Articulating virtue: planning ethics within and beyond post politics

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Abstract:

Post-foundationalist political theories have provided some of the most radical tools of critique in recent years. As well as challenging the dominant orthodoxy of achieving consensus in decision-making, they give voice to claims that the world can be conceived differently than how it is expressed in contemporary neoliberal hegemony by the reassertion of disagreement as fundamental to democratic politics. However, this conflict itself is a means not an end: it provides the intellectual tools to dissemble the dominant qua *hegemonic version of contemporary society and its concomitant framing of values, but it does not provide a way in which to assess the validity of any counterclaims to the contemporary hegemony. Post-foundationalist approaches can critique the status quo for its practice and ontology, but do not offer substantive grounds for an alternative. This is of particular importance for planning as an outcome-based activity; engaging daily with ideas of better or worse developments. If planning is to be conceived as 'the art of situated ethical judgement'*

(Campbell, 2006), questions of value judgement are central to any theoretical conceptualisation or critique.

The paper develops this argument by considering the contribution that Alasdair MacIntyre's ethical and political thought could make to this debate. MacIntyre's notion of virtue ethics demonstrates how ethical judgement can be made without the need for an enlightenment foundationalist ontology to underpin its claims. The paper demonstrates how this approach allows for new ways of thinking through the ethical questions implicit in much of the post-foundationalist critiques of planning practice and in turn offers a situated way of judging outcomes which is not constrained by the post-political condition.

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The paper develops this argument by considering the contribution that Alasdair MacIntyre's ethical and political thought could make to this debate. MacIntyre's notion of virtue ethics demonstrates how ethical judgement can be made without the need for an enlightenment foundationalist ontology to underpin its claims. The paper demonstrates how this approach allows for new ways of thinking through the ethical questions implicit in much of the post-foundationalist critiques of planning practice and in turn offers a situated way of judging outcomes which is not constrained by the post-political condition.

Introduction

For over twenty years, planning theory has been dominated by the debate between consensus-oriented approaches epitomised by collaborative planning and the 'communicative turn' (Healey, 1992, 1997; Yiftachel & Huxley, 2000) and those which see this search for agreement as politically and ontologically flawed (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998). More recently, this debate has engaged with how the search for consensus has led to a situation of 'post-politics' (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2015), where fundamental questions about, or challenges to, the neo-liberal world order cannot be voiced. The post-political condition, constructed within an enlightenment, naturalist ontology conflates ideas of individual choice, the free market and the emphasis on economic growth, into the norm of society which is beyond political debate. Theories of conflict and dissensus which challenge the post-political condition in planning, drawing substantially on the works of Mouffe (1993, 2005, 2013) and Ranciere (1998, 2001), demonstrate how attempts to secure consensus delegitimises opposition and reinforces existing power differentials by giving voice to the strongest (Baeton, 2009; Purcell, 2009). This provides strong critiques of planning within the established political structures, but offer limited guidance for practitioners wishing to secure better urban outcomes. This paper aims to illustrate how Alasdair MacIntyre's political and ethical project of contemporary neo-Aristotelian moral philosophy (2007, 2002, 1999, 1998) offers new ways of theorising and practicing planning. Specifically, it shows that using his version of virtue ethics offers ways to reconceptualise how values can enter this debate.

The argument here is that MacIntyre's ideas offer a way to link the creative conflict of agonistic/dissensus based planning theory with ethical judgement; by actively articulating the substantive content and meaning of terms such as 'justice' and 'social equity' rather than simply assuming agreement over these (Winkler & Duminy, 2014). These deepen the concept of planning as 'the art of situated ethical judgement' (Campbell, 2006) by challenging the

usual basis of moral judgements in planning practice. The paper argues that conflict is necessary to allow for different interpretations of 'good' and 'bad' to be made apparent - without difference how could it be possible to make judgements about whether certain actions or outcomes are better or worse? However, in an activity such as planning which is outcome (or development) oriented, there needs to be the possibility of creating shared understandings on which to judge the merits of any proposal, without this becoming a call to a consensus which goes beyond that specific situation or something that necessarily resolves an argument in a way which pleases all involved. The paper argues that by engaging with MacIntyre's concept of virtue ethics it is possible to make such decisions in a way which promotes planning as substantive ethical judgement without nullifying debate and difference. Within this approach, questions of power remain present, but the dominant ethical assumptions of post-political neo-liberalism - that questions of the right course of action are merely about individual market-framed choices - can be challenged. Where the possible interpretations of a situation can be left open for conflict, interstitial spaces: those which are less prominent, yet ubiquitous (Steele and Keys, 2015) of value arise, spaces in which different questions can be asked, reframing the limits of what is currently deemed possible. Instead of looking for compromise or consensus between involved parties, or showing how those with the most power have foreclosed discussion to serve their own interests, situated discussions about the promotion of the virtues, or about human flourishing (McClymont, 2014) can be developed.

It is not new to claim that planning is about making decisions which aim to make life better. As Taylor (1998; 64) succinctly puts it '(t)he only ultimate justification for planning, and for public policy generally, is that it makes things better than they would be without it...the overall purpose of planning is to further the well-being, or the interests, of the public'. Moreover, debates about the concept of the public interest remain both necessary and

controversial (Alexander, 2002; Campbell and Marshall, 2002; Murphy & Fox-Rogers 2015, Tait, 2016). Notwithstanding postcolonial challenges to the imperialist implications of the public interest (Sandercock, 1998, 2003), the need to claim some wider justification for planning remains (Campbell, 2006; Watson, 2006), framing debates about the public interest within broader problems of ethics and moral philosophy. The majority of the debates stem around the relative merits of two alternative enlightenment frameworks. Described in varied terms in the literature, the basic difference is between judging the ethics of an *action* or the ethics of an *outcome*, the former: deontological, drawing on the tradition of liberalism from Kant to Rawls and Habermas, and the latter on Utilitarianism and seen in planning practice with the dominance of cost-benefit analysis as a tool of decision making. Within this, planning decisions are respectively seen as good if they are made in the correct way, or because they cause the greatest good for the majority. These approaches have been criticised for being inappropriate ways to frame the decisions and practices of which planning is made up (Campbell, 2006, 2012; Upton 2002; Watson, 2006). Partially this is because the focus of these theories is 'constitutional level'; they deal with the running of societies or human life in broad and abstract terms. As important as planning practice and decisions may be, they are not of this level or remit. Secondly, and more centrally for the development of this argument, both deontological and utilitarian approaches have the individual as their core point of reference. This is problematic as planning is fundamentally a collective and context oriented activity - decisions rely on 'the art of situated ethical judgement', and for this appropriate, coherent ethical frameworks are needed rather than abstract, constitution level claims.

Moreover, this enlightenment notion of the self as a timeless, universal actor which can exist *a priori* the community/context (Lennon, 2016) is problematic on an ontological level when engaging with post-foundationalist critiques. It relies on a positivist ontology which assumes certain types of being exist universally and eternally, based upon a given, natural, foundation.

In contrast, post-foundationalist ontology is 'an ontology of lack' (Fougere and Bond, 2016: 3) denying the fixity of meanings, and instead seeing meaning as being constructed contingently through power relations. Although this alternate ontology provides a useful means of challenging the post-political condition, neo-liberal hegemony and any given situation in which consensus is the end-point, it raises a challenge for *ethical* debate, because if meanings are not fixed and eternal, how can notions of right and wrong be judged or claimed? It is this challenge that this paper takes up. By linking MacIntyre's approach to post-foundationalist critiques, a radical (re)interpretation of post-foundationalist ethics is possible; one which can provide new insights into the nature of 'good' in any given context. By seeing questions of values as compatible with ontologically anti-foundational critiques of the post-political, this paper further unsettles the binary oppositions between consensus and conflict (Bond, 2009). It accepts that situated meanings of value-based statements are obfuscated by assuming universal shared interpretations of notions such as 'social equity' (Winkler & Duminy, 2014), in ways which tend to reinforce (global) power imbalances. Moreover, only conflict can bring about the spaces in which agreement on the right course of action for a specific situation can be achieved, creating the possibility of changing hegemonic interpretations and hence shifting the attendant power imbalances. In practice, post-political neo-liberalism is multi-faceted and locally varied, rather than monolithic as sometimes assumed. By interrogating its specificities with an intention of engaging ethically, questions of 'right' and 'wrong', or 'better' or 'worse can be put back on the agenda. A MacIntyrian virtue ethics inspired approach elevates the importance of searching for the right or good course of action in a given situation, through discussion and debate with others, but without seeing this 'good' as fixed, or necessarily transferable to any other situation or context. The paper does not claim that this is easily achievable, or without resistance from those with

vested interests in how the system currently operates. It does however, assert the centrality of contingent ethical debate in engaging in this endeavour.

The paper first outlines key themes in planning theory, which challenge the post-political condition using a range of conceptual tools such as agonism, antagonism and dissensus. Specifically, it suggests that the majority of this work implicitly contains ethical judgements about better or worse planning practice and outcomes. It then outlines key tenets of the MacIntyre's work, discussing their influence on planning literature to date, and how they are useful for developing contemporary arguments around the importance of ethical judgements in challenging the post-political condition in planning. It uses these ideas to demonstrate the compatibility of the post-foundational critiques of post-political governance, focusing primarily on the work of Chantal Mouffe, with the substantive, situated debate about ethical judgement proposed by MacIntyre. In so doing, it considers the implications for planning practice, and the grounds on which planners justify and legitimise their decisions.

Post politics and its adversaries

This section will briefly outlines some of the key considerations emerging from the growing literature which addresses and defines the postpolitical condition and demonstrates the practical and conceptual flaws with consensus-oriented approaches. This includes a wide range of terminology such as 'dissensus' and 'conflict' as well as 'agonism' It is now a well-rehearsed story that partially in challenge to the dominance of the 'communicative turn' in planning theory (Healey, 2003; Innes & Booher, 2004), but also in response to the wider ideology of post-politics, alternative strands of thought developed, drawing predominantly on the ideas of Mouffe, Ranciere and Zizek (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2015) and Foucault, (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Flyvbjerg and Richardson, 2002) centring around a rejection of the

philosophical foundations of Communicative Rationality (Habermas, 1984) and consensus as a goal in planning practice (Purcell, 2009; Swyngedouw, 2010; Hillier, 2003). Although the aim of much of this work was to demonstrate the problems (practical and ontological) and potential negative outcomes of the collaborative approach, and its tacit support for, or co-option within the wider-ranging post-political situation; for the purpose of this paper, a slightly different aspect of this work is of greater importance.

The majority of authors challenge the post-political condition. For planning, city governance and urban studies this entails a situation in which democratic debate has been replaced by a managerialist concept of 'good governance' which is arguably a neoliberal sleight of hand to undermine challenges to its quasi hegemonic status as a world order (Haughton et al, 2013). Claims made from the 1990s onwards argued that the 'old' distinctions of left and right in politics should be superseded by pluralism and 'third way' consensus (Giddens, 1998; Beck, 1997). However, instead of creating a new politics, this move obscured the critical dimension of politics: that difference is central to the possibility of politics (Mouffe, 1993, 2005, 2013) and that these differences are not merely market choices between a range of similar options, but represent radically alternate versions of the world founded upon the ontology of lack which denies the possibility of meaning being fixed once and for always, or having natural foundations. From this situation, antagonistic conflict arises (Mouffe, 2005; Mouffe et al 2012) - fundamental disagreements about the nature of the social- making those holding different views enemies who deny the legitimacy of each other's position. Put in a different way, Ranciere describes this as challenging the police order, in pursuit of a new 'partition of the sensible'- a different way of constructing who has voice and social meaning in the world. Based upon this theoretical perspective, arguments for consensus, or support of any given established order, make opposition to the existing order illegitimate, and beyond the realms of post-political 'democracy'. Any party who remains outside of the consensus- which by its

nature should be all encompassing- loses their legitimacy and hence become either an irrelevance or an enemy (Baeten, 2009).

Mouffe's (2005) idea of agonistic democracy, which is the focus of the majority of this paper as it is arguably the most fully debated within planning theory, retains the conflict inherent in antagonism but aims to 'transform antagonism into agonism' (Mouffe et al, 2012: 10) allowing difference to remain, but within the shared framework of a broad concept of democratic politics. Recent works have considered the limits of agonism as a guiding concept within planning debates due to disagreements about the nature of the 'political' including the relative importance of antagonism as opposed to agonism (Yamamoto, 2016; Fougere and Bond, 2011; Roskamm, 2014). These provide useful reflections into the detailed application of, and debates internal to, post-foundational critiques, but the scope and focus of this paper does not explore these differences. What it does, however, is demonstrate that there are spaces for (situated) ethical judgement, as conceived by MacIntyre, within an agonistic approach.

As noted above, the related concepts of agonism, conflict and the post-political condition help explain and analyse the policies and activities which pertain to planning (Oosterlynck & Swyngedouw 2010; Raco, 2014). Although recent political events[1] can potentially be seen as having begun to unsettle the hegemony of the established neo-liberal order in the West/Global North, much policy making and governance in recent decades has been critiqued for promoting and maintaining this exclusive, managerialist consensus (Baeton, 2009; Legacy, 2015; Haughton et al, 2013). However, these critiques are not solely maintained at the level of ontological disagreement with the concept of consensus; arguments are not merely pursued because of an abstracted critique of the nature of being, assumed by neo-liberalism. The majority of these arguments are underpinned by claims for a better, fairer,

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[1] Elections of Donald Trump and Francois Macron in the US and France, and the Brexit vote in the UK

more appropriate way of governing and living, one which is absent from or excluded by the contemporary neoliberal hegemony. Critiques of contemporary consensus-oriented practice may be partially because of *how* it operates, but are also because of the outcomes it brings about; promoting instead "a commitment to radical democratisation and egalitarian emancipation" (Wilson and Swyngedouw, 2014: 11).

In the examples cited below, not only do the authors critique the way decisions have been made, or policies have been promoted, they also suggest that the outcome of the policy does not promote the best interests of many of those involved, and that it represents the maintenance of abusive power structures. This implicit sense of 'good' or 'better' and its relationship to situated debate and shared decision making demonstrates the importance of bringing questions of values into the discussion about planning and post-politics. This ethical dimension of post-foundationalist planning research can be seen in several examples from recent literature. In the critique of private finance initiatives (legitimised by post-political consensus), Raco (2015: 166) claims '(t)he need for this re-assertion of the public character is greater than ever', making a substantive claim that public services are better than (part) privatised ones. This argument does not only disagree with the post-political consensus as a way of making decisions, but also with the substance of the decision made in this way. Post-politics is presented here as a tactic of those in power, influenced by neoliberal ideologies, presenting their views as the only viable option; and an option which encompasses everyone. Critics of this do not only challenge these assumptions through ontologically deconstructing the possibility of consensus to truly encompass everyone, they also challenge the ethical substance of the decisions being made in this way; however, this is only done implicitly. The unequal power relations are exposed, as well as the negative substantive outcomes. In this case, Raco's (2015) arguments not only highlight how public-private partnerships are

promoted on the grounds of a flawed notion of consensus, they also imply a value, or a good, in the public-ness of public services, but this is hinted at, rather than actively put forward.

Further, Bylund & Byerley (2015: 139 emphasis added) in discussing the challenges of governing behaviour in a park in Stockholm, argue that a post-political response would '(foreclose) action and regulation more sensitive to the specific 'ecological' forms of the particular place which is Tanto: that is, *a collective exploration of 'what to do' and 'how shall we live together?'* This demonstrates not only the closure of substantive debate as a key aspect of post-political decision-making, but also that the alternative way of formulating these questions involves shared reasoning about common goods, something which resonates with MacIntyre's philosophical standpoint. Again, these questions link to broader positive ethical claims only implicitly made. Purcell (2013: 560) discussions of how (re)imagining 'alternative urban futures' is possible through political action conceived in terms of Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) networks of 'equivalence and difference' demonstrates that rearticulations of the possible could provide *better* outcomes than the suggested or imposed ones presented by the current order. Through conflictual engagement with the post-political condition, rather than submitting to its delineation of possibilities, groups are able to challenge the way questions and their possible solutions are posed by established power structures. These rearticulations of the conditions of the possible opens up a different space for decision making, one in which 'the art of situated ethical judgement' could be applied. This is supported by claims that agonistic challenges to the post-political status quo allow for a new sort of active population to emerge: 'citizen action groups are seeking ways to not only dictate an alternative urban transport policy agenda, they are also advocating for ways to reinstate democratic practice into planning *by reasserting themselves into decisions that affect their lives*' (Legacy, 2015: 14, emphasis added).

Not only do these examples illustrate the ongoing importance of articulating substantive alternatives to the post-political status quo, they highlight that engaging with substantive political questions is something that should be valued and enabled as core aspects of everyday life and that these questions centre on different ways of framing ethical judgements (Sandel, 2009), although the literature does not directly frame them in this way. This is not to argue that any challenge to the established order, any new chain or network of equivalence is necessarily better or progressive. However, what agonistic, antagonistic or dissensual contestations, re-articulations or re-partitions of the sensible do, in relation to planning, is to challenge existing power relations and open the space for debate about the values of a specific initiative or decision. It is in these specific situated instances of debate, as the research cited above demonstrates, that small actions show the possibility of going beyond 'neo-liberalism as all-encompassing' (Larner, 2014: 194), highlighting the possibility of doing things differently, as Larner's (2014: 191) discussion of 'Co-exist' in Bristol demonstrates. Co-exist is described as a co-operative, entrepreneurial organisation 'premised on alternative conceptions of leadership, courage, willpower and fortitude', operating within contemporary neo-liberal society, but by means of different values, challenging it by 'actively producing alternative futures' (p201). Challenges to the post-political offer different visions of society which engender reprioritisations and unsettle established power dynamics. Questions of how to judge the value of, or to ethically frame these challenges are not explicitly considered within these debates despite value judgements, or virtues, being implicit within them.

To do this, the paper now turns to MacIntyre's work to explore an alternative way of conceiving ethical judgements; one which can be compatible with the challenges to the current dominant ontological, economic, political and social structures discussed above. Moreover, it offers a means of further unsettling the binary divide between conflict and

consensus in planning and hence develops new possibilities for both judging planning outcomes and promoting collective engagement with visions of specific and situated shared futures in ways which can undermine established power structures.

(after) Virtue: the Contribution of Alasdair MacIntyre

The influences of MacIntyre's ideas currently comprise an emerging undercurrent of interest in planning theory (Blanco, 1995; Lo Piccolo and Thomas, 2008; Watson, 2006; Lennon, 2015, 2016). Macintyre's work is at times referred to as neo-Aristotelian as Aristotle's notion of the virtues are important throughout his work, both to utilise and critique their application in the contemporary world. He is also often labelled as a communitarian, something he fervently rejects (see MacIntyre, 1998: 244) seeing communitarianism as a *response* to enlightenment ontology and values, not a criticism or renunciation of it, which his work provides. This section sets out the core aspects of his thinking which inform the argument of this paper. Specifically, this is done by examining firstly his criticisms of the individual as an a priori, free agent, secondly by exploring the implications of the situatedness of moral judgements in virtue ethics and thirdly by discussing what this might mean for contemporary debates about planning.

Before so doing, it is important to note that this paper does not claim to present a definitive summary of MacIntyre's work or accurately differentiate between the positions held in various texts, nor does it argue that this interpretation is without challenge. MacIntyre's own position on ethics is outlined and developed over several books and other writings. Here, the aim is to explore ways in which some of his central claims can deepen and enhance theorising about planning, and contribute to specific debates within planning theory. By bringing together post-foundationalist political theory with moral philosophy, the paper extends the

concepts and considerations of planning as both an idea and a practice. The works of Chantal Mouffe (as well as other post-foundationalist philosophers) and Alasdair MacIntyre do not come from the same tradition, or directly engage in the same arguments; nor have either been conceived with the practice of planning in mind. The outlook of the former is a critique of the contemporary politics (in both practice and theory) whilst the latter engages with issues of moral philosophy, and how this in turn impacts on what the 'good life' should look like. What they do share is a rejection of the tenets of enlightenment foundationalist ontology (see Blakely, 2013, 2016 for a discussion of this in relation to MacIntyre's contributions to social science ontology). This paper suggests that a synergy of these ideas can help inform and develop contemporary debates in planning theory, specifically offering a more substantive means of articulating the ethical assertions latent in much post-foundational criticism of the post-political, as well as demonstrating how spaces can be opened up to critically re-evaluate and change practice.

MacIntyre rejects approaches to moral philosophy based on enlightenment rationalities; be it ones which focus on outcomes, or ones which focus on processes. Both criticised paradigms base their claims to understanding and judging justice and ethics in a way which has no explicit substantive version of 'the good', or of human flourishing. (MacIntyre, 2002). Moreover, both utilitarian and deontological enlightenment perspectives hold that an idea of a substantive *good* is antithetical to their central tenets as it goes against the values of individual liberty on matters of substantive lifestyle decisions. This critiqued position is founded on two complimentary claims, universality and the a priori existence of the individual as a rational agent (MacIntyre, 2007). In enlightenment morality, the central actor is an individual who being without community, temporality or setting, is both free and universalisable as such. The notion of an untethered, context free individual as the crux of moral reasoning is problematic for MacIntyre, not because *any* version of a rationality or

individual agency is rejected (MacIntyre, 1999) but because this specific concept of rational individual agency is necessarily a priori to, and able to exist beyond or without, society, community or context, something which MacIntyre (2007: 290) challenges: '(i)ndividuals are thus … primary and society secondary, and the identification of individual interests is prior to, and independent of, the construction of any moral or social bonds between them'. It is this idea that individuals can have interests which are formed outside of the relationships, places and social networks in which they exist, and hence the ability to extrapolate universal norms from this, that MacIntyre finds problematic. This means that all (ethical) judgement has to take place within its given context to make sense. It does not mean that any level of relativist judgement is acceptable any more than abstracted universalised judgement is. It means that to make sense of a context, its histories, traditions and practices need to be first understood, and second reasoned within. It does not, however, mean that the established norms or mores of a situation, founded upon and supported within the established power structure of that situation or tradition have to be unquestioningly accepted. It means that the context has to be acknowledged and examined, rather than ignored or written out in a claim to wider (or universal) applicability.

Concomitantly, moral judgements are not absolute or eternal, but also situated within the relationships in which they are claimed, made and remade. MacIntyre argues 'all morality is always to some degree tied to the socially local and particular and that the aspirations of the morality of modernity to a universality freed from all particularity is an illusion' (MacIntyre, 2007: 147). Therefore both personal interests and the concepts of morality used to judge these rests not within an isolated individual or a timeless and placeless universal version of wrong and right, but are found and founded socially. This means that community and tradition are not only the source of ethics but the way (ethical) meaning is found and experienced within life. However, ethical judgements are not simple or unitary because of this; people's lives

will experience intersecting and competing traditions, each potentially suggesting a different virtuous course of action in any given situation, a conflict in which power will influence both decision and interpretations.

This situated standpoint goes some way to counteract the problems of using constitutional-level theory to make judgements about planning practice as well as undermining the use of such universalising theories. Further, MacIntyre's position is neither that ethical judgements are fixed or unchangeable, nor exclusively culturally relative. As mentioned earlier, MacIntyre rejects the description of his work as communitarian. He does not see communities as static, beyond criticism or as only a subsection of a higher order liberal state. Conversely, he rejects any theory which ignores the situatedness of being and meaning; seeing this as necessary to establish common parameters for debate, a starting point based within shared understanding, through which different and challenging ideas can be expressed. To understand any judgement, it is necessary to understand the context in which it was made as statements become 'intelligible by finding (their) place in a narrative' (MacIntyre, 2007: 244). It is by developing this understanding that any narratives or practices can be challenged, developed or supported. This does not mean that specific existing structures, and in particular the power relations inherent within them cannot be challenged. It means that the challenge has to make sense within that given narrative, rather than be part of an abstracted grand narrative. This sort of reasoning allows for the value of small changes or actions to be deemed worthy of praise, and to offer something different which is both beyond and within the neo-liberal order. This can be seen in Larner's (2014) discussion of Co-exist, as mentioned earlier. Co-exist engages with narratives of entrepreneurialism, but does so in a way which is not bounded by the more conventional interpretations of the terms which focus on financial profit as a measure of worth. By drawing on aspects of innovation and creativity within this idea, the narrative it develops is able to judge entrepreneurial behaviour on its

social rather than financial benefits, and part of the wider project of 'alternative urban futures' it seeks to promote.

MacIntyre develops this argument in greater depth through the notions of social practices and seeing the wholeness of life's narrative. Social practices are activities which are undertaken to maintain, uphold and develop certain virtues through skills such as chess or football, and that may attract, but should not centre on the acquisition of external goods (i.e. money, fame). There is not the scope in this paper to provide a full discussion on this, but it is important to note this concept as it helps to explain the meaning of the virtues in virtue ethics, and link the importance of situated judgements to activities which in turn develop how these concepts can help inform the debate on planning practices. Virtues pertain to the skills needed to develop aptitude at a practice; doing them allows judgement to be made that the practice is good. Picking up on the previously used example, there would be certain skills needed to be a successful entrepreneur-which are not agreed upon by all and forever- but could include creativity, innovative thinking, and understanding a market. Emphasising the importance of the internal values of practices challenges other ethical frameworks which deny having claims about *substantive* goods, and instead looks to processes such as 'good governance' whose value is seen in meeting efficiency targets and saving money- prime examples of external goods in MacIntyre's terminology, or use mechanisms such as cost-benefit analysis which do not assess any substantive dimension of their calculus. Different practices, as part of the roles all humans undertake, may require different virtues. Drawing (and slightly conflating) examples MacIntyre himself uses, the virtues required for being a good watchmaker are not necessarily the same as being a good mother, for example, even if these roles are held by one and the same person. The sense of life as narrative (Lennon, 2015) and within community allows for judgements to be made when the virtues of these practices may come into conflict. Again returning to the Co-exist example, within this community, or

collective, it is possible that the entrepreneurial values may at times conflict with ones about social inclusion or urban sustainability, and therefore situated debates and judgements need to be made over the relative merits of each, with a mind to the overall narrative of Co-exist, or any individual within it. It is only within these temporal and spatial settings- spaces for situated ethical judgement- that such assessments can be made.

Attendantly, MacIntyre's virtue ethics necessarily rejects the liberal notion of individuals as agents removed from their social context. Not only does MacIntyre disallow for the atomised notion of individuality seen within enlightenment ontology, he also sees the virtues as *part* of the good life, not a means to it. This need for moral judgement to be communally constructed is not a means to something above and beyond its context; 'the exercise of the virtues is not in this sense a means to the end of the good for man (sic). For what constitutes the good for man (sic) is a complete human life lived at its best, and the exercise of the virtues is a necessary and central part of such a life, not a mere preparatory exercise to secure such a life' (MacIntyre, 2007: 174). This means that to exercise judgement or enter debate with others (be it in a neighbourhood or professional organisation) is in itself of value; an ethical action, and one closely entwined with debates about human flourishing. Therefore groups who challenge the claims of the post-political condition and how its impacts on their lives are in themselves engaged in moral reasoning. They are challenging its established power by undermining its ontological foundations. They are remarking the terms on which judgements about actions can and should be made. This claim is fundamentally antithetical to approaches which places the individual as the (dislocated) centre of moral judgement as such debates and challenges can only be made communally and within given everyday contexts. In this way, difference and differing opinions are accepted, rather than subsumed by the universalising ontology of individualism.

The summation of this implies that a substantive version of the good, incorporating notions of human flourishing, should be at the heart of all debate about how lives should be lived, decisions taken. The meaning of any substantive version of 'good' is not fixed temporally or spatial, and changes and adapts according to its situation. As MacIntyre argues, '(w)hat it is for human being to flourish does of course vary from context to context, but in every context it is as someone exercises in a relevant way the capacities of an independent practical reasoner that her or his potentialities for flourishing in a specifically human way are developed' (1999: 77). Making judgements about the right thing to do depends on both those judgements being taken with a context in which the decisions can make sense, and for the relevant actors within those given contexts to have both the skills and legitimacy to make those judgements. Established parameters can only be challenged by having a situated understanding of those; this does not mean that they can only be challenged by those with power therein. This differentiates MacIntyre's arguments from those such as Habermas'(1984) as there is no ontological a priori grounding for rational discussion other than from that developed within traditions, and therefore no grounds to claim universality for rational discourse of an 'ideal speech situation'. Meaning is both made and re-made in situated contexts, without appeal to a neutral, context free, pre-existing ontological foundation. However, this does not mean that all judgements are equally valid, or that all ethical claims are simply emotivist. Shared traditions empower those within them to defend and make claims about the value of an action or endeavour, and more importantly to set the agenda about what issues should be considered political: or to put it another way, to be considered of importance when making decisions about human flourishing. MacIntyre (1997: 236-237) argues; '(c)onventional politics set limits to practical possibility…(a)nd the most fundamental issues are excluded from the range of alternatives. 'By seeing moral reasoning as locally situated, it is possible for views to be put forward which counter the

dominant discourse of neo-liberalism, or any variant of it pursued by a given government. These views would not be mere opinions of a given individual, but situated moral claims of the value of a way of life; examples from planning histories could include the arguments against clearance of housing by (predominantly working class) communities for roadbuilding schemes, or 'regeneration' projects (Grey & Porter, 2015). These are arguments about communal value and situated virtues (mutual assistance, family and kinship). By accepting their validity in planning debates, by changing the agenda or the ability to set the 'question', power imbalances could also be challenged.

The paper has so far discussed how MacIntyre's notions of virtue ethics could contribute to debates within planning about the best course of action, and offer ways to change the goalposts of debate, and in so doing empower voices and communities who are too often overlooked and ignored. What it does not do is provide a simple toolkit of how virtues can be discussed and developed in a situation where different communities with different traditions and histories coexist. This is of particular interest when considering how divergent groups may come together to form 'chains of equivalence' to counter the contemporary post-political condition. As there is no guarantee that challenges, or new anti-establishment political groupings would promote progressive ideas, therefore there is a pressing need for a way of assessing the ethics or values of a movement or political agenda. MacIntyre (1998: 252) argues for the need to find and examine 'instructive examples of the politics of local community' to develop the possibilities and understanding of his philosophical approach. The paper now discusses these ideas in greater depth, specifically arguing for the compatibility of virtue ethics and post-foundational thought in planning theory.

Articulating virtue? Post-foundationalist planning ethics

So far, this paper has argued firstly that ethical judgements are tacit in the work of many authors who draw on a range of post-foundationalist theorists in debates in planning theory which challenge the current social and political order. Secondly it has outlined how MacIntyre's work offers a new way of theorising planning as 'the art of situated ethical judgement' (Campbell, 2006). However, in promoting the use of MacIntyre's ideas in planning theory, Lennon (2016: 6) claims that 'agonistic' planning theory proponents see actors as self-interested and motivated in developing institutions to promote own claims, as a space for 'negotiating a trade-off between their relative interests' and therefore that these approaches are incompatible as MacIntyre's virtue ethics reside on the development of shared ethical reasoning through communities and traditions. This interpretation of agonism is problematic and occludes its radical reformulation of politics and the social: post-foundationalist planning theory is not pluralism sprinkled with post-modern seasoning. As demonstrated earlier, it can be- and frequently is- a tool of critiquing the dominant-qua-hegemonic forces of contemporary capitalist/neo-liberal governance on the grounds of substantively divergent norms and by the assertion of other questions and collective actions than those deemed legitimate by the post-political condition. By asserting that the current given order; the contemporary attempt at fixing a hegemonising discourse (following Chantal Mouffe's language) or the current partition of the sensible (following Jacques Ranciere's terminology) is not natural, or the only option, it is possible to conceive of a radical re-shaping of contemporary society. In so doing, the possibility to ground this within substantive ethical debate- one which considers empowerment and inclusion- is made possible. Although, as stated earlier, MacIntyre and Mouffe's projects and claims are highly divergent, there is scope to bring their ideas into dialogue with each other to develop current debates.

Planning theory grounded in post-foundationalist ontology does not centre around the notion of an atomised rational individual as this in itself presupposes a fixed category created before

the construction of meaning in either discourse or community. Nor does an agonistic (or other post-foundational) approach to the post-political condition presume there is one model of universal decision-making, one which can be replicated regardless of tradition or context, as Mouffe argues 'the way democratic institutions will be envisaged depends very much on the way they are inscribed in specific traditions and cultures'(Mouffe et al, 2012, p59). A(nta)gonistic thought offers the strongest tools to challenge the ways of framing morality, by being able to deconstruct its claims to neutral universalism. MacIntyre's work offers grounds for the creation of substantive alternative ethical formulations. By using post-foundational theories to challenge third way (neo)liberalism on the basis of its political and ontological premises, it also opens the possibility to engender a different way of thinking about ethics. As discussed above, MacIntyre's approach offers a way to frame debate which allows for discussion of substantive notions of right and wrong, but ones which take into consideration local cultural and historic development of these ideas. The need to shift the remit of the political, to re-create claims about public spending, behaviour in parks, pollution, public space and sustainable transport amongst many other locally specific instances, stem from ethical questions of how we should live together. Asking such question is only possible socially, or collectively.

Despite the fact that MacIntyre's ideas are at times (wrongly) interpreted as conservative because of the emphasis on tradition (Blakely, 2013), there is much compatibility of these with the deemed 'radical' thought of Mouffe. The following section explore this in depth. MacIntyre's notion of practices and traditions as the foundations of ethical reasoning, and Mouffe's emphasis on the importance of collective social movements coalesce to subvert the dominance of the individual as a (moral) agent, instead both emphasising the importance of place based and group relationships which go beyond the aggregate of individual concerns. Mouffe argues 'I do not consider mobilizing people through the internet a form of real

political mobilization, because it does not create a genuine social movement' (Mouffe et al, 2012: 46) stressing the importance of physical collective presence (such as the occupation of Tahrir Square in Egypt) in the development of a genuine social movement. MacIntyre claims 'the notion of the political community as a common project is alien to the modern liberal individualist world…a modern liberal political society can appear only as a collection of citizens of nowhere who have banded together for their common protection '(MacIntyre, 2007: 182-3). Although discussing different issues from quite different standpoints, they share a common claim about the importance of something which could be described as community, an entity which is not an individual (although it comprises of many individuals), not a family, but also not a (nation) state or national government as the locus of ethical or political judgement. This collective/movement/community is the scale at which claims about (or against) the world can be made, and understandings of virtue or good can be developed. At this level, the possibility of setting a different agenda, or raising different (political) questions is also possible. Within this, 'it matters a good deal with which others we choose to deliberate' (MacIntyre, 1999: 7) as a movement too narrowly focused may not offer a compelling enough alternative or be able to engage beyond a very specific set of concerns, whereas one too widely focused can lack substantive meaning (see Mouffe on the Occupy movement and others, Mouffe et al, 2012: 86-97). What is apparent, however, is that debate over substantive versions of right and wrong are not only possible but necessary in any shared rearticulation of the social.

As already mentioned, the challenges to the post-political hegemony are not grounded in simply in a notion of self-interest, derived from their individual, a priori aims. In most cases, challenges are based upon a substantive ethical alternative version of society, one which does not subscribe to the norms and values of modern neo-liberalism and importantly one which is negotiated within a community, interest group or campaign (e.g. Fougere and Bond, 2016;

Legacy, 2015; Larner, 2014; Baeten, 2009). A network of equivalence can be a coming together of diverse actors who collectively articulate, through discussion and reflection, a better way of being, a better set of substantive outcomes than the one they are challenging presents as the only option. This substantive 'better' is mutually articulated and does not have to be just a tokenistic compromise around which different actors, with their own actual aims, can coalesce. Counter hegemonic claims are based on an assertion that the given way of constructing the world is (morally) *wrong*, not offering people a good or virtuous life, and therefore, another, *better* way is possible. As already stated, the substance of these claims is paramount. Attention needs to be given to power relations, and on what grounds certain actions are being promoted. However, it is not possible to be able to define a bad community, or development, or plan, without having some notion of what a good one would be like. The point of asserting the irreducibility of the political, or the impossibly of foundationally grounded consensus allows for situated, specific ethical articulations of 'the good'. This ethical foundation is both the motivation for and the aim of agonistic practice-conflict or strife is not an end in itself (Pløger, 2004). As expressed by MacIntyre 'it is through conflict, and sometimes only through conflict that we learn what our ends and purposes are' (MacIntyre, 2007; 191). It is through (agonistic) debate, stemming from conflicting calls on our moral duty and attendantly how we express this collectively, that we begin to understand and create better ways of being, and promote human flourishing. Moreover, by bringing the language of 'good and bad' into mainstream debate, it offers a way in for voices and views that would otherwise be marginalised. This therefore offers a more developed way to make situated judgements about the wrong or right course of action in any planning scenario. It does not offer a fixed or universalising framework nor one which is entirely relativist and without coherent grounds for its claims.

This, in turn, links back to the contemporary concerns of planning theory, specifically the possibility of going beyond the binary of conflict or consensus. As stated previously, intellectual challenges to post-political democracy offers space for the debate and articulation of differences which goes beyond the established boundaries, or police order, but also offers the potential for reinterpretation of categories, as demonstrated in Larner's (2014) discussion of Co-exist. This disruption creates spaces which allow for deliberation about the relative merits of this action or that action in any given context, echoing Campbell's (2006) claim that planning is 'the art of *situated* ethical judgement'. However, it also provides a different way to think about the possibility of making these ethical judgements. MacIntyre (2007: 250, emphasis added) states '(w)e live out our lives, both individually and in our relationships with each other, in the light of *certain conceptions of a possible shared future*, and future in which certain possibilities beckon us forward and others repel us'. This possible shared future is core to any concept of planning practice: certain development choices will enable and sustain flourishing and the good life more than others will. These choices cannot be taken from a pre-existing blueprint but need to be debated and explored by those who can use a shared language developed through shared practices and traditions, but in a way which allows for change and empowerment specifically by giving voice to those who would otherwise be outside of the system. Moreover, this is a mutually created shared future, one which has to be conceived and practiced communally as it is only through engagement with others, in contingent, situated, lived contexts that it is possible to develop an understanding of virtue, or be able to articulate the right course of action in any given situation.

Conclusions

In uncertain times, the *idea* of planning (Campbell, 2012) still offers the possibility for shared debate about specific urban (and rural) futures. What these futures may look like depends hugely on the ways in which planning goes about envisioning them. In opening up the spaces between conflict and consensus, planning can operate in a way which forecloses neither difference and debate, nor the possibility of ethically grounded- but temporally and spatially bounded- agreement. To think about participation and engagement in planning, it is necessary not to delimit the boundaries of debate within the constraints of the post-political condition, as is so often the case (in addition to the instances cited earlier, Neighbourhood Planning in the UK (see Parker et al., 2017) is a relevant example), but to open the possibility of situated debate about the right, or virtuous, thing to do within a practice, tradition or community.

By highlighting the possible synergies between agonistic democracy and virtue ethics, this paper has aimed to demonstrate a different way of thinking about assessing values and ethics; one which both allows for substantive judgements to be made, but also for difference and conflict to remain. MacIntyre's ideas do not necessarily sit comfortably with those critiques inspires by Mouffe and Ranciere, but it is in the challenge of bringing these divergent frameworks together that the possibility for creativity, and the exploration of 'interstitial spaces' (Steele & Keys, 2015) emerges. MacIntyre's notion of virtue ethics shares the post-foundationalist ontology of Mouffe and Ranciere, and their challenges to the post-political order and the possibility or desirability of consensus as a goal. By arguing for the need to engage with substantive outcomes, and asserting that there are better ways to live and to act, it also offers the possibility of moving beyond critique as an end in itself by situating the possibility for substantive ethical debate

For planning, this approach raises as many questions as it offers solutions for. Most importantly, it is unclear how moral reasoning that relies on shared communal traditions can

be transferred to situations of diversity and difference (cf Watson, 2006), which are commonplace, if not ubiquitous in the majority of urban contexts. This is not to undermine the claims of the paper. It is precisely because of the difficult and heterogeneous circumstances of most planning decisions that a framework which allows for both disagreement *and* the possibility of shared moral reasoning about situated outcomes is urgently needed. Within this, questions of power and agenda setting cannot be overlooked. Further research is needed to explore how this might be put into action, and what this might look like in practice.

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