

Vulnerability, Virtue, and Flourishing in the Rarámuri-pagótuame

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Abstract: This article examines the concept of human flourishing (Aristotelian εὐδαιμονία) through a case study of the indigenous-religious community of the Rarámuri-pagótuame, located in the Sierra Tarahumara, Northwestern Mexico. The objective is to present a concrete model where communal worldview, the practice of social virtues, and a deep-rooted religious sense converge to provide the foundations for individual well-being in contexts of high vulnerability. The theoretical analysis is grounded in the framework of Alasdair MacIntyre's virtue ethics, seeking to anchor the concept of flourishing in specific social practices. The focus is placed on the kórima, a practice of reciprocity that is established as a central ethical-religious axis. Contrary to the simplified notion of almsgiving, it is argued that kórima intrinsically articulates the exercise of virtue, indigenous identity, and religiosity. The findings suggest that religious and traditional communities possess valuable models of human flourishing that prioritize interdependence and social virtue over individualism, offering a relevant framework for contemporary research on community well-being.

Keywords: Human Flourishing, Rarámuri-pagótuame, Korima, Virtue Ethics, Interdependence.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present the case of the Rarámuri-pagótuame as a concrete example where the community worldview, the practice of social virtues, and religious meaning intertwine to provide individuals with the necessary elements for human flourishing, understood in the Aristotelian sense

(ευδαιμονία). In particular, we will focus on *kórima*, which is a practice of reciprocity that, contrary to what is often thought, transcends charity and becomes an ethical axis linking the practice of virtue, religiosity, and indigenous identity.

Rarámuri-pagótuame is the endonym used by the baptized indigenous people of the Sierra Tarahumara. Located in northwestern Mexico, this group has a long history of engagement with Jesuit missions and other religious organizations. Robles has written:

In general, they are known as Tarahumaras. I will refer to them as the Rarámuri, because that is what they call themselves. When commenting on their religion and faith, I will have to talk about their entire life, because they make no distinction between something that has to do with their God and something that does not; because their authorities act in the name and with the authority of God; because in everything they collaborate with Him to continually restore harmony among the people, to preserve their fraternal life (Robles 1991, 45).

The name literally means “Christian man,” and they are the result of a cultural synthesis in which the pre-Hispanic and the Christian become indistinguishable (Robles 1991, 58). However, there are some elements of their religiosity and social philosophy that are clearly pre-Hispanic and manifest themselves in the form of “rites, ministries of service, and ways of relating to God, man, and the world” (Robles 1991, 60).

According to Robles (1991, 60), their primary contribution is a resilient culture rooted in lived religious values. This cultural confidence allowed the evangelization process—spanning from the 17th century to the present—to result in a profound synthesis rather than an alienating syncretism. Although this path involved a high cost in material poverty, it fostered a collective consciousness of being “true men” and “children of God” who actively pursue human brotherhood.

One of the most significant elements is the *kórima*. Jesuit missionary Enrique Mireles explains:

Some mistranslate it as ‘alms,’ when in reality it is about sharing, knowing that I will later find myself in a similar situation. I share, and then, when I am out there in the hills, other Rarámuri people, who are not the ones I shared with, will share with me and will not let me die, because I am a human being, and I have the right to food, to have a little place where I can stay. (Galindo 2025, 2)

In the following sections, we will seek to argue that this practice constitutes an authentic experience of the virtue of *just generosity*, formulated by the Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre as central to human flourishing, always within

a community (MacIntyre 1999, 121–123), and that, in the case of the Rarámuri-pagótúame, it takes on not only social but also religious dimensions. In other words, we are not talking, in this case, about a religious community isolated from a social and civil configuration, but rather about an integral and supportive worldview.

We will argue that, both in MacIntyre’s neo-Aristotelian formulation and in the Christianized indigenous Rarámuri vision, the recognition of human vulnerability is a central element of practices aimed at flourishing. In order to demonstrate this hypothesis, we will proceed in the following order: first, we will develop the concept of *flourishing* as εὐδαιμονία, a notion that, in Aristotle, is intrinsically linked to community life. Next, we will discuss the role of communities, particularly religious ones (even though, as we have said, there is no separation between the civil and the religious in the Rarámuri-pagótúame), in human flourishing. Finally, we will present the particular case of the Rarámuri, focusing on the practice of *kórima*. We hope that this work will serve to highlight the importance of the link between the religious, the secular, and the communal in the material and spiritual development of the participants in a society.

Regarding the authors’ positionality, this research stems from an academic dialogue between philosophy and the living tradition of the Jesuit missions in the Sierra Tarahumara. While the article primarily offers a philosophical-ethical analysis based on established ethnographic records (Robles 1991; Velasco Rivero 1983), the insights are also informed by direct engagement with the field. Specifically, one of the authors conducted an interview with Fr. Enrique Mireles, SJ, a missionary currently living and working in the Sierra Tarahumara (Galindo 2025). This first-hand testimony allows us to bridge the gap between historical ethnographic sources and the contemporary lived reality of the Rarámuri-pagótúame people.

2. The Concept of Flourishing (εὐδαιμονία)

The classical understanding of human flourishing dates back to Aristotle’s notion of εὐδαιμονία, understood not as an emotional state or subjective well-being, but as the full realization of the rational and social powers of human beings in accordance with virtue. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle states that every action tends toward a good and that the supreme good of human life consists in activity in accordance with reason (2000, I 1097a30–1098a16). Thus, the ultimate goal of existence is not found in external goods or momentary passions, but in the good life shared with others: a life in which human beings, as *zoon politikón*, develop their excellence within the framework of the community.

2.1. Aristotelian *εὐδαιμονία*, Virtue, and the Good Life

Eudaimonia therefore has a teleological and normative meaning. It is not equivalent to individual satisfaction, but to the fulfillment of *the telos* proper to human beings: living according to practical reason, regulating passions through virtue, and ordering actions to the common good. Flourishing is not a result or a final state, but a continuous activity (*energeia*) that expresses the perfection of the rational soul in praxis and in relationships with others (Aristotle 2000, I 1097b22–1098a20, II 1105b25–1107a2, VIII 1155a–1156a, X 1174a14–1175a5). In this tradition, virtue is an elective habit that mediates between extremes and can only be acquired in community. The good life is achieved in community, where prudent deliberation (*phronēsis*), friendship (*philia*), and justice structure the space of reciprocity (Aristotle 2000, V 1129a–1138b10, VI 1140a1–1141b, VIII 1155a1–1156a10). Thus, human beings cannot fulfill themselves outside of cooperative practices in which virtues are learned and exercised.

2.2. From Self-Sufficiency to Dependence: MacIntyre's Critique

However, the modern reception of Aristotle tended to privilege the self-sufficiency of the wise man (*autarky*) as the ideal of fulfillment, displacing the relational character of virtue. In contrast to this individualistic reading, Alasdair MacIntyre proposes a recovery of eudaimonia from the perspective of vulnerability and dependence. In *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999), he argues that human beings are what the title says: rational animals, whose rationality is formed in contexts of dependence, vulnerability, and care, and whose autonomy is based on bonds of reciprocity:

We human beings are vulnerable to many kinds of affliction and most of us are at some time afflicted by serious ills. How we cope is only in small part up to us. It is most often to others that we owe our survival, let alone our flourishing. (MacIntyre 1999, 1)

In effect, MacIntyre introduces a new horizon to Aristotle's idea of flourishing by criticizing Aristotle himself and his idea of magnanimity (*megalopsychia*), as one who reaches the fullness of virtue, and is therefore deserving of many goods that allow life to flourish (Aristotle 2000, IV 1123b 35–1125b). Aristotle seems to describe the magnanimous person as someone who, because of their greatness, is ashamed to receive favors and prefers to grant them (Aristotle 2000, IV 1124b 9–10). This exaltation of self-sufficiency and the deserving of great honors seems to distance the figure of *the megalopsychos* from human frailty and virtues such as gratitude, so necessary for human flourishing (Curzer 1990, 517–537; 1991, 131–

151; Kristjánsson 2015, 503–510). MacIntyre criticizes precisely this dimension: the Aristotelian version of the magnanimous runs the risk of fostering an autonomy that hides dependence and vulnerability, promoting a kind of moral self-sufficiency that denies the relational experience of receiving help (MacIntyre 1999, 147–151).

For MacIntyre, incorporating the idea of dependence into Aristotle’s model of virtue and flourishing is necessary: flourishing in the life of virtue cannot be understood as opposed to all human imperfection or fragility, but must recognize the conditionalities and bonds of dependence that constitute human life. However, MacIntyre’s critique does not imply discarding the Aristotelian framework of *ευδαιμονία*; rather, it suggests completing it: it is possible to preserve an anthropology inspired by Aristotle that goes beyond the approaches indicated by integrating vulnerability. Aristotle himself offers nuances on the possible interpretation of *the* Aristotelian *megalopsychos* as a self-sufficient being: he distinguishes between popular magnanimity (linked to pride and honor, exemplified in the tragic characters of Ajax and Achilles) and a more reflective magnanimity that detaches the subject from external goods, orienting his greatness toward virtue and the aspiration to the sublime (Aristotle 1993, 97b 17–25; Irwin 1999, 195–217; Pakaluk 2004, 241–275). Furthermore, the inclusion of passages from *Nicomachean Ethics* on friendship broadens the interpretative framework of the Aristotelian magnanimous figure, so that it can be said that the life of virtue—and in particular the practice of justice—is not possible without friendship (Aristotle 2000, VIII 1155a–IX 1172a).

Despite these positive interpretations—which present the magnanimous as detached from external goods and not hostile toward others (Pakaluk 2004, 243–245; Curzer 1990, 517–537)—practical problems remain: the magnanimous person may awkwardly receive favors from others and feel offended for having needed them, which facilitates vanity and relational disconnection (Irwin 1999, 213–217; Kristjánsson 2015, 507). Aristotle himself identifies the risk of excess—vanity—in the face of genuine magnanimity (2000, IV 1124b 20–35).

The proposal that emerges is twofold: on the one hand, we must recognize Aristotle’s conceptual richness on hierarchies of ends and detachment; on the other, we must accept MacIntyre’s claim that the tradition incorporates gratitude, gratuitousness, and dependence as constitutive elements of a truly human and communal virtue that allows for personal flourishing (MacIntyre 1999, 124–128; Kristjánsson 2015, 503–510). In this way, magnanimity can be reformulated—without completely abandoning Aristotelian inspiration—to embrace the fragility and reciprocity that sustain moral life in community.

Therefore, from the perspective of the requirement of dependence that generates gratitude, in *ευδαιμονία*, vulnerability is not presented as an obstacle to virtue, but as a condition of possibility for human flourishing. Childhood,

illness, and old age are moments that reveal the constitutive indigence of human beings. From this experience arise virtues such as mercy, patience, and gratitude, all of which are embedded—as we shall see later—in just generosity. MacIntyre calls them virtues of recognition of dependence: dispositions that allow us to support one another, recognize the gift received, and respond to it through just and generous action (1999, 141–151). Aristotelian flourishing, therefore, is not defined by overcoming fragility, but by the ability to assume it within a network of mutual care.

Eudaimonia is thus inseparable from virtuous interdependence: one's own good can only be achieved by participating in practices that contribute to the common good. As Aristotle points out, the good of the individual and that of the city are one and the same (2000, I 1094b7–8); but, in MacIntyre's reading, that good is extended to include those who cannot repay, recognizing that justice begins with caring for the most vulnerable.

2.3. Measuring Flourishing and the Normative Framework

As we can see, the Aristotelian tradition of flourishing, *eudaimonía*, is presented as a rational activity in accordance with virtue, which is difficult to reduce to quantitative parameters. However, contemporary attempts to measure human flourishing have sought to translate this normative idea into empirical indicators that allow us to evaluate, albeit partially, the conditions that favor a good life. Along these lines, Tyler J. VanderWeele (2017) proposed a multidimensional definition of *flourishing* that encompasses five domains: happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, purpose and meaning in life, character and virtue, and positive social relationships. These components, which are derived directly from Aristotle's conception of the complete good, or *téleion agathón* (Aristotle 2000, I 1097a25–b5), form an integrative index aimed at measuring a person's overall well-being. From this perspective, the aim is to offer a rigorous tool for the social sciences and public health, without dissolving the moral core of the concept (VanderWeele 2019).

Unlike purely psychological indicators of subjective well-being, these instruments incorporate the domain of virtue or character, recognizing that moral excellence is a structural condition for flourishing. In his most recent formulations, the Harvard professor insists that flourishing cannot be understood without reference to moral agency and the development of virtues such as justice, temperance, or generosity, which integrate care for oneself and the good of others (VanderWeele 2022, Weziak-Bialowolska et al. 2023). On this point, Alasdair MacIntyre's proposal offers the decisive normative framework: the virtues of recognizing dependence—and, in particular, just generosity—provide the qualitative criterion that complements empirical attempts at

measurement. If *flourishing* indices quantify observable dimensions of well-being, just generosity introduces the principle that guides their interpretation: there is true flourishing only where there is reciprocity and mutual care. Thus, measurement reaches its philosophical fulfillment when integrated into an understanding of human good as virtuous interdependence. In other words, VanderWeele's metrics provide the descriptive means, while MacIntyre's ethics provide the criteria that give them meaning; the ultimate measure of flourishing is not self-sufficiency or independence, but the ability to share the good with justice and generosity. We will now turn to these MacIntyrean criteria of normativity.

3. Flourishing, Vulnerability, and Just Generosity in MacIntyre

In *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999), Alasdair MacIntyre formulates an anthropology that integrates the biological, moral, and social dimensions of human life under a radical assumption: vulnerability is not an accident to be remedied, but an ontological condition that determines how human beings can achieve excellence. Unlike the Enlightenment ideal of autonomy, MacIntyre argues that human beings are essentially rational dependent animals, whose practical rationality is forged in contexts of care, learning, and cooperation (1999, ix–xiii). From a biological point of view, human beings belong to a species whose survival requires long periods of dependence, not only in childhood and old age, but also in the contingencies of illness, disability, or helplessness. On the moral level, a key element of Aristotelian flourishing, this condition implies that human good cannot be defined without reference to the relationships of mutual aid and recognition that sustain life (Galindo 2024, 133–146). Vulnerability, then, is not a mere limitation, but the very possibility of flourishing: because we are needy, we can receive and care; because we are fragile, we can recognize interdependence as the basis of justice and friendship.

In this perspective, practical rationality is not opposed to the body or emotion, but is exercised through them. Thus, MacIntyre shifts the focus of virtue ethics from Aristotelian self-sufficiency to a rationality embodied in corporeality (MacIntyre 2006; Montoya Camacho and Giménez Amaya 2024). Moral deliberation does not consist of the calculation of the isolated agent, but rather the discernment of what is good for the common good of a community of vulnerable beings. In this sense, vulnerability becomes an epistemic and moral principle: only those who recognize their own poverty can deliberate fairly on the needs of others (Giménez Amaya and Lombo 2022).

3.1. Virtues Based on the Recognition of Dependence

MacIntyrean anthropology introduces a set of virtues based on the recognition of dependence, which broaden Aristotle's classical horizon. Including Thomas Aquinas, MacIntyre affirms that these virtues do not seek moral self-sufficiency, but rather the cooperation that makes it possible to sustain life in common. MacIntyre distinguishes two groups: the virtues of giving—mercy, just generosity, prudence, and industriousness—and those of receiving—gratitude, courtesy toward imperfect gifts, and understanding of others' shortcomings (1999, 124–128). Both categories express the same principle: human beings can only flourish in community, within a network of recognized reciprocity.

This reciprocity does not imply symmetry. Human relationships are marked by asymmetry of abilities and circumstances. Those who give do so because they have received; those who receive do so with gratitude, not submission. In this dynamic, the virtues of dependence articulate justice and mercy, balancing right and gift. MacIntyre draws on Thomistic moral theology to interpret mercy as a rational virtue that moves the agent to alleviate the misery of the other through recognition of a shared human need (Aquinas 1972, II–II q. 30 a. 3). Mercy, thus understood, is a secular virtue founded theologically (MacIntyre 1999, 124). Its structure—recognition, emotion, and action—reveals the practical texture of the virtues of care: emotions are rationally educable and can become means of discernment and moral action mediating between human desire and the good that must be achieved (Hernández 2022, 54).

In this way, MacIntyre develops an ethic of dependent flourishing, in which moral perfection does not consist in freeing oneself from others, but in caring and allowing oneself to be cared for. The good life is not that of the one who dominates, but that of the one who participates in a community that sustains and is sustained. Therefore, the virtues of recognizing dependence constitute the core of a new understanding of the common good: human goods are only achieved and preserved in cooperative practices that integrate individual frailties into the collective fabric of excellence.

3.2. Just Generosity as the Core of Community Reciprocity

Among these virtues, just generosity occupies a central place (MacIntyre 1999, 119–124 and 157–159; Montoya Camacho and Giménez Amaya 2025). The Scottish philosopher presents it as the virtue that overcomes the false dichotomy between justice and generosity:

If, for example, we search for a name for the central virtue exhibited in relationships of receiving and giving, we will find that neither 'generosity' nor

'justice', as these have been commonly understood, will quite supply what is needed, since according to most understandings of the virtues one can be generous without being just and just without being generous, while the central virtue required to sustain this kind of receiving and giving has aspects both of generosity and justice. (MacIntyre 1999, 120)

On the one hand, justice aims to give everyone their due, while generosity seems to exceed what is owed. But when human interdependence is recognized, that distinction becomes blurred: what is mine is always mediated by what is ours. Fair generosity expresses that original reciprocity that makes community possible. Just generosity is rational in an embodied sense: it arises from the bodily experience of vulnerability, dependence, and care, from the exchange of services and gratitude for goods received. Moral deliberation does not start from calculation, but from the memory of the gift within the framework of a tradition. Hence MacIntyre argues that gratitude is a form of justice, because by learning what it means to care for someone, we can fully understand what we owe to those who once cared for us (1999, 139). This awareness of debt shapes a humble practical rationality, conscious that justice without gratitude becomes calculation and generosity without justice becomes sentimentality. Therefore, just generosity is an expanded form of justice that includes the recognition of unpayable debts and openness to mercy.

The virtue of just generosity also has a social and communal dimension. It forges characters capable of sharing burdens and benefits, of being grateful for what they have received, and of resisting the temptation to absolutize self-sufficiency (MacIntyre 1999). At the social level, it anchors deliberation on the common good: flourishing communities are open networks of reciprocity that prioritize care for the vulnerable and exercise hospitality (Montoya Camacho and Giménez Amaya 2025). According to MacIntyre, when the virtues of just generosity and common deliberation are lacking, communities are always prone to corruption by narrow-mindedness, complacency, prejudice against strangers, and a variety of other deformations, including those derived from the cult of local community (MacIntyre 1999, 142). In this way, hospitality appears as a social expression of mercy and a condition of social justice.

For MacIntyre, moral traditions are the framework within which these virtues acquire their meaning. In *After Virtue*, he presents tradition as a narrative that extends over time, in which certain goods are pursued and continually redefined (2007, 226–243). This idea of tradition introduces temporality and vulnerability into the structure of the good: human goods are fragile and need to be renewed in each generation. Therefore, human flourishing depends not only on individual virtue, but also on the narrative memory of the community. Ethics ceases to be a

system of rules and becomes a shared story where dependence is recognized as a source of virtue.

In this context—that of community cultures—MacIntyre illustrates just generosity with the Lakota term *wancantognaka*, which designates “a generosity that I owe to all those others who also owe it to me” (MacIntyre 1999, 120). This word expresses the practical unity of justice and mercy, and the recognition of reciprocal responsibility in the family and the tribe. It is not a unilateral gift, but a mutual moral obligation that preserves the dignity of both the giver and the receiver. In it, justice and compassion are not opposed, but rather imply each other: to do justice is to be generous, and to be generous is to recognize what is just.

At this point, a comparison with the Rarámuri practice of *kórima* will lead us to a deeper understanding of the connections between vulnerability, virtue, and flourishing in these communities. Like *wancantognaka*, *kórima* dissolves the hierarchy between benefactor and beneficiary (Galindo 2025). In both cases, generosity is a reciprocal obligation, and shared vulnerability forms the basis of the moral order. These practices show, in anthropological terms, what MacIntyre develops philosophically: the virtue of just generosity as the foundation of the good of a community.

The link between vulnerability and flourishing takes on a particular density in this framework. If Aristotle had defined *ευδαιμονία* as the activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, MacIntyre shows that such activity is always social and dependent. Human flourishing cannot be understood without the bonds of care that sustain existence. Therefore, returning to what has already been stated: vulnerability is not an obstacle to be overcome, but the condition of possibility for virtue. Dependence becomes the terrain where mercy, gratitude, and just generosity flourish.

Just generosity, therefore, is also a principle of shared practical rationality. There is no practical reasoner of integrity, MacIntyre asserts, without the ability to reason socially about the common good (1999, 129–146). Identifying one’s own goods requires doing so in relation to the goods of others, through joint deliberation. Hence, justice must attend to both those who contribute and those who need to receive. Fair generosity regulates this asymmetrical relationship through prudence, integrating equity with compassion. The result is not utopian communitarianism, but an anthropology of limits: recognizing that our moral excellence depends on how we treat the vulnerability of others.

Human flourishing, from this perspective, can be defined as the fullness of a good life lived with and for others, in communities where mutual dependence becomes a school of virtue. The common good is not the sum of individual goods, but the network of reciprocities that allows each member to develop. Therefore, the virtue of just generosity not only mediates the relationship between justice

and mercy, but also articulates the relationship between the individual and the community. It condenses the moral dimension of flourishing, i.e., giving what is due with love and receiving what is given with gratitude.

Ultimately, MacIntyre's ethic of vulnerability shows that *ευδαιμονία* is not a state of self-sufficiency, but an activity of mutual care. Just generosity is precisely the virtue that transforms fragility into communion and orders gratitude, mercy, and justice into a single practical act. In this way, MacIntyre's thinking converges with the traditions of reciprocity: the good life is measured by the ability to recognize what has been received and to respond accordingly. Hence, just generosity, in its logic of giving and receiving, offers a solid foundation for religious community flourishing: it enables stable bonds, legitimizes authority as service, structures hospitality, and sustains liturgical and charitable practices as internal goods of common life. In short, it constitutes the core of an ethic of vulnerable, rational, and embodied flourishing, which prepares the ground for understanding how religious communities—where reciprocity is cultivated as a duty and a gift—can become authentic schools of virtue and goodness for the community.

4. Flourishing and Religious Community

From the Aristotelian and MacIntyrean perspective, the religious community can be understood as a school of virtue and flourishing: an environment in which shared practice orders desires, structures time, and shapes the moral character of its members. It is not an aggregate of individuals with common beliefs, but a way of life guided by internal goods that can only be achieved in cooperation and under shared standards of excellence. In this horizon, vulnerability is neither hidden nor pathologized: it is recognized as the starting point for moral learning and as a condition for flourishing. Therefore, the sick monk, the elderly brother, the pilgrim, or the poor are not burdens; they are mediations of the common good that call for the virtues of care, patience, and mercy.

In the Catholic Christian tradition, this anthropology of interdependence is expressed institutionally in community life, obedience, poverty, and hospitality (Aquinas 1972, II–II q. 186 a. 1; q. 188 aa. 6–7; q. 104 a. 3; q. 31 a. 1; MacIntyre 1999, 122–126; Benedict XVI 2009, nn. 53–58). Far from denying the self, these dimensions are practical exercises in embodied rationality: they order passions and external goods in order to safeguard the internal goods of the theological and communal life. Thomas Aquinas reminds us that the good of the individual is inseparable from the good of the multitude, because the law—and with it, moral life and the flourishing of individual life—is ordered to the common good (Aquinas 1972, I–II, q. 90 a. 2). In practical terms, this means that justice (giving each person his due), mercy (alleviating the misery of others), and generosity

(giving beyond what is strictly due) are learned and exercised in common, integrating convictions, habits, and services (Aquinas 1972, II–II q. 58 a. 1; q. 30 a. 3).

In this vein, mercy for Thomas Aquinas is not merely a compassionate affection; it is a virtue that directs the movement of affection toward action that relieves the indigence of others (Aquinas 1972, II–II, q. 30, a. 3). For this reason, mercy is considered “greater” among the moral virtues because of its proximity to charity, insofar as it participates in its form (Aquinas 1972, II–II, q. 30 a. 4). At the same time, justice ensures the universality and stability of that aid—it avoids favoritism and distributes burdens and benefits—while generosity (or liberality) preserves the gratuitousness of the gift by avoiding self-interested calculation (Aquinas 1972, II–II, q. 58 a. 1; q. 117 aa. 1–2). This triad—justice, mercy, generosity—therefore provides the conceptual framework for reading the life of a religious community as a regulated gift economy, where the demand for what is due and the overabundance of love are not opposed, but rather mutually reinforcing.

4.1. Theological-Moral Articulation: MacIntyre and Thomas Aquinas

At this point, MacIntyre’s proposal offers a bridge between Thomistic moral theology and an anthropology of vulnerability and dependence. As we have seen, the Scottish philosopher emphasizes that human excellence is forged in contexts of care and cooperative learning. Hence his insistence on the virtues of recognizing dependence—the virtues of giving (mercy, just generosity, prudence) and receiving (gratitude, courtesy in the face of imperfect gifts, understanding of others’ needs)—as conditions for flourishing together. Obedience itself, in this framework, is no longer understood as submission but appears as a rational act of trust that directs freedom toward the common good (Aquinas 1972, II–II q. 104 a. 3; MacIntyre 1999, 109–112). In this vein, as we have stated above, just generosity, as a MacIntyrean category, designates the practical unity of justice and mercy in societies of shared vulnerability. It is not optional benevolence or cold justice: it is the just way of being generous when interdependence is recognized. The memory of the gift received—parental care, education, community support—establishes a gratitude that, rationally, translates into action (MacIntyre 1999, 142). Thus, just generosity expands justice with the logic of the surplus characteristic of mercy; and, conversely, it confers on mercy the universal form of justice, protecting it from mere sentimentality (Aquinas 1972, II–II q. 30 a. 4; q. 58 a. 1).

In brief dialogue, we can mention once again the Rarámuri *kórima*—which we will develop in the following section—as a related cultural practice, understood not as charity but as a reciprocal right and duty to help those in need (Galindo,

2025). These anthropological references do not replace moral theorization, but they show how virtuous reciprocity is historically embodied and how just generosity can acquire institutional expression in religious communities and specific traditions.

In this light, the religious community appears as the place where MacIntyrean just generosity—arising from consideration of vulnerability—is trained and discerned in practice. Liturgy, fraternal correction, hospitality, the distribution of tasks, and care for the sick and poor establish habits that order the affections and consolidate embodied practical rationality. Authority is legitimized as service, not as domination: to command is to care; to obey is to cooperate in a good that cannot be achieved individually (Aquinas 1972, II–II q. 104 a. 5; MacIntyre 1999, 127–128). From this point on, community flourishing is no longer measured by institutional self-sufficiency but by the ability to sustain the most fragile. Furthermore, the classic Thomist thesis on the priority of the common good takes on social concreteness: giving and receiving are integrated into networks of open reciprocity, which avoid identity closure and favor hospitality toward strangers (Aquinas 1972, I–II, q. 90 a. 2; II–II q. 31 a. 1; MacIntyre 1999, 122–127). When this is lacking, the community drifts into closed self-referentiality. In this sense, laws or rules do not replace virtue, but rather facilitate its learning by inscribing it in ongoing practices with clear internal goods for the community (MacIntyre 1999, 160).

4.2. *Just Generosity as the Foundation of Community Flourishing*

Understood in this way, the religious community is a laboratory for flourishing: it turns vulnerability into virtue and dependence into communion. Just generosity regulates not only material exchanges, but also spiritual ones—correction, consolation, intercession—and gives common life an *ethos* that integrates right and gift. Therefore, to speak of flourishing from MacIntyre and Thomas Aquinas is not to refer to psychological states, but to an activity in which one's own good is achieved by participating in goods that exceed the individual (Aquinas 1972, I–II q. 90 a. 2; MacIntyre 1999).

In short, the virtue of just generosity is offered as a strong foundation for the flourishing of religious communities: by articulating justice, mercy, and generosity in stable practices, it keeps networks of reciprocity open, legitimizes authority as service, and preserves the dignity of both the giver and the receiver. In this way, vulnerability ceases to be a paralyzing limitation and becomes a school of moral excellence and virtuous flourishing. The following section will delve in greater detail into how these dynamics are embodied in traditions and specific cases, showing the formative power of virtuous reciprocity for the common good, as in the case of *kórima*.

5. The Case of the Rarámuri-pagótuame

Having established the theoretical framework in the previous sections, particularly the notion of Aristotelian eudaimonia and the imperative of just generosity and recognition of vulnerability in Alasdair MacIntyre, it is time to complement the philosophical and theological perspectives with the ethnographic. The case of the Rarámuri-pagótuame, an indigenous population in northwestern Mexico, offers a concrete and living example of how an integral worldview fuses community ethics, religious meaning, and practices of reciprocity to generate a space for human flourishing, even in conditions of marked material poverty and geographical isolation. This section will focus on a synthetic presentation of the identity, the historical-geographical context, and the worldview of this people, which is fundamental to understanding why their axial practice, *kórima* (which will be analyzed in section 6), can be interpreted as the concrete materialization of MacIntyre's virtue of just generosity, central to this author's conception of community as a place of flourishing.

5.1. Identity and the Result of Cultural Synthesis

The term *Rarámuri* is the self-designation of this indigenous people from the Sierra Tarahumara in the state of Chihuahua, Mexico, and translates as "the light-footed ones" or "runners" (INPI n.d.). The complete and central name for the study at hand is *Rarámuri-pagótuame*. This addition is not accidental; as mentioned in the introduction, *pagótuame* means "Christian" or "baptized," making the full name literally translate as "Christian man" or "baptized people." According to Pedro de Velasco, among the Rarámuri-pagótuame "there was a process of real acceptance and reworking of the Christianity preached by the Jesuits, which led to a new, integrated, and organic religious understanding" (De Velasco 1983, 26). Below, we will point out some specific aspects that account for their community specificity:

Rarámuri life takes place in the Sierra Tarahumara, a territory characterized by its complex terrain (deep ravines, extreme altitudes) and harsh climate, which imposes a condition of constant material precariousness. This geography has historically dictated a pattern of dispersed settlement, which contrasts sharply with the need to maintain a strong sense of community for survival (Colectivo EPUMx 2024). Physical dispersion is compensated for by intense social and cultural cohesion, which is activated through rituals and practices of obligatory reciprocity, making community life an existential imperative (Galindo 2025).

This composite identity is the result of a long process of evangelization that began with the arrival of Jesuit missionaries in the 17th century. It is essential to understand that this process did not generate mere syncretism but, as we have

pointed out, a profound cultural synthesis in which the pre-Hispanic and the Christian became indistinguishable in practice, enriching each other. The Rarámuri assimilated the worship of the creator and father God, in their ancient tradition associated with the Sun and known as *Onorúame* (Bonfiglioli 2008, 47), and the Virgin Mary, in their tradition, *Eyerúame*: she who is mother (Bonfiglioli 2008, 55), who is associated with the moon and is the center of pre-Hispanic dance and song rituals such as the *Yúmari* and the *Danza del Matachín*, where religious meaning and social order reinforce each other.

The Rarámuri faith is, above all, a religion lived in action and community, as opposed to a disembodied spirituality. To be *Rarámuri-pagótuame* means to believe in *Onorúame* and his saving will, becoming a people and a community (Mireles 2025). This synthesis was an act of creative resistance (Robles 1991, 67). The Rarámuri people absorbed Christian concepts and reinterpreted them through their own dual categories (Father/Mother, Sun/Moon), preserving their ancestral social and ceremonial structures under the mantle of the Christian faith (Bonfiglioli 2008). This ensured not only cultural continuity but also strengthened social cohesion in the face of external threats, providing an ethical framework that binds the community together and enables its physical and cultural survival.

Religion is not separate from everyday life; the experience of God occurs when one is in contact with others as a community (Mireles 2025).

5.2. Integral Worldview: God, Authority, and Armony

The key to understanding the flourishing of the Rarámuri lies in their integral worldview, which dissolves the barriers between the secular, the social, and the transcendent. In this system, survival and *ευδαιμονία* depend directly on the maintenance of order and harmony, which are managed through ritualized community structures and practices. Mireles, who has lived closely with them in the Jesuit mission, recounts:

The religious experience is not separate from everyday life. We experience God when we are in contact with others as a community. When everyday relationality is lost, we distance ourselves from the experience of God. God's daily action is found in the sharing of the Rarámuri community at every feast, in every offering before the cross. (Mireles 2025).

In the Rarámuri-Pagotúame worldview, social administration and morality are inherently linked to a mandate that seeks order and harmony within the community. Traditional authorities, led by the governor, or *síriame* (INPI n.d.), are figures who combine civil and moral leadership, and their primary function is to ensure cultural continuity and harmony among the people (Robles 1991, 45).

This authority is comprehensive: the governor and the rest of the officials (generals, captains, majors, among others) reflect in their actions the deep link between social life and beliefs, giving community rules an ethical weight that differentiates them from mere state law (Robles 1991, 98–102).

Robles (1991) addresses the organization of the community at the beginning of his analysis. In this system, the traditional governor and his assistants (prosecutors, captains) do not exercise secular power, but act as moral and spiritual leaders who have a mandate to preserve harmony and unity (Robles 1991, 48–90). The primary function of this authority is to ensure cultural continuity and fraternal life, which is in line with the belief that social order is a reflection of divine will. The Rarámuri:

They consolidated their government as a service desired and ordained by God, who provides shepherds to care for and gather the people, to judge crimes paternalistically and reconcile those who stray, to organize festivals as sacraments of 'being a Rarámuri people' (Robles 1991, 54).

The foundation of Rarámuri authority is, above all, an act of service and collaboration with the divine. Its ancestral value is centered on service and not domination (Robles 1991, 54), a key characteristic that allowed its leaders to act in the name of God and tradition. The purpose of this authority is eminently social and spiritual: to collaborate with God in continually restoring harmony among the people and preserving their fraternal life (Robles 1991, 45). This approach is intrinsic to their “utopia of fraternity,” which requires sharing and leveling differences (Robles 1991, 60), ensuring that leadership fulfills a supportive rather than an imposing role.

The purpose of Rarámuri authority is thus the preservation of moral order and the balance of the community. This model of leadership, focused on service and virtue, lays the foundation for the study of *kórima* as a practice of just generosity necessary for the survival of the group. In this sense, it is useful to recall the way in which MacIntyre defines human communities as “institutionalized networks of giving and receiving” (MacIntyre 1999, 102) in which members assume roles of responsibility and power over one another. The author distinguishes that these relationships can be guided according to the norms of flourishing, when power is placed at the service of the person over whom it is exercised, or of hierarchy, when a relationship of domination is established that frustrates human beings in the pursuit of their goods (MacIntyre 1999, 102–103). Rarámuri authority, being based on moral preaching and seeking harmony and community balance as its supreme goal, embodies the first of these options: it is a form of power that is exercised exclusively in the service of the flourishing of others and the network of interdependence, never as a means of domination. Therefore, it is the ideal

social framework for the virtue of just generosity, which we will address in the following section, linking it to the practice of *kórima*.

Similarly, their economy is not perceived as a profane activity but as a ritual responsibility; mechanisms for redistributing surpluses are understood as fulfilling God's project for community brotherhood, while accumulation is condemned as a fundamental sin that disrupts the moral order (Robles 1991, 54, 70, 79). This interdependence is so radical that the very survival of the cosmos depends on the maintenance of ritual order; the Rarámuri believe that through their feasts and dances, they actively assist God in His struggle to sustain the universe and prevent its collapse into chaos (Robles 1991, 64, 73, 104). Consequently, human flourishing, or eudaimonia, is attained only through communion with the entire universe, where individual well-being is inseparable from the harmony of the community and its relationship with God, whom they address as "Father-Mother" (Robles 1991, 74, 76, 89).

6. *Kórima*: Just Generosity as a Practice of Community Flourishing

The preceding sections have established two pillars of argument: first, that human flourishing (ευδαιμονία) requires a morally ordered community to manage the vulnerability inherent in the condition of Dependent Rational Animals (MacIntyre 1999); and second, that the Rarámuri-pagótuame people have built a society where the moral, the civil, and the religious are inseparable, as demonstrated by the figure of their traditional authority, which seeks social harmony (Robles 1991). The purpose of this section is to demonstrate that the practice of *kórima* is, for the Rarámuri people, the purest ethnographic manifestation of the virtue of just generosity proposed by Alasdair MacIntyre. We argue that, in the context of the Sierra Tarahumara, *kórima* transcends mere charity or optional altruism to become a mandatory ethical institution that ensures the maintenance of the community as an interdependent system. In this way, the Rarámuri moral system offers an epistemology of charity (Galindo 2025) that validates the need for the virtues of vulnerability for the development of practical reason.

6.1. *Kórima in the Rarámuri Context: An Obligatory Practice*

The term *kórima* is fundamental to the Rarámuri worldview. It is often superficially translated as "giving" or "sharing," but its meaning, as we pointed out in the introduction to this article, is much deeper and encompasses an obligation of continuous reciprocity that sustains the social and economic network of the community. This practice is not based on surplus or charity, but

on the needs of others and the conviction that individual survival is intrinsically dependent on the health of the collective.

The phenomenon of *kórima* must be understood in light of the harsh living conditions in the Sierra Tarahumara and the moral structure of the community. The land is difficult, resources are scarce, and threats to life are constant (INPI n.d.), making vulnerability not a contingency but a perennial condition of existence. Therefore, the act of giving is not an act of supererogation, but a primary moral responsibility imposed by the community to manage that shared vulnerability. This obligation is reinforced by traditional authority, whose sermons or advice, as we have seen in the previous section, constantly remind the community of moral principles and the need for community contribution. Failure to participate in the *kórima* thus becomes a moral failure that threatens social harmony and, by extension, the very life of the community.

What distinguishes *kórima* from Western charity is its nature as a social debt and the absence of hierarchy. There is no superior donor and inferior recipient. The giver knows that tomorrow he may be the recipient, and the act of giving is seen as an investment in the social capital of the community. *Kórima* establishes a constant flow of goods (food, seeds, labor) that functions as mutual insurance against scarcity. In this sense, *kórima* acts as a law of life that guarantees subsistence and is ontologically linked to the Rarámuri identity itself (Galindo 2025).

6.2. *Kórima as MacIntyre's Virtue of Just Generosity*

As we have explained in this article, Alasdair MacIntyre, in *Dependent Rational Animals*, argues that the virtue of just generosity is that which allows us to recognize and respond to our own and others' vulnerability. This virtue is indispensable for human beings to flourish. MacIntyre, as we mentioned before, introduces the concept of the Native American Lakota virtue *wancantognaka*, which is "a generosity that I owe to all those others who also owe it to me" (MacIntyre 1999, 120) to illustrate a morality where generosity is the first response to need. The connection with *kórima* is direct because, like it, it also operates as a moral imperative and a way of life that is constitutive of the identity of the Rarámuri moral agent.

If just generosity is the virtue that sustains practical reason by ensuring that everyone's basic needs are met, then *kórima* is the institutionalized practice that makes that virtue operational in the Sierra Tarahumara. The characteristics of *kórima* overlap perfectly with MacIntyre's formulation: it arises from an explicit recognition of dependence, it is a mutual obligation without which social practice would collapse, and its guiding principle is the priority of need rather than arithmetic equity. Therefore, *kórima* is not merely an object of ethnographic study,

but a model of practical rationality that demonstrates how a community can structure its life around the virtues of vulnerability.

6.3. *Kórima and the Theological-Moral Order of the Community*

The analysis of *kórima* cannot be separated from the theological-moral framework that legitimizes and imposes it. Reciprocity is an obligation that is integrated into the dual and harmonious Rarámuri worldview, honoring *Onorúame* (God the Father) and *Eyerúame* (God the Mother) mentioned in the first section of this text, which has been Christianized through evangelization. The link between the obligation to give, religious celebration, and survival is explicit in the community's moral discourse. The following excerpt from a Rarámuri sermon, quoted by Merrill (1988), is proof that the act of sharing food is not an option, but a divine requirement with existential consequences:

All of you should give fiestas and dance. Do not be lazy when fiestas and dances are being performed. Send to God that which God has put here, a calf, a kid. Everyone should pool their food, each contributing a little, and place it on the dance space to send to God. This is how it is. If you do these things, you will be given more days to live. Give fiestas with force and you also will have force. (Merrill 1988, POS 25.67%).

This obligation of ritualized reciprocity, which involves gathering your food and sending it to God through the communal offering, demonstrates that the act of sharing (*korima* in its broad sense) is the social practice that sustains life itself (you will be given more days to live). Reciprocity with one's neighbor during the feast is inseparable from reciprocity with the divine, and is a condition for personal and collective flourishing. Failure to participate in this reciprocity is not only a social failure, but a cosmic and moral failure that threatens the relationship with *Onorúame*, endangering harmony and, by extension, the very life of the community. In this sense, *kórima* is an institutionalized virtue that shapes character: the Rarámuri community demands fair generosity as a condition of membership, for one cannot be a good Rarámuri without practicing *kórima* and participating in the ceremonial cycle of offerings (Robles 1991, 80).

6.4. *Kórima and MacIntyre's Critique of Modernity*

The analysis of *kórima* as just generosity has a direct impact on MacIntyre's critique of liberal morality and its inadequacies in managing human vulnerability. In Western societies, generosity becomes an optional and meritorious choice, rather than an obligatory virtue. *Kórima* demonstrates the

superiority of the community model based on interdependence. In the Rarámuri model, dependence is the norm, generosity is justice, and virtue is collective, as the practice is sustained by community authority and consensus.

By proposing *kórima* as an “epistemology of charity” (Galindo, 2025), it is suggested that Rarámuri morality offers a practical and concrete answer to the problem posed by MacIntyre: how to live a flourishing and rational life while being inherently dependent. The Rarámuri case is, for all intents and purposes, empirical proof that human flourishing is only possible when just generosity is elevated to the status of a central political and social virtue, as MacIntyre referred to.

In this sense, *kórima* functions as the practical resolution to the tension between Aristotelian autarky and human vulnerability. While the magnanimous man of the Nicomachean Ethics might view dependency as a shadow on his excellence (Aristotle 2009, IV 1124b–1125a), the Rarámuri-pagótuame find in *kórima* a form of flourishing (eudaimonia) that is inherently communal. Here, the 'independent practical reasoner' proposed by MacIntyre is not a self-sufficient hero, but a member of a 'network of giving and receiving' (MacIntyre 1999, 99) where acknowledging need is not a failure, but a prerequisite for virtue.

7. Conclusions

The purpose of this article was to present the case of the Rarámuri-pagótuame as a concrete example where community worldview, social virtues, and religious meaning intertwine to provide the necessary elements for human flourishing (ευδαιμονία). To this end, Alasdair MacIntyre’s framework on interdependence and just generosity was introduced. We have argued that the Rarámuri concept of *kórima* is the concrete, institutionalized, and religiously obligatory embodiment of MacIntyrean just generosity, thus offering a model of practical rationality that validates the virtues of vulnerability.

Throughout the sections, three fundamental pillars were established that converge in the practice of *kórima* as a moral and social axis.

First, the Imperative of Vulnerability was demonstrated: the condition of Dependent Rational Animals requires communities to structure their moral practices not on liberal self-sufficiency, but on the explicit and mutual recognition of fragility. The Sierra Tarahumara, with its geographical hostility, imposes precariousness as the norm, making interdependence not an option, but a condition of survival.

Second, Authority in the Service of Harmony was analyzed: the Rarámuri system of authority, embodied in the governor (*síriame*), is a model of moral and theological leadership whose primary purpose is the preservation of social harmony. This authority, assisted by the council (*Sinnúame*) and legitimized by

faith, is exercised exclusively in the service of the flourishing of others and the network of community interdependence. Being subject to ethics and consensus, it prefigures the form of power that MacIntyre considers necessary for a community ordered toward virtue.

Finally, *La kórima* was established as Justice: *kórima* transcends the Western notion of optional charity or almsgiving. It is a mandatory ethical institution whose purpose is not arithmetic retribution, but the satisfaction of need. By operating as an intra-community social security system, it ensures that individual loss (due to illness or poor harvest) does not result in the collapse of the family unit. In this way, generosity becomes an act of social justice, a collective virtue that shapes the identity of the Rarámuri moral agent.

The value of the Rarámuri practice lies in its ability to offer a practical and sustainable response to MacIntyre's critique of liberal morality. While in Western modernity generosity is an act of individual supererogation, the Rarámuri model demands just generosity as a condition of membership. One cannot be a good Rarámuri without practicing *kórima* and participating in the ceremonial cycle of offerings that sustains the very life of the collective, as evidenced in the link between sharing and the divine demand for "more days of life."

Ultimately, the Rarámuri-pagótuame case is not a mere ethnographic curiosity, but a model of human flourishing that challenges the paradigm of radical autonomy. It demonstrates that *ευδαιμονία* is only achievable when dependence is recognized as the norm, and the virtue of just generosity is elevated to the status of a central political and social obligation. *Kórima* is, therefore, a proposal for an epistemology of charity that enriches contemporary moral thought by proving that practical reason is inseparable from institutionalized networks of interdependence.

This study opens up several lines of research, including a detailed comparison between the figure of the Rarámuri governor and MacIntyre's notion of virtuous authority, as well as a deeper theological exploration of the assimilation of Christian charity in the context of ancestral practices of reciprocity.

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