Reconceptualising teaching as transformative practice: Alasdair MacIntyre in the South African context

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Abstract

In its ideal conception, the post-apartheid education landscape is regarded as a site of transformation that promotes democratic ideals such as citizenship, freedom, and critical thought. The role of the educator is pivotal in realising this transformation in the learners she teaches, but this realisation extends beyond merely teaching the curriculum to the educator herself, as the site where these democratic ideals are embodied and enacted. The teacher is thus centrally placed as a moral agent whose behaviour, in the classroom space particularly, should, ideally, represent and communicate the values we aspire to cultivate in post-apartheid South African society generally.

Thus, this notion of what teaching encompasses fits broadly into the conception of a "practice" in the sense developed by Alasdair MacIntyre, in that it is a transformative activity the enactment of which not only benefits the practitioner, but also extends to and benefits the broader community as well. Furthermore, practices are grounded in features of social or moral life we hold to be significant and, importantly, it is only through their active cultivation that they can be made tangible and further developed. MacIntyre's theory of virtue is based on a three-fold interrelationship between practices, how they meaningfully narrate and shape an individual life, and how, in turn, this builds and sustains our moral and social traditions. Using these ideas to analyse post-apartheid South Africa, and the structural transformation paradox it is in, reveals the difficult and complex nature of a society that is in this transitional space. The claim is that attentiveness to practices in the educational space, and to the way they shape and inform moral and social traditions, is necessary to more fully understand and guide this societal transformation.

Keywords: teaching, post-apartheid South Africa, Alasdair MacIntyre, practices

Introduction

> Of the many attributes associated with transformative teaching, the most crucial ones seem to concern the teacher as a person. For it is essential to success within that tradition that teachers who are trying to bring about transformative changes personify the very qualities they seek to engender in their students. To the best of their abilities, they must be living exemplars of certain virtues or values or attitudes. (Jackson, 1986, p. 124)

In this theoretical paper, we argue that Alasdair MacIntyre's conception of Aristotelean virtue ethics, by offering a way to think about the role of the teacher as a transformative force in society, can lead to important insights into the South Africa educational landscape. For MacIntyre, ethical values are formed through "practices" where a practice is understood as a complex and multi-layered activity that allows for the cultivation of virtues and character traits which enable the flourishing of the individual in, and as part of, the broader community (MacIntyre, 1981/2007). We argue that teaching is such a practice—a site for the embodiment and realisation of moral values, and, therefore, that teachers are uniquely placed to contribute to society's shared moral tradition.[1]

Twenty-five years after the end of apartheid, the education system is caught in what Slonimsky has called an ongoing structural paradox (2016) in which institutions, identities, and pedagogies forged under the apartheid regime have not been fundamentally transformed, but, rather, persist, resisting efforts to bend them into new just and democratic systems, given the entrenched "rotten[ness]" of the apartheid tradition of education (Enslin & Pendlebury, 1998, p. 261). This "rottenness" forms part of the ongoing structural and moral paradox South Africa faces. Enslin and Pendlebury (1998) presciently observed, just after the demise of apartheid, that education in South Africa could not merely be "reformed" because this would imply that something could be salvaged from Christian National Education and Fundamental Pedagogics. Rather, "only radical, thorough-going and systematic change" could overcome these previous demoralising educational practices. Thus, the insistence on "transformation" (p. 261).

Arguably, a similar structural paradox is evident more broadly in South African society. While many public institutional structures of politics and law have shifted since 1994, it is evident that post-apartheid South Africa is still, in many ways, powerfully shaped by unequal economic and social structures made possible because of apartheid (Hein, 2011; Moosa, 2018; Runciman, 2016). South Africa's transition to democracy is what Gramsci called a "passive revolution" and he warned us that "no social formation disappears as long as the productive forces which have developed in it still find room for further forward movement" (2000, p. 263). Gramsci was speaking about socio-economic structures, but the same holds true, we suggest, for South Africa's social and cultural transition. Apartheid-era social structures persist in day-to-day interactions, language use, the sense of shared traditions; in

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[1]   Important for MacIntyre is that these values and their associated virtues are not conceptualised and prescriptive, but emergent and enacted, because they develop from the practices themselves.

other words, the social imaginary of South Africa is still powerfully shaped by apartheid ideology and geography.

We suggest that this structural paradox has led to an unarticulated moral vacuity in that South African society lacks a coherent, consensual, moral language. Hillard has gone so far as to argue that the legacy of apartheid has created a "moral bankruptcy" which continues to plague South Africa, and which creates considerable moral ambiguity in its citizens (2002, p. 438). Following the end of apartheid, this problem has been amplified by many of the country's political and business leaders who should, ideally, exemplify the ethical behaviour they wish their citizens to emulate, but are often themselves morally compromised.[2]

Perhaps the most important consequence of this ongoing inequality is the evident lack of the communal sense that we share what Hannah Arendt has called a "common world" in South Africa, a lack deliberately engineered by apartheid. This continues to have severe repercussions in how we forge a new democracy, particularly in relation to the ongoing and pronounced inequality of our society. Arendt used this term particularly in the context of education. The task of education, she argued, is to prepare our children in advance for "the task of renewing a common world" (1961, p. 196). The "common world" in Arendt's sense is the "shared and public world of human artefacts, institutions, and settings which separates us from nature and which provides a relatively permanent and durable context for our activities" (d'Entreves, 2016, n.p.). The task of renewing a common world can take place only through a deliberate praxis that emphasises and reinforces particular traits and dispositions in individuals in order to forge a sense of common identity and collective purpose.

However, in the South African context the possibility of forging this common world is especially problematic particularly in terms of South Africa's educational sphere, which is regarded as a primary site in which the beginnings of a new South Africa can take root. The difficulty now is finding a productive way to theorise the role of teaching in social formation in order to envisage a praxis that can effectively enable meaningful transformation to take place.

In this paper, we argue that a focus on practices, particularly teaching, and the way in which they can develop virtues, offers one potential way to realise how such a common moral language may emerge. A top-down transformation process that relies on guiding ethical, legal, and governmental policy, as well as existing traditions, may seem the obvious starting point. But, for MacIntyre (1981/1998, 1981/2007), as will be discussed, it was the other way around. Meaningful transformation begins firstly with practices, which constitute the first stage of development for a community's social and moral traditions. Practices (MacIntyre's definition of which we will discuss in more detail below) then build upon and create the coherence of an individual narrative life, which is the second stage of the development

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[2]   For example, Transparency International's global report on corruption ranks South Africa 44/100. Countries that fall below 50/100 are considered to have serious corruption problems. Transparency International's Global Corruption Barometer for 2019 indicates that the majority of South Africans believe that corruption is increasing (2019). Recent work by Robins (2020) confirms this, indicating the large ongoing collapse of many municipalities across the country because of entrenched corruption and bad governance. See also PwC's Global Economic Crime and Fraud Survey (2020) which ranks South Africa third in the world for economic crime.

process. The idea of a "narrative life" means that individual human actions constitute an "enacted narrative" which presupposes an intelligible and unified sense of selfhood (MacIntyre, 1981/2007, p. 211). Thus, the concept of a self "resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death" (1981/2007, p. 205). Finally, the narrative lives of the members of a community then inform the social and moral tradition of that community, the third and final stage of the development. A moral tradition is constituted by a collective, shared sense that an individual's own unified narrative aligns with the larger *telos* of the community of which she forms part, and to which she belongs. In MacIntyre's words, a living tradition is "an historically extended, socially embodied argument" about the goods which both constitute and are pursued in that tradition, often through generations (1981/2007, p. 222). Each of the interrelated stages of logical development from practices through to moral tradition presupposes the earlier, but "not *vice versa*" (MacIntyre, 1981/1998, p. 82).

Practices are central in all stages of a community's development of a moral tradition because it is through practices that the individual cultivates virtues. Therefore, if we frame South Africa's transition within MacIntyre's three-fold notion of practice, narrative life, and social traditions, we will see more fully why South African education faces such difficulties, and why the Arendtian task of education understood as "renewing a common world" is challenging. South African society does not yet have a "common world" that its members may work to renew, and this remains an ongoing structural paradox in our attempts to transform our society. Our argument, via MacIntyre, is that a closer reflection on the nature of practices and the virtues they embody, which are constitutive of a good life, offers a potential way to forge a common world; we suggest that teachers are uniquely placed in society to actualise this world. First, we explain why MacIntyre argues for a return to a theory of virtue as part of his critique of Western morality. Then we explore the role of practices and virtue in relation to education and elaborate on the three-fold structure MacIntyre develops, centred on practices. Last, we discuss and relate these ideas to the ongoing structural transformation that South Africa needs, and make tentative suggestions for a way forward.

MacIntyre and the return to virtue

MacIntyre works to re-invigorate the Aristotelean tradition of virtue ethics. His fundamental claim is the "disquieting suggestion" that Western morality is no longer able to answer the fundamental question regarding what constitutes a good life. Instead, he argues that the language of Western morality in its current conception is gravely disordered. Even though the appearance of morality persists, the "integral substance of morality" has been fragmented and destroyed (1981/2007, p. 5). One symptom of this fragmentation is that in our Western culture today (and, consequently, in global postmodern discourse), there seems to be "no rational way of securing moral agreement" (p. 6). MacIntyre discusses moral examples that demonstrate the insecurity of our rationality, such as just war and abortion, juxtaposing logically valid but rival arguments, and concluding that we have "no rational way of weighing the claims of one as against another" (p. 8). Our moral language today is characterised by "emotivism" which means that moral positions are no more than expressions of attitudes or feelings (p. 69). Thus, moral persuasion amounts to the manipulation of the

emotions of others, rather than being based on an appeal to some shared grounding moral framework in which to find rational consensus.

The rise of modern Western culture's moral incommensurability is the result of the failure of the Enlightenment which tried to replace "traditional and superstitious forms of morality [with] a kind of secular morality that would be entitled to secure the assent of any rational person." The belief was that by appealing to what was considered "universal" human reason, one could ensure consensus and agreement but MacIntyre argued that this ultimately failed. Instead, what arose was a collection of "mutually antagonistic moral stances", each claiming to have achieved "rational justification, but each also disputing this claim on the part of its rivals." These "rational" moral concepts became no more "than useful fictions" and MacIntyre singled out the concept of human rights and the utility of welfare as examples of this (1981/1998, p. 70). This position of modern moral relativism is also confirmed by Charles Taylor (2003), who argued that secular morality gives rise to one of the malaises of modernity—individualism or a "centring on the self" at the expense of awareness of "greater issues or concerns that transcend the self" (p. 14). This individualism leads to a narrowing of life and then to moral subjectivism which is the idea that "moral positions are not in any way grounded in reason or the nature of things but ultimately adopted by each of us because we find ourselves drawn to them." For Taylor, this moral subjectivism means, in similar vein to MacIntyre, that "reason cannot adjudicate moral disputes" (p. 18).

The emergence of moral relativism has resulted in a modern cultural morality that is emotivist, and not rational in nature. Rather than consisting of a series of rational interchanges, relationships between individuals can be managed only in manipulative ways, often through the "prestige which the concept of managerial effectiveness enjoys" (MacIntyre, 1981/1998, p. 70). MacIntyre claimed that social reality is controlled through some appeal to pseudo-social scientific laws, even though these laws do not exist. In fact, social reality is unpredictable, but to acknowledge this is to acknowledge "how much of the claims of modern private and public bureaucracy rest on deception and self-deception" (p. 71). Essentially, in a society whose morality is emotivist there can be no genuine distinction between "manipulative and non-manipulative social relation[s]" (MacIntyre,1981/2007, p. 23).[3] Thus, we use each other as a means to our own end because, fundamentally, we have no consensus of what the common, collective good is for which we should strive.

MacIntyre developed this position originally as a critique of Western morality, in order to justify his re-invigoration of virtue ethics. However, we suggest that aspects of this notion of moral incommensurability accounts in large part for South Africa's own current moral vacuity. Post-apartheid South Africa, like all post-colonies, is still shaped by what Grosfoguel has called "global coloniality" (2011, p. 13). He has argued that the "heterogeneous and multiple global structures put in place over a period of 450 years did not evaporate with the juridical-political decolonization of the periphery over the past 50 years" (2011, p. 13). In this sense South Africa is still profoundly influenced by the Western political and social

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3   For example, the rise of so-called fake news and the election of Donald Trump support MacIntyre's claim that society is currently characterised by an emotivist and manipulated morality. See, for example, Frankfurt's *On Bullshit* (2005).

imaginaries that shaped it as a colony, especially given the deliberate ethico-legal architecture of apartheid. Nakata, Nakata, Keech, and Bolt characterise postcolonial spaces as complex interfaces between "ongoing Indigenous systems of thought and ongoing analysis of colonial experience and the ever-changing face of the ongoing 'Western' knowledge presence" (2012, p. 126). Since, as Maldonado-Torres has pointed out, ethics cannot be segregated from epistemology, politics, and "other areas of human creation" (2011, p. 9), the situation of ethical consciousness in South Africa is as fluid and contested as is the nature of valid epistemology. This difficulty, we believe, strongly supports an approach to an ethical framework, and to the building of a consensual moral language that is grounded in practices and virtue praxis, rather than in prescriptive, fragmented, and broken traditions. In order to further support our claim, we examine what moral so-called good education aims to achieve in light of MacIntyre's theory.

The good of education

To situate MacIntyre more fully within the Aristotelean tradition we discuss briefly some central Aristotelean ideas that underpin MacIntyre's own thinking, framed within an educational context. We then discuss MacIntyre's three-stage conception of his virtue theory, beginning with his notion of a practice. One of the persisting and enduring questions in Philosophy of Education concerns what education is ultimately for. Is it, following Cornel Hamm's analysis of R. S. Peters's work, "General Enlightenment" (1989, p. 33) or is it, as John Dewey (and Arendt) have asserted, the "renewal of life by transmission" (Dewey, 2004, p. 12)? We find Seneca writing to Lucilius around CE 62, lamenting that we learn for the schoolroom "but not for real life" (Seneca, circa CE 62/2007, p. 58), suggesting the perennial disconnection between the institutional framework of schooling, and the successful transfer of those skills and competencies into what we think of as real life.

One powerful way to answer this question about education, and human activity generally, is to look to Aristotle. In the opening of his *Nicomachean Ethics* he wrote, "Every art and every inquiry, and similarly every action and choice, is thought to aim at some good; and for this reason the good has rightly been declared to be that at which all things aim" (circa BCE 340/1996, p. 2). The question of what education is for, then, can be answered in general terms in an Aristotelean way. Education, as the activity of both enquiry and the transmission of knowledge, aims to realise and sustain those goods which are central, ultimately, to what Aristotle calls *Eudaimonia*. This term is often translated as "happiness," but really means "flourishing", or making a success of and excelling at the living of life. As MacIntyre put it, *Eudaimonia* is "a state of being well and doing well in being well . . ." (1981/2007, p. 148). Underlying this claim about the centrality of *Eudaimonia* is Aristotle's contention that we are rational animals, blessed with intellect and motivated by our *telos* to seek out those practices and activities that allow us to live excellently. Aristotle distinguished two kinds of activity depending on where the good accomplished by this activity can be situated. First, an activity may be good in itself, practised for its own sake, in which case the end or purpose of the activity is realised in its actualisation; an example Aristotle provided is playing the flute. Second, an activity may be directed towards a finished end which stands apart from the

activity itself, such as carpentry, which is desired not merely for its own sake, but for the sake of the completed object it produces.

Education straddles both these goods in that not only does teaching produce, ideally, an enlightened student, but also teaching is itself is an activity that aims to be done excellently (MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002). The practice of teaching offers the potential for self-cultivation and improvement because it is, ideally, a transformative practice by its very nature. One transforms others and, in doing, transforms and enriches oneself. At the core of this understanding of teaching, then, we find an ethics of virtue, a way of understanding moral behaviour not as prescription, but in terms of lived action, in terms of practices which inform, develop, and promote the kinds of moral behaviour and character traits that enable both an individual and society to flourish. MacIntyre developed from Aristotle this core idea that meaningful action, virtue, and the good are intertwined; MacIntyre's oft quoted definition of a practice illustrates this.

> … any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended. (1981/1998, p. 83)

Virtues, then, are those qualities without which the "goods internal to practices" cannot be achieved (MacIntyre, 1981/1998, p. 83).

While it may seem, at first glance, that teaching fits well within MacIntyre's definition, he himself, in an interview in 2002 surprisingly contended that he did not think of teaching as a practice, but rather as a "set of skills put to the service of a variety of practices" (quoted in MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002, p. 5). This claim has been vigorously contested, with many commentators arguing strongly that teaching could be considered a model example of a practice, in MacIntyre's specific sense (Dunne, 2003; Fitzmaurice, 2010; Higgins, 2011; MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002; Noddings, 2003). We accept the claims of these commentators. Teaching is undoubtedly "a complex form of socially established co-operating human activity" with "internal goods" which are distinct and central to it, such as the development and success of students. It has "standards of excellence" which allow for both the judgement and improvement of the practice. Moreover, engagement with the practice allows "human powers to achieve excellence… [which] are systematically extended." In teaching, this "excellence" has a "double reference" in that the excellence of teachers extends through and is realised in the excellence achieved by their students (MacIntyre & Dunne, 2002, p. 7).

The second stage of development MacIntyre identified builds on the first stage: virtues go beyond practices to inform and sustain the qualities and character traits— those "human powers" mentioned in the definition of a practice—that are required to "achieve goods which furnish individual human lives with their telos [or sense of purpose]." This telos "derives from possessing some kind of narrative structure" within which these virtues make sense

(MacIntyre, 1981/1998, p. 72). Teaching can become one's life work, one that can sustain and develop moral and intellectual growth in oneself as teacher, and also inform the over-arching purpose of one's life. This second stage of development draws out the importance of a practice as something socially established and cooperative. Individual identity is always embedded within a broader social and historical community, and the virtues, cultivated through practices, form part of this living and extended communal tradition. Thus, the practice gives the individual a meaningful narrative which purposefully orientates them in the world. Furthermore, commitment to the practice maintains and grounds this orientation by encouraging the practitioner to cultivate the necessary virtues to enable the sustained ongoing development of the practice, and the "good of a certain kind of life" it makes possible (MacIntyre, 1981/1998, p. 85). There is also clear decolonial potential in these ideas, in light of the claims of Grosfoguel, mentioned above. The idea that life has a narrative structure, and that individuals have roles and purpose that enable their meaningful belonging within a community are features of human existence that extend beyond any specific tradition.

This leads to the third logical stage which is the social and moral traditions of which practitioners become the bearers, and also, importantly, inform. Having a narrative sense of one's self implies belonging to a broader historical community. Here a collective understanding of what constitutes the practice exists, something potentially transmitted through generations (MacIntyre, 1981/1998). Initially partaking in a practice means that the initiate submits herself to the rules that govern the practice and accepts the standards of excellence required to achieve the goods internal to that practice, according to the "best standards realized so far" (MacIntyre, 1981/1998, p. 85). However, this is a dynamic process, and part of the understanding that characterises belonging to this community is an ongoing argument about *which goods* should be transmitted. In teaching, for example, corporal punishment in South Africa is now regarded as an inhumane, humiliating practice and is not permitted. The reasons for this are not only pedagogic, but reflect the broader, progressive moral and social concerns of the society itself. In South Africa's case these concerns are also clearly outlined in the Bill of Rights (1996).[4]

However, given the complexity of post-apartheid South Africa and the ongoing, unfolding questions of coloniality and decoloniality, and tension surrounding Western and Indigenous epistemes there is, and must be, on ongoing argument, in the spirit of MacIntyre, about the *goods* that will constitute the kinds of traditions we want to transmit. For Grosfoguel, reaching this kind of consensus can only be the result of a "critical dialogue between diverse critical epistemic/ethical/political projects towards a pluriversal as oppos[ed] to a universal world" (2011, p. 3). We have to work out the claims of cultural and moral diversity, and of identities that are fluid and hybrid in how we situate ourselves within this diversity. The aim is to reach "a common language despite the diversity of cultures and forms of oppression" (2011, p. 28). Indeed Welsch, as cited in Horsthemke, argued that cultures can no longer claim purported homogeneity, but are characterised "by mixtures and permeations" (2017, p. 6). In similar vein to Grosfoguel's "pluriversal" Welsch has argued for these new structures

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[4]   See chapter 2, section 12, "Freedom and Security of the Person" in the Constitution of the Republic of South
      Africa (Department of Justice, 1996)

of cultures as "transcultural" in that they traverse and transcend traditional cultural boundaries (cited in Horsthemke, 2017, p. 6). Any genuine attempt at establishing the kinds of goods formative to and thus transmitted by our social and moral traditions in post-apartheid South Africa must be cognisant of the pluriversal, transcultural space that we all now inhabit.

In moving to the last section of this piece we consider how MacIntyre's three-stage conception of virtue, and how it shapes moral traditions, applies to the South African context.

South Africa's paradox

In South Africa, this sense of having enduring social and moral traditions is complicated by the "structural paradox" discussed at the beginning of this paper. For MacIntyre's position, prescriptive ethical codes such as the Constitution and, within the claims of this paper, a document such as the South African Council for Educators' Code of Professional Ethics (South African Council for Educators, n.d.) which is meant to "guide educators to do the right thing in their working lives" (Department of Education, n.d. n.p.) cannot, of themselves, inform and transform teaching practices. Rather, importantly, it is the *already* existing institutional forms that are the sites in which social transmission and shaping of the practices occur, and this is South Africa's paradoxical difficulty. The legacy of apartheid educational practices such as corporal punishment, in spite of its illegality, and discrimination based on language, race, gender, and/or religion are a constant feature of post-apartheid South Africa's schooling landscape, regularly making news headlines. Prescriptive ethical codes alone are not sufficient to change practices and the beliefs that underpin them that have been transmitted and emulated over generations.

This highlights the central role, in MacIntyre's theory, that institutions play in shaping practices. Institutions and practices exist in tension with each other. Practices can exist fully and be fostered only within an institutional framework which is necessary to sustain them. However, part of a practice's flourishing is its resistance to the dictates and prescriptions from the institution in terms of how it is imagined and exercised. The creativity of a practice is "vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution" and needs to resist its "corrupting power" (MacIntyre, 1981/1998, p. 87). This resistance is possible because of the central virtues that practices enable, namely, justice, courage, and truthfulness. Given the dictatorial and deliberately engineered nature of apartheid education structures it was difficult for public education to resist the corrupting power of the institutions which promoted it. Legally enforced segregation and Bantu education were two of the many ways in which institutional power enforced and regulated practices in the classroom space, stultifying the creative nature of a practice such as teaching. In this sense apartheid inverted and made static the relationship between institutions and practices. As discussed above, MacIntyre emphasised that a social moral tradition is informed *by* its practices, rather than traditions and the institutions they create informing the nature of the practices. In this reversed situation practices are reduced to behavioural dictates and prescriptions, with the aim of numbing and suppressing those central virtues mentioned above.

Post-apartheid South African schooling is still unavoidably and problematically shaped by the legal, economic, geographic, infrastructural, hierarchical, and social divisions that were part of the formative and deliberate way apartheid shaped and regulated public schooling. MacIntyre's conception of virtue ethics within this three-fold structure offers a perceptive analysis of the ongoing structural paradox in South African education because of the powerful way apartheid traditions and institutional frameworks reverberate into post-apartheid South Africa. This highlights the ongoing difficulties with the necessary call for radical transformation that Enslin and Pendlebury urged in 1998, soon after the end of apartheid. If we accept that nothing can or should be salvaged from the demoralising educational practices perpetuated by apartheid, and accept unquestioningly the need for thorough-going transformation we confront a dilemma that remains unsolved: how are we to imagine and enact those practices in the educational space which are going to shape the narratives, traditions, and institutions that will meaningfully inform and contribute to a radically transformed post-apartheid educational landscape? Which social and moral traditions could inform these practices that are not already comprised by the apartheid legacy? How are we to work towards and forge the renewing of a "common world" that Arendt describes as the central role of education, when we still exist in lifeworlds segregated by apartheid practices and ideologies? And how are we to work meaningfully towards overcoming the moral vacuity and ambiguity that plagues South Africa?

The simple answer, in light of this paper, is to focus on practices themselves, and decide whether these practices are representative of virtues that enable human flourishing. One way to approach this via Nakata et al. (2012, p. 126) is to begin by analytically tracing the confluence of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems and "their history of entanglement and (con)fused practice," Detailed ethnographic and historical analysis of schooling practices in South Africa, for example, would reveal more concretely the ways in which we remain entangled in practices of teaching which are no longer part of the *goods* of the kinds of traditions we wish to create and transmit. Fundamental to this position is that practices "are in fact our ethical sources: they are the sites where aspects of the good are disclosed to us as well as the primary scenes of our ethical education" (Higgins, 2011, p. 10). The claim is that teaching, and the goods of teaching are ideally transformative, not only of the individual who embodies them, but also of the communities that encounter the individual in this role as teacher. A directive approach to educational transformation that begins at an institutional level, and is conveyed in codes of conduct, ethical prescriptions, and frequent prescriptive curriculum revisions will further mire and dictate the nature of teaching, and attempt to enforce standards of excellence internal to its practices, rather than encourage the open tension and creative impulse that should exist between, and inform, institutions and their practices.

The question then is one of virtues, and the virtues that are necessary for the goods internal to a practice to be realised. Our contemporary decolonial and Indigenous spaces in South Africa will have to guide how we understand and name these virtues. One such virtue (or collection of virtues) is certainly *Ubuntu* which has come to be seen as a panacea for our societal ills, and is in danger of being over-theorised and, given the force of global coloniality, of

disappearing from practice. Nonetheless, a central virtue of teaching, which is also central to the *Ubuntu* ethic, is altruism (Higgins, 2011; Kohl, 1984; Metz, 2007; Metz & Gaie, 2010). It is a virtue that should both prompt an individual to pursue teaching as a profession and be a further motivation to remain a teacher. However, in South Africa today it is often the case that teaching is seen as a last resort for those whose final school marks did not permit them to study anything else.[5] The point is that if one pursues teaching as a career without the requisite virtues that such a profession requires in order for it to be done excellently, and to flourish in the doing of it, then the result will be mediocre, and even cruel teachers, and a general lack of respect for the profession itself. This brings us to the epigraph from Jackson which opens this paper. Altruism is a virtue that desires one's own selfless promotion of the wellbeing of others. Teaching is ideally placed as the profession which readily and widely promotes this sense of altruism, and thus to genuinely teach is also to transform those who are taught. But that transformation cannot merely be the transfer of knowledge but is, instead, embodied and personified by the teacher, who must be a "living exemplar" (Jackson, 1986, p. 124) of precisely those virtues, such as altruism, which makes the transformations of others possible. Attentiveness to practices in the educational space in South Africa, and the way they can shape and inform moral and social traditions, is necessary to more fully understand and guide our societal transformation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we argue that MacIntyre's three-stage theory of virtue, with its focus on practices themselves and on the goods that emerge from them, offers a thought-provoking way to understand some of the difficulties evident in post-apartheid South African education and society. The claim is that the reliance on prescriptive ethical codes, and the difficulty of South Africa's ongoing structural-transformation paradox hinders meaningful transformation in teaching and prevents us from realising the possibility of a common world. Rather, a focus on the practice of teaching itself, and the transformative goods of this practice, such as altruism, would be far more beneficial in helping us reimagine a new tradition of education, and the role of the teacher as a transformative force in South Africa.

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[5]   One of the authors recalls a high school headmaster admonishing us learners by stating that if we did poorly in our final exams we would end up as teachers. The irony of this claim seemed lost on him.

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