

Maggini, Golfo. 2020. "Alasdair MacIntyre's Nietzschean Anti-Modernism." In *Virtue Ethics and Contemporary Aristotelianism: Modernity, Conflict and Politics*, edited by Andrius Bielskis, Eleni Leontsini, and Kelvin Knight, 162–74. Bloomsbury Academic.

Mueller, Gustav E. 1958. "The Hegel Legend of "Thesis-Antithesis-Synthesis"." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 19, no. 3, 411–414.

Nietzsche, Friedrich 1968 [1887]. *The Will to Power, trans. W. Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale, ed. W. Kaufmann*. New York, NY: Vintage.

Pippin, Robert B. 2015. "Alasdair MacIntyre's Modernity." In *Interanimations: Receiving Modern German Philosophy*, 235–56. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Popper, K. R. 1966a [1945]. *The Open Society and its Enemies*, Volume II, *The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath*. London: Routledge.

Popper, K. R. 1966b [1945]. "Facts, Standards and Truth: A Further Criticism of Relativism." In *The Open Society and its Enemies, Volume II, The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx and the Aftermath*, 369–96. London: Routledge.

Popper, K. R. 1969 [1957]. *The Poverty of Historicism*. London: Routledge.

Popper, K. R. 1972a [1963]. *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*. London: Routledge.

Popper, K. R. 1972b [1963]. "Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition." In *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, 120–35. London: Routledge.

Popper, K. R. 1972c [1963]. "Truth, Rationality and the Growth of Scientific Knowledge." In *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, 215–52.

Yulina, N. 1984. "On Popper's Implicit Hegelianism." *Philosophia Naturalis* 21, no. 2/4: 652–61.

Zamyatin, Yevgeny. 1991 [1970]. *A Soviet Heretic*, trans. Mirra Ginsberg, intro. Akex M. Shane. London: Quartet Books.

Zamyatin, Yevgeny. 1991 [1922]. "H. G. Wells." In *A Soviet Heretic*, 259–90. London: Quartet Books.