

# **A MacIntyrean Philosophy of Work**

Matthew Sinnicks

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### Acknowledgements and Dedication:

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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Carol and Michael Sinnicks.

## Abstract:

This thesis outlines and defends a MacIntyrean account of contemporary work. MacIntyre's virtue ethics seems to entail a wholesale rejection of the modern order; throughout his writings MacIntyre is highly critical of capitalism, large-scale modern institutions, management, regulation, and indeed of our whole 'emotivistic' culture (as he sees it) which he regards as being inimical to our potential to virtuously flourish. MacIntyre's mature period, from *After Virtue* (2007, originally published 1981) contains much that is relevant to a philosophy of work. I will develop and update MacIntyre's own arguments and I will also argue that contemporary working life can be more MacIntyrean than MacIntyre himself realises.

Because both work as a topic, and the relevant parts of MacIntyre's writings are extremely diverse, my strategy will be to examine the different key elements of a MacIntyrean philosophy of work without decontextualising the key notions of practices, virtues and institutions from MacIntyre's wider moral philosophy. I will argue that MacIntyre's key concept of a practice, the first stage in his definition of a virtue, is able to account for productive activities and can survive a variety of challenges. We are best able to make sense of the notion of the narrative unity of a whole life, the second stage in MacIntyre's definition of a virtue, if we distinguish between lived-narratives and the told-narratives that best allow us to understand our lives. Despite his broad endorsement of Marx's critique of capitalism, a MacIntyrean account of work differs from Marx's theory of alienation. I will argue that a fully MacIntyrean workplace will be small-scale, will not pressurise employees to identify with compartmentalised roles, and will allow trust to flourish. However, because MacIntyre overstates the extent to which people accept the definitions of 'success' that are dominant within modernity, he is unable to see the extent to which MacIntyrean communities can survive the threats posed by contemporary corporations. Another element of MacIntyre's account of work which needs modification is his critique of the character of the manager, and I will offer an emendation of this in order to make it applicable to contemporary forms of management.

Finally I show that distinctively modern phenomena of workplace governance and regulation can serve MacIntyrean ends and can allow us to codify broadly MacIntyrean workplace initiatives. However, because of the deep context-sensitivity of the key MacIntyrean notions: practices, narrative-unity, and communities, such measures resist detailed and explicit formulation. My aim is to defend MacIntyre, to deepen our understanding of what a MacIntyrean philosophy of work entails, and to show that and how good work exists even within modernity.

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## **Introduction**

### **MacIntyre's Philosophy**

Alasdair MacIntyre is one of the key figures in the resurgence of virtue ethics over the past few decades and *After Virtue* is his most important and influential text. It was the first major work of MacIntyre's mature period, and it is the work in which MacIntyre first outlined his conception of the virtues as depending on practices, narrative unity, and the concept of a tradition. Two subsequent books, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* developed the concept of tradition-based enquiry first outlined in *After Virtue*, and a fourth book, *Dependent Rational Animals* detailed the nature of human dependency and provided an enriched (and somewhat modified) conception of the virtues. Alongside these four works stand numerous important articles on an unusually wide range of topics. My aim in the present thesis is to develop, and sometimes to amend, MacIntyre's account of work in contemporary capitalist society, and in so doing to account for how we might flourish at work. Before embarking on this task, however, a brief introduction to MacIntyre's moral philosophy is in order.

Among the central contentions of *After Virtue* is the claim that modern morality and moral theory are deeply incoherent. MacIntyre argues that the Enlightenment project – the quest to provide a secular morality to which any rational person could assent (e.g. Kantianism and Utilitarianism) – has failed. Furthermore, MacIntyre argues that our culture is fundamentally emotivist and possesses only fragments of a (once) coherent morality. While MacIntyre disagrees with emotivism as an account of the meaning of moral terms, he argues that emotivism captures how moral terms are predominantly used in our culture. He says,

If emotivism is true... evaluative utterance can in the end have no point or use but the expression of my own feelings or attitudes and the transformation of the feelings and attitudes of others. I cannot genuinely appeal to impersonal criteria, for there are no impersonal criteria... The sole reality of distinctively moral discourse is the attempt to align the attitudes, feelings, preferences and choices of one another with its own. Others are always means, never ends.<sup>1</sup>

MacIntyre offers as evidence for this claim the fact that modern moral disagreements are apparently interminable, that debates between, for instance, those who advocate liberty and

those who advocate equality, between 'pro-life' groups and 'pro-choice' groups, can find no resolution because there is no way to secure rational moral assent within our culture. Much ink has been spilt by defenders of modern liberal society eager to dispel MacIntyre's worries about what they regard as the pluralism characteristic of modernity. While one of my aims is to show that we possess greater moral resources within modernity than MacIntyre sometimes suggests (especially in *After Virtue*), I will not do so by entering into this particular debate and will instead largely pre-suppose the truth of MacIntyre's diagnosis of our culture.

MacIntyre's definition of a virtue has three stages: practices, narrative unity, and traditions. Each of these three stages presupposes the former. Practices are the schools of the virtues. MacIntyre's definition of a practice is

any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.<sup>2</sup>

There is obviously a great deal to be unpacked from this definition, and that is the task of chapter 1. For MacIntyre a good life cannot merely consist in a set of arbitrarily chosen practices; the demands of different practices may conflict, so MacIntyre thinks our lives must be ordered according to a narrative unity. This unity is presupposed by the virtue of integrity (amongst others), which MacIntyre argues is a precondition of genuine moral agency. Again, I will outline and defend this stage of MacIntyre's definition of a virtue later and so will say no more about it here.

The third stage in MacIntyre's definition of a virtue is that of a tradition. Just as practices must be contextualised by narrative unity, both receive further contextualisation from traditions. MacIntyre defines a tradition as "an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition"<sup>3</sup>. Although it is of vital importance to the MacIntyrean project, this thesis will not devote any time to an extended discussion of traditions. There are several reasons for this. Firstly, MacIntyre has devoted two books to the subject, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, and to do justice to those works in addition to the ones I have focused on would pose scholarly challenges which would make it impossible to discuss working life in any depth. Secondly, since the publication of *Dependent Rational*

*Animals*, the role of traditions is, if still epistemologically central, *arguably* less central to MacIntyre's ethics because in that particular work MacIntyre defends a conception of metaphysical biology which he advances as a partial justification of morality. Here is not the place to pursue that argument, however. Moreover, if we give MacIntyre's tradition requirement an 'exclusivist' reading, it's clear that most people within modernity do not consciously consider themselves to be part of such a tradition and do not spend time engaged in an argument about the relevant goods of tradition, so the concept cannot shed much light on the problem of working life. On the other hand, if we give the tradition an 'inclusivist' reading and accept either that the liberal, Anglophone social order constitutes a tradition *or* that particular local communities are traditional in the relevant sense, then the notion of traditions does play an important part in the argument that follows, even if it does not do so explicitly. I leave it to the reader to decide whether this omission was well or ill-judged.

A number of important studies have demonstrated the connections between MacIntyre's earlier thought and his mature period<sup>4</sup>, but I will consider only his mature period. MacIntyre himself acknowledges that his thought underwent a significant change in the late 1970s<sup>5</sup> resulting in the publication of *After Virtue*.

### **Aims and Scope**

In "Moral Theory Put to the Question", presented at the American Philosophical Association conference 1994, MacIntyre claimed "in times of crisis theorists, like everyone else, are sustained by the continuing inarticulate, atheoretical goodness of those whose unexamined lives are well worth living."<sup>6</sup> That this is so is one reason to accord importance to philosophical reflection on, and empirical research, into everyday life. The importance of the ordinary itself underlines the importance of work. Most people spend around 50% of their waking lives at work. It is a central feature of human life, and as such any ethical theory concerned with how people actually live and how people actually might live (that is to say, any worthwhile ethical theory) is going to have some ramifications for our understanding of work.

Moreover, one central feature of MacIntyre's ethical theory is the belief that all moral philosophy presupposes a sociology. He says

every moral philosophy offers explicitly or implicitly at least a partial conceptual analysis of the relationship of an agent to his or her reasons, motives, intentions and actions, and in so



doing generally presupposes some claim that these concepts are embodied or at least can be in the real world... Thus it would generally be a decisive refutation of a moral philosophy to show that moral agency of its own account of the matter could never be socially embodied; and it also follows that we have not fully understood the claims of any moral philosophy until we have spelled out what its social embodiment would be<sup>7</sup>

The present thesis is a partial attempt to spell out how MacIntyre's ethics can be so embodied. That MacIntyre is so hostile to modernity might suggest that it is impossible to formulate a MacIntyrean account of contemporary work that contains anything other than outright hostility. Such an interpretation of MacIntyre would be a caricature. One of my aims in chapter 3 is to show that a MacIntyrean account of work resists reduction to a Marxist theory of alienation, and one of my overriding purposes is to demonstrate that MacIntyre's ethics is not hopelessly anachronistic<sup>8</sup>. MacIntyre's views on modernity are more subtle than this picture would suggest. In the 2007 preface to *After Virtue* MacIntyre states that where "the tradition of the virtues is regenerated, it is always in everyday life... through the engagement by plain persons in a variety of practices"<sup>9</sup>, in an interview he states "large scale politics has become barren"<sup>10</sup>, elsewhere that we must be utopians<sup>11</sup>, and elsewhere still that prudence dictates that we occasionally engage with mainstream politics<sup>12</sup>. Although I will not spend much time explicitly discussing MacIntyre's politics, it is impossible to flesh out a MacIntyrean philosophy of work that goes beyond a practices-virtues-institutions framework without addressing politics at least obliquely. The final three chapters attempt to account for working communities, the culture of management, and workplace governance without taking MacIntyre's arguments out of their political context but also without presupposing a solution to the evident tensions between the different strands of MacIntyre's political thought.

One thing this thesis is not, though were time and space not factors I would have liked it to have also been and that a complete MacIntyrean philosophy of work would need to be, is a history of both work and of philosophical reflections on work, or an examination of the deeper meaning of human labour. As such figures who are critically important to both MacIntyre's philosophy and such a history, figures like Aristotle, Aquinas, Marx, Ruskin, Weber etc. do not feature prominently.

## Thesis Plan

According to MacIntyre,

A virtue is an acquired human quality the possession and exercise of which tends to enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods<sup>13</sup>

This is MacIntyre's primary definition of a virtue and therefore the essence of his Eudaimonism, and so I will begin, in chapter 1, by outlining and defending MacIntyre's concept of a practice. I argue that the concept of a practice can accommodate productive practices and that because engagement in practices can involve a re-discovery of the goods and ends involved, those who are not at the cutting edge of practices can still be accounted practitioners. I will consider some epistemological problems raised by Russell Muirhead and will argue that an understanding of practices is available to those at the fringes of any particular practice-based community, and that practices admit of gradation, but where an activity is practice-like it stands in an even greater need of being well-institutionalised.

In chapter 2 I turn my attention to the second stage in MacIntyre's conception of a virtue, the narrative unity of life. Again I will defend MacIntyre and will show that many of the objections raised by Lippitt, Lamarque and Mulhall can not only be dealt with by MacIntyre but, in the case of the self-deception problem, which according to Lippitt results from the temptation implicit in narrative conceptions of the self for people to select the most flattering narrative rather than the most accurate, is actually part of what motivates MacIntyre's narrative unity requirement. Key to my strategy is the distinction between told and enacted narratives, which MacIntyre himself fails to explicitly draw but which I argue seems to be implicit in much of what he says, and clearly is compatible with his argument. Chapters 1 and 2 complete the purely theoretical part of this thesis, and ground much of the later discussion of working life.

In chapter 3 I begin to explore contemporary work and will contrast a MacIntyrean philosophy of work with Marx's theory of alienation. The early Marx's own reflections on alienation apply primarily to industrial factory work. Braverman's account of white-collar alienation is more plausible, but not sufficiently up-to-date to provide a compelling account of contemporary work, so we will explore the changes to the contemporary workplace

described by sociologist Richard Sennett. More broadly this chapter will provide a ground for the more detailed discussions of working life to follow.

Chapter 4 is a discussion of the worthwhile elements of emotion work, the problem of role identification and its threat to unity and integrity, and lastly the conditions of trust under which it becomes rational or desirable to engage in the difficult task of transforming oneself, particularly in the context of employment. For MacIntyre, the hard work of morality consists in the task of transforming our desires so that we aim at the good, and I will argue that for this healthy 'emotion work' to be possible, contexts must be relatively small-scale and that the threat to integrity posed by role-identification must be avoided. Ideally such work will take place under conditions in which genuine community, a relatively thick notion of trust, and genuine friendship are possible. At the heart of the chapter is a rejection of Christine Swanton's role ethics, which is incompatible with the conception of narrative unity defended in chapter 2.

Having outlined some of the optimal conditions for MacIntyrean work, our attention then turns to the prospects of communities in inhospitable working environments. I will argue that, despite MacIntyre's frequent criticisms of the dominant institutions of modernity, quasi-communities of resistance can survive inside such institutions. I will argue against John Dobson's claim that the modern firm is a new form of practice-based community, and (following Beadle) against Geoff Moore's claim that business itself can be a practice, but will argue for the claim that moral agency is sufficiently robust, and disengagement from modern work sufficiently widespread, that alienation and compartmentalisation can be avoided by most workers.

Having seen in chapters 4 and 5 that the modern workplace, if not usually conducive to flourishing, is not as deeply threatening to it as MacIntyre's philosophy sometimes seems to imply, the final two chapters will, in their different ways, consider the role of those 'in charge' of the modern workplace. Chapter 6 explores MacIntyre's critique of the manager, or rather what he calls the *character* of the manager. I will outline MacIntyre's notion of *characters*, which has received surprisingly little scholarly attention, in order to better understand MacIntyre's critique. I will show that MacIntyre overstates his case because his culturalist argument underplays the extent to which individuals can pay lip-service to the role requirements of management without being compartmentalised agents. MacIntyre argues that managerial expertise is impossible and that the *character* of the manager embodies emotivism. However, as this critique was first published in 1981, and because management has, ostensibly, changed a great deal in the intervening decades, I will explore the concept of

leadership in order to update MacIntyre's critique. I will argue that although leadership does not appear to depend on the kind of scientific expertise MacIntyre argued was invoked to justify the power and authority of technicist conceptions of management, such a justification is often still tacitly invoked. Furthermore, leadership remains an embodiment of emotivism.

In chapter 7 we turn away from the culture of management and back to the question of how workplaces might house practices, or be conducive to our virtuous flourishing. Our focus will primarily be on the governance of virtue, or how institutions might serve to protect and maintain a focus on internal goods. We will begin by examining Geoff Moore's attempt to codify MacIntyrean workplace initiatives. While governance is an especially important issue for MacIntyrean ethics, I will argue that Moore's account is defective because his system is incompatible with MacIntyre's account of moral education and in particular because it misinterprets MacIntyrean ethics in such a way that it becomes too close to the mere regulation of behaviour. Though I will also argue that we ought to recognise the importance of regulation. However, it is clear that regulation cannot itself provide the moral education that MacIntyre claims is provided by practices, but is crucial where work is not practice-based, and not intrinsically rewarding. What is appropriate to practices and institutions that house them, is not always what is appropriate to workplaces in which work is tedious and a mere imposition on the workforce. I will end by reformulating Moore's list of MacIntyrean desiderata in light on the arguments advanced in the preceding chapters.

By the end I aim to have shown what a MacIntyrean account of modern work is (though I have disagreed with MacIntyre himself about certain points), that such a MacIntyrean account can survive various challenges, and how work might be made such that it is more likely to be conducive to flourishing in MacIntyre's terms.

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<sup>1</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.24.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.187.

<sup>3</sup> *ibid*, p.222.

<sup>4</sup> I have in mind McMylor 1994, D'Andrea 2006, and Knight 2007.

<sup>5</sup> MacIntyre, 1998h, p.268.

<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre, 1994b cited by Solomon, 2003, p.147.

<sup>7</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.23.

<sup>8</sup> As has sometimes been claimed, for instance by Thomas Nagel and Martha Nussbaum, whose criticisms are expertly rebutted by Lutz, 2004, ch.5, and Paul Du Gay, 2000, whose claim that MacIntyre "regards science as profoundly immoral" (p.19) is entirely without warrant.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, xiii.

<sup>10</sup> MacIntyre, 1998g, p.265.

<sup>11</sup> MacIntyre, 2008a, p.5.

<sup>12</sup> MacIntyre, 2010c.

<sup>13</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.128.

## **Chapter 1: Practices**

For MacIntyre a 'practice' is the first of three stages in the development of his conception of a virtue, the second and third being the narrative unity of a human life and an account of what he calls a moral tradition respectively. Since MacIntyre uses the word 'practice' in a highly specific way, the first section of this chapter will clarify what a practice is for MacIntyre, and then to identify some ways in which this conception might be problematic. There are a number of possible criticisms of MacIntyre's conception of a 'practice' such as vagueness<sup>1</sup>, elitism, inability to account for productive practices<sup>2</sup> and so on which, I will attempt to show, carry little weight once we are clear about what a MacIntyrean practice is. In particular I will argue that because of the propensity of practices to allow those people engaged in them to discover and rediscover the goods and ends involved, the notion of 'practice' is importantly richer than that of a 'craft'. Section 1.2 will focus on epistemological worries about engagement in practices and in particular will consider the problem of the uninitiated distinguishing between practices and non-practices. I will argue that although the goods internal to a practice are only available to those engaged in those practices, this engagement admits of gradation, so those at the fringes of a practice can still know enough about it to assess it, and the goods internal to it, adequately. Because this admission that engagement is partial seems to threaten the conclusion of section 1.1, section 1.3 will examine the institutional preconditions of practices and also borderline practices that do not fit easily into either the category of clear cut practices or the category of non-practices. In this final section I will attempt to show that MacIntyre's account of the role of institutions is correct and that borderline practices are to count as practices only if they are well supported by institutions.

### **1.1 The Definition of a Practice.**

In this section I will be concerned to outline the range and scope of MacIntyre's concept of a 'practice'. MacIntyre's definition of a practice is notorious for its complexity:

By a 'practice' I am going to mean any coherent and complex form of socially established co-operative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and

human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended.<sup>3</sup>

MacIntyre attempts to illuminate this definition by giving some examples of what he takes to be practices. Architecture, chess, portrait painting, physics, football and farming are practices, whilst bricklaying, throwing or kicking a ball with skill, and planting turnips are not. Let us consider the significant clauses in MacIntyre's definition in turn to see why he makes these distinctions. Clearly each item on MacIntyre's list of practices is coherent and it is equally clear that bricklaying, throwing a ball, and planting turnips etc. are also unified and sufficiently comprehensible to be considered coherent.

It might be argued that almost any human action is in some way complex. Skilfully throwing a ball is complex in that it requires a sensitive judgment of distance, weight, a sense of timing, and a good deal of dexterity and of course the biological processes that underpin even the most inept attempt at an accurate throw are complex. Complexity conceived of abstractly is clearly going to be of no use to us, so let us focus on the most productive of MacIntyre's list of practices and on the related and most banal and simple item on his list of non-practices: farming and the planting of turnips. Given that the arts are so obviously complex in terms of development and history, I take it that to so focus is to challenge MacIntyre's definition as robustly as possible.

In one sense it does seem natural to say that farming is complex and planting turnips is not. At the very least it is clearly true that farming as a whole is more complex than planting turnips on the grounds that the former can subsume the latter but the converse does not hold. One way to solve this problem might involve stipulating that an activity is a genuine candidate for the status of 'practice' if it is sufficiently complex to be interesting to the person doing it. If this is the case then the distinction between a practice and a non-practice is in danger of becoming one of subjective preference: one person may find planting rows of turnips to be sufficiently complex to be interesting and thus a source of enjoyment, whilst another is hopelessly dissatisfied with any agricultural role that stops short of full farming. Clearly this interpretation is not what MacIntyre intends. Indeed, he says, "a practice, in the sense intended, is never just a set of technical skills, even when directed towards some unified purpose and even if the exercise of those skills can on occasion be valued or enjoyed for their own sake."<sup>4</sup>

However, MacIntyre never fully explains what he means by complexity and how it might separate practices from non-practices, and this is also the case for his discussion of social establishment and co-operation. Whilst farming is more clearly socially established

than turnip planting, and in virtue of being a more diverse and multi-faceted activity tends to require more co-operation, turnip planting is nevertheless at least minimally co-operative in that each planter must learn from a more seasoned planter something about the relevant tools and techniques involved, and is, or might easily be, socially established. It seems that as yet we have no reason to draw those distinctions - between farming and planting turnips, football and throwing a ball, architecture and brick-laying - that MacIntyre himself draws.

Perhaps the notions of internal goods or standards of excellence will enable us to understand MacIntyre's intended distinction. For MacIntyre, internal goods are those goods which cannot be achieved in any way other than engaging in the activity in question and are to be contrasted with external goods, examples of which include power, prestige, and money<sup>5</sup>. Unlike internal goods, external goods can always be achieved in a variety of ways and are characteristically always someone's property and possession<sup>6</sup>. Perhaps there is no good that is unique to planting turnips, but there is certainly no incoherence in supposing that someone might enjoy the planting of root vegetables more generally in such a way that the goods enjoyed are internal and are realised in the course of trying to achieve the appropriate standards of excellence, so we are still unable to draw just the distinction that MacIntyre wants. It is important to note that, while there is no incoherence in imagining this enthusiastic turnip planter, there is also no reason to think that turnip planting really does contain the internal goods that would warrant this enthusiasm. No-one has as yet, as far as I know, made such claims about turnip planting. We will return to this point later.

The final clause in MacIntyre's definition of practice is the most demanding and the most difficult to decipher. If the realisation of these internal goods must have "the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are *systematically extended*" (my emphasis), then planting turnips does seem to be excluded, but so does farming. Farming and the turnip planting both have ends and goods but is it far from clear exactly how these are to be systematically extended. In elaborating this final and crucial clause of his definition, MacIntyre says, "Practices never have a goal or goals fixed for all time - painting has no such goal nor has physics - but the goods themselves are transmuted by the history of the activity."<sup>7</sup> The great painters, the great physicists, and even the great sports people transform their disciplines and these practices have histories characterised by systematic extensions of conceptions of ends and goods. This is not however true of the history of planting turnips, and farming seems in this respect closer to planting turnips than it does to physics or painting. Farming has changed over time, with the advent of new technologies and growth in the relevant scientific knowledge, but this history is not

characterised by the same transmutation of goals as the histories of painting, physics, or even cricket. The ends of farming do and must include the production of food. The goals and ends of painting and physics on the other hand are susceptible to fairly significant change, and although the ends of batting in cricket must and do include scoring runs, what constitutes a good shot, a pure technique, a good total or run rate have changed in a variety of ways and to a degree that again does not seem to be true of farming.

Without some way of interpreting this 'systematic extension' clause that allows for the inclusion of productive practices, MacIntyre's own list of examples of practices and non-practices is unsustainable and would leave him facing a choice between excluding productive crafts from his list of practices altogether (the exclusive option) and settling for an elitism akin to that of Aristotle, or to reduce the strictness of his requirements - thereby including the comparatively simple, but skilful and potentially enjoyable activities he had sought to exclude. The latter (inclusive option) would leave him in a position akin to that of Sennett, a thinker with whom he is sometimes compared.<sup>8</sup>

Whereas MacIntyre uses the word 'practice' far more narrowly than it is ordinarily used, Sennett uses the words 'craft' and 'craftsmanship' in senses that are far broader than ordinary usage. For Sennett, 'craftsmanship' names the desire to do a job well and a 'craft' extends beyond the concept of skilled manual labour to any activity that requires skill, commitment and judgement. Examples might include computer programming, musical performance, parenting, etc. Sennett says that "three basic abilities are the foundation of craftsmanship. These are the ability to localise, to question, and to open up. The first involves making a matter concrete, the second reflecting on its qualities, the third expanding its sense"<sup>9</sup> and drawing on intuitive leaps to stimulate fresh thinking. It is easy to see how these three abilities allow us to distinguish between a craft and a non-craft, ruling out for instance certain tedious and uninvolved jobs such as telesales or assembly line work, and might allow someone to achieve the goods internal to an activity without the apparent difficulties involved in MacIntyre's formulation of practices, in particular the difficulties involved in cashing out what MacIntyre might mean by 'systematic extension' in relation to productive activities.

However even as things stand there is one attractive aspect of MacIntyre's account missing from Sennett's: co-operation and sociability. Sennett admits that craft "is not character forming in relation to other people" and that craftsmanship is "a very old-fashioned virtue, though it is not a sociable virtue"<sup>10</sup>. Sennett has been criticised for the lack of ethical content of his theory<sup>11</sup>. This is because the focus of a craft is solely on the quality of the work. Craftsmanship can furnish an individual with dignity and self-respect, but it need not,



for instance, lead to mutual respect, and this is so despite the fact that craft is clearly socially established and despite the fact that insofar as all crafts must be taught, it is also co-operative. Sennett's aims are not MacIntyre's aims, but the former does seem to have missed this essential sociability.

Even throwing a ball with skill admits of the three criteria advanced by Sennett. When an attempted throw goes awry the thrower can localise through thinking about whether it is the weight of the ball or the atmospheric conditions that intervened, whether some other way of gripping or releasing the ball might be more effective, etc. Given that Sennett defines questioning as “dwelling in an incipient state”<sup>12</sup>, it is clear that the thrower can also question. Finally, it is clear that the thrower can also open up the question. Sennett says “[t]he capacity to open up a problem draws on intuitive leaps, specifically on its powers to draw unlike domains close to one another and to preserve tacit knowledge in the leap between them”<sup>13</sup>. The thrower may open up the question by throwing the ball like a boomerang or a javelin when faced with a peculiar situation. Sennett might be able to exclude the most drearily repetitive activities from craft-status, but little else. If this is what the concept of a practice must boil down to then the internal goods seem very minimal indeed. Fortunately for MacIntyre this is not all there is to be said and with a little interpretative work, we can give more sense to MacIntyre's problematic "systematic extensions of conceptions of goods and ends" clause and sidestep the exclusive/inclusive dilemma altogether.

As we saw, read in light of his comments about the historicity of practices, MacIntyre's 'systematic extension' clause seems to entail that the notion of a practice must either be unacceptably exclusive or so inclusive that it becomes almost vacuous and stands in need of supplementation by something like Sennett's account of craftsmanship. However, although MacIntyre never fully explains what he means by 'systematic extension' he does leave clues about how we might rescue the notion of a practice from these opposing fates. In the post-script to the second edition of 'After Virtue' MacIntyre notes that practices are "those modes of activity within which ends have to be discovered and rediscovered, and means devised to pursue them"<sup>14</sup>. If it were only the case that ends had to be discovered then it would be hard to resist the strongly historicised reading that would rule farming out of contention for the status of 'practice', but as the *rediscovery* of ends is part of a practice this need not be so. A systematic extension then need not be aggregative. Instead we should read 'systematic extension' as being opposed to piecemeal extensions, extensions in which one aspect of a practice is extended without that extension having some relevance or bearing to a greater whole. When someone is in the process of becoming a farmer he or she does not learn

how to carry out one task in isolation from how it is interconnected with a whole host of other tasks. Here we have a way of understanding the 'systematic extension' clause that is not only compatible with the weaker historicism of the *rediscovery* of ends, but one which also fits well with the requirement that practices be complex.

A systematic extension in which ends are only discovered rather than both discovered and rediscovered suggests that only those activities in which innovation is part of the aim, such as the arts and sciences, could count as practices and perhaps even that only those capable of significant innovations could count as genuine practitioners. This is because an outright discovery is liable to change the practice as a whole. In this case the likes of Einstein, Picasso, and Don Bradman would be almost alone as practitioners in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, joined only by a handful of other innovative greats. A systematic extension that involves the *rediscovery* of ends and goals on the other hand allows that individual practitioners and groups of practitioners can deepen their understanding of a practice by *rediscovering* for themselves what prior and contemporary practitioners have already learned, so when a farmer or a painter or a physicist learns the skills necessary to partake in those respective practices they are both personally discovering and historically *rediscovering* the ends and goods involved. So whilst we cannot spell out the goods and ends involved without direct experience of farming, painting or physics, we can at least see how MacIntyre's notion of a practice is able to cater for productive practices in addition to artistic and intellectual practices and thereby able to maintain a categorical distinction between activities such as farming and turnip planting.

What then are we to say about the absence of sociability in Sennett's conception of a craft? How are practices intrinsically "character-forming in relation to other people"? Practices are intrinsically character-forming because virtues, which such discovery and *rediscovery* of goods enables us to acquire, are not identical to skills. Learning a skill does very often require at least a minimal degree of co-operation and sociability in that it must initially be taught but what it requires most of all is repetition. Before elaborating the 'systematic extension' clause we noted that complexity, co-operation, and social establishment could be considered somewhat thin notions. Having made sense of that clause in light of the notion of *rediscovering* ends and goods we are now able to see that the complexity, co-operation, and social establishment must be of a sufficiently high level that such discovery is possible. Planting turnips is not sufficiently complex or co-operative for the ends and goods to admit of discovery and re-discovery. One turnip planter may be more efficient than another, one craftsman may be more skilful than another, and the lesser of

either pair can only hope to catch up by trying harder and repeating the task again and again in order to refine their skill, but a superior practitioner knows more about the ends and goals of the particular practice than does a newcomer. The newcomer is inferior and inadequate in a way that can only be remedied by acknowledging that fact and learning from teachers, contemporaries and/or historical predecessors, learning not simply how, but what it is they are engaged in doing.

Because the systematic extension of ends can take the form of rediscovery, MacIntyre's conception of a practice offers a richer account than that provided by Sennett's conception of craftsmanship. A craft involves the cultivation of skill and the production of good work whereas a practice additionally involves a continuing process of discovery and rediscovery. So while the goods internal to a practice must remain partially opaque to anyone who does not engage in that particular practice, it is clear that the concept of a practice is neither unduly vague nor unduly elitist and can account for productive practices. MacIntyre's motivation for developing his concept of a practice as he does is because he believes that practices are 'schools for the virtues'. Notice that the concept of a practice is such that anyone engaged in a practice will need the humility and honesty required to subordinate themselves to superior fellow practitioners, to give and receive criticism, and to engage in the continued conversation of the practice in question if they are to learn what they must. In this sense engagement in a practice can be extremely demanding. It is to the cognitive features of practices that we now turn.

## **1.2 Muirhead's 'Leap of Faith' and Knowledge of Goods.**

As we have seen above, MacIntyre's conception of a practice is not elitist or exclusive in any problematic sense. We have also noted that for MacIntyre the goods internal to practices are only fully knowable by those engaged in each particular practice. Whilst this engagement criterion, as we shall call it, understood in terms of both discovery and rediscovery, helps MacIntyre to avoid an excessive, intellectualised and elitist historicism, it does itself create a different set of problems which can be codified as:

i) *The Decision problem*: if one cannot understand a practice without being a practitioner oneself, how could one rationally decide which practice(s) to engage in?

ii) *The Testimony problem*: would it still be acceptable to deny apparent non-practices, such as the planting of turnips, the status of practice if a life-long turnip planter (not

farmer who specialises in producing prize turnips) claimed the status of practice for his activity? That which appears to be a practice might not be, and that which appears to be a non-practice might instead turn out to be a practice. There is also a problem concerning the testimony of those engaged in established practices. When does someone count as sufficiently knowledgeable or adept to be able to speak on behalf of a particular practice or practice-based community?

iii) *The Master-Apprentice problem*: if someone engaged in an activity which is clearly a practice, architecture for instance, never becomes fully competent or fully able to articulate or understand the goods, goals, aims of architecture, would it be correct to describe such a person as a practitioner? This problem again suggests that there could be an excessive elitism implicit in the concept of a practice, which would be goodness out of the reach of all but the exceptionally talented. However it also suggests an unacceptable inclusiveness that reduces practices to the status of enjoyable activities and rules out the morally significant element of subordination to pre-existing, socially established standards of excellence.

These questions are raised with varying degrees of explicitness by Muirhead in his discussion of MacIntyre in 'Just Work'. Muirhead believes that there can be no satisfactory answer to the related decision and testimony problems and so the decision to engage in any practice or to consider some activity a practice must involve a 'leap of faith', and that engagement in practices does not necessarily lead to greater understanding and so there can be no adequate answer to the apprenticeship problem. Muirhead's response to the testimony and decision problems is a direct challenge to MacIntyre who, despite his admission that engagement is necessary for proper judgement, clearly does think it possible to categorically distinguish between at least some practices and at least some non-practices. Muirhead's response to the mastery and apprenticeship problems is on the other hand just a contradiction of MacIntyre and contains an implicit, unarticulated challenge to distinguish between practitioners and non-practitioners within a given practice by showing that proper engagement in a practice must lead to a growth of understanding. It is important to note that while Muirhead is critical of some of the details of MacIntyre's own formulation of the concept, he does regard 'practices' broadly construed in a MacIntyrean sense to "offer the best understanding of the promise of work"<sup>15</sup>. Rather than seeking to overturn the concept entirely, Muirhead wants to modify it, make it more inclusive, and thereby soften the normative force that MacIntyre attaches to it.

Let us consider the would-be practitioner's lack of knowledge of the putative practice in question. Muirhead says, "To participate in a practice ... involves a leap of faith, or

commitment. We take a chance, knowing that we cannot know all we need to know in advance...’’<sup>16</sup> (The decision problem). If the goods are internal then the uninitiated cannot know them. This is not a problem if the engagement in a practice constitutes a hobby, but if it is to shape a life then lack of reliable knowledge is a problem. However, we can have at least a minimal and partial knowledge of a practice without engaging in it. Someone who has never played a piano knows about scales, knows that they are boring but that they can enable a budding pianist to better play more enjoyable music. Someone who loves playing Rugby Union will be able to guess whether he or she will enjoy Rugby League, and will be able to give reasons for this. Such a person might be surprised by how restricting or liberating the alternate code is, but this response makes sense only if it is possible to have some awareness of relevant internal goods in advance. Someone who has both painted and tried their hand at carpentry will be able to have some idea what kinds of joy are to be had in sculpture on account of his or her knowledge of both art and working with materials. Unsurprisingly Muirhead admits as much, he says “This trust need not be blind... [rather] some independent judgement is possible’’<sup>17</sup> but his point remains, and he still thinks the cognitive aspect of practices to be sufficiently mysterious to say, “It is difficult to identify the internal goods relevant to a particular line of work, and we should not be too quick to judge particular jobs or careers as simply lacking them [the testimony problem]. Internal goods may be hard to locate even at an individual level [the apprenticeship problem], with respect to one’s own work’’<sup>18</sup> (my additions in square brackets). It is undeniable that one must sometimes make a decision based as much on hope and trust as knowledge and expectation, but Muirhead’s claim must be read in a stronger fashion if we are to make sense of his remarks on the difficulty of locating internal goods. Finally, in order to accurately characterise Muirhead’s critique we should note that he believes it only possible to locate the goods internal to a practice when one has been initiated into that practice (though we shall see below that this admits of degrees), which “in turn may require sustained commitment,” and that to “realise the internal goods that come from a practice takes discipline; over time, as proficiency grows, the standards of the practice are no longer felt as constraints’’<sup>19</sup>. So according to Muirhead we must be disciplined and committed even though we do not have any experience of goods internal to a practice, or at least any significant experience of the kind that would make it possible to identify and be motivated by those internal goods.

One questionable element of Muirhead’s way of setting up the decision problem is that it relies on a model of the potential practitioner as someone having to decide between a set of putative practices with only the little independent judgement (or as we shall shortly

consider, the unreliable testimony of others) that is possible available as a guide. Indeed the overall thesis of Muirhead's 'Just Work' is that work is fulfilling when it 'fits' an individual's abilities, wants, and needs. In one sense, there is clearly nothing wrong with this overall thesis; *ceteris paribus* it is good that any work, activity, or practice caters for someone's abilities, wants and needs. However, the notion that the selection of a practice involves some kind of 'leap of faith' betrays a commitment to the belief that an individual can have no *convincing* reason for choosing to devote him or herself to one practice over any other. From a MacIntyrean point of view this cannot be correct for it is impossible to even be in a position to make an independent and informed, and so rational choice without first having been to some degree schooled in types of practice. Also the types of practice in which a person has contingently been engaged, as well as the differing degrees of social availability of types of practice, will partially govern the preferences and inclinations that the person selecting a practice possesses.

From an engagement in games and sports, membership of a family and household, and the study of various academic and practical subjects in schools and at home, and so on, a young person will develop character-traits and preferences that prevent a problematic type of neutral decision that requires a 'leap of faith' from ever arising. This is one element of what MacIntyre calls the narrative unity of a life, which will be the focus of the following chapter. In making decisions about what to do with one's life, which practices are choice-worthy, which are worthy of perhaps painful subordination and diligent commitment, one must consider the trajectory of one's life as a whole and the pre-existing commitments that might render certain decisions rational when they might be inexplicable when considered in the abstract. The decision problem exists in theory, but in practice the narrative of one's life, and the long-term commitments one has, renders a decision to engage in a particular practice less difficult. It might be impossible to give reliable advice to a stranger, or to some disembodied chooser, but it is not impossible to advise a friend, and it would not be impossible to advise a stranger who one knew to share certain premises about the nature of a well-lived life.

In reality, no autonomous and independent agent is ever entirely 'unpractised' (nor fully informed), and it is only through engagement in practices that one can come to be able to choose independently. Furthermore, it is not simply the case that through a combination of independent judgement and experiences of certain practices one can come to make an educated guess as to which practice it would be best to engage in, rather the inherent sociability of practices we saw earlier means that everyone in part owes what he or she gains from a practice in terms of internal goods to certain others, others who are superior in certain

regards to oneself. When MacIntyre says, “If, on starting to listen to music, I do not accept my own incapacity to judge correctly, I will never learn to hear, let alone appreciate, Bartok’s last quartets”<sup>20</sup> he means that our tastes, interests, and preferences are largely formed in relation to the tastes, interests, and preferences of others. This applies also in terms of what options are available to us. Someone who does not recognise their own inability will not only be unable to appreciate Bartok but may never even know that Bartok’s music exists. The person who decides to make an effort to cultivate an appreciation of Bartok is not fully able in advance to appreciate Bartok and may never be so able, but has not made a leap of faith. The decision to make an effort with Bartok itself requires a particular set of conditions, as the tenor of MacIntyre’s broad historicism about practice suggests. It will almost certainly be the case that a person sat scratching his or her head when first attempting to listen to the pizzicato movement of Bartok’s fourth quartet may have come through similar experiences with the music of more obviously tuneful composers, struggled and finally succeeded in a bid to understand those composers and then moved on to more challenging music. It is not for nothing that in Austria parents take their children to see ‘The Flying Dutchman’.

The final point which needs to be made against the decision problem also tells against the testimony problem. As we saw when comparing Sennett’s notion of craft with the notion of practice, those engaged in practices learn not only skills but sociable virtues. It is part of MacIntyre’s account of virtue that we not only need others in order to develop virtues but that we both owe others a debt on account of this and that genuine virtue possession is nearly always at least partially other-regarding. If I, like Camus, learned all I know about morality and obligations from football it wouldn’t count as genuine learning if those obligations ended as soon as the final whistle blew. Few people are ever in the position of choosing what to devote their lives to in isolation from others. If being able to choose requires the acquisition of at least some virtues through engagement in some practices, and engagement in some practices and the nature of those virtues involves acquiring a debt of concern for certain others, then an intelligible independently made choice about one’s own good and what or which practices to engage in and prioritise will not be completely independent of the goods of those friends and family members one is indebted to, a fact that will be invoked in my defence of MacIntyre’s conception of narrative unity in the following chapter. A person faced with the task of choosing a career to pursue will not simply need to make a decision based only on the guessed at goods internal to practices, but how such a practice fits in with existing commitments. Some of those will be commitments to others who have played important roles in that person’s development into a rational, independent agent, and the testimonies of those

persons will be taken more seriously than the testimony of strangers. This consideration is a key part of MacIntyre's notion of a tradition.

This is not simply a point about preferring to trust those close to one, that is obvious, but also about 'objective' factors about a subject, about bonds and commitments that really exist. In many cases those close to one will genuinely be able to give better advice than a stranger even if that stranger is more experienced in the practice in question. The inadequacy of practices alone to determine what is good is why MacIntyre claims both that the conception of practices gives us but a primary definition of a virtue, and that the category of 'goods of excellence' extends beyond the category 'goods internal to practices'. This is why the notion of practice-based communities is important, a topic we will explore in some depth in chapter 5. Life choices are not (and for the most part, ought not be) made in isolation from the network of bonds and commitments that sustain our lives, and the narratives we tell to best understand our lives. Not all testimonies are equal.

So, any individual may well have good reason to pay closer attention to some testimonies than others. Nevertheless, at the level of abstract reflection, the testimony problem remains. If MacIntyre's account of practices is correct there must be some way of ruling out certain kinds of testimony. At the very least it might be possible to say that activities MacIntyre considers to be non-practices, turnip planting, bricklaying, throwing a ball with skill, etc. appear to possess no internal goods and have had no advocacy proclaiming their status as practices. One response to this would be to say that given that MacIntyre's conception of a practice has only come into existence relatively recently and is highly specialised that this is to be expected. However it is not simply that ringing endorsements of turnip planting are not couched in the correct terminology, it is that they do not seem to be forthcoming at all. Of course people can and do find activities that are not practices both enjoyable and rewarding. However, if we consider the complex definition of a practice given by MacIntyre, any claim that something like planting turnips is actually characterised by the sorts of internal goods and systematic extension necessary for the status of 'practice' will have to be quite different from the claim that planting turnips is enjoyable. On the basis of what has been said so far such a claim is entirely conceivable. One answer to the testimony problem is simply that if such a situation arose it would be problematic. It is worth considering whether we can have any stronger grounds for thinking that such a testimony will not be forthcoming.

There are two reasons for thinking that a stronger case against the testimony problem can be made: 1) the historical and socially established nature of practices make it impossible



that there should be a lone voice testifying that something considered to be clearly a non-practice by most people nevertheless is a practice, and it would be hard to believe that a sufficiently large community of practitioners would not be believed. 2) Non-engaged or imaginative knowledge of a practice need not be as restricted as the problem presupposes. Of course, if it can be shown that those not fully engaged in a practice can appreciate its internal goods, then the problems will have thereby been assuaged.

It is important to note that practices were not necessarily always practices, and so the concept admits of degrees<sup>21</sup>. Portrait painting is clearly a practice but, if we consider the entire and broad history of art, ultimately emerged from cave paintings, which were either a very different kind of practice or a communicative or ceremonial tool in another practice. The first children in Tudor England to protect some precursor to stumps from a ball with some kind of bat were not properly engaged in the practice of cricket even if they invented it. These proto-practitioners would not have been inclined to make claims for their activities which can be and are made about portrait painting and cricket because they could not have understood themselves as engaging in something that has evolved historically. What then of farmers? Farming did not evolve historically in quite the same way as portrait painting or cricket, as we saw earlier, and farming is not as liable to having its ends and goals systematically extended in the same way arts and sports. Nevertheless farming is still socially established and as such has historically inherited standards of excellence that can be rediscovered by individual farmers in a way that is not true of the proto-practitioners given as examples.

As we have seen, it is possible to have some knowledge of a practice without being engaged in it but it is important to emphasise the fact that we can also be partially engaged in a practice. When discussing how the achievements of JMW Turner and WG Grace benefitted their whole relevant community MacIntyre says “whether we are painters or physicists or quarterbacks or indeed just lovers of good painting or first rate experiments or a well thrown pass,” we must subordinate “ourselves within the practice in our relationship to other practitioners”<sup>22</sup>. What this shows is that in addition to the fact that it is not only the historical greats who are to be accounted as engaged in a practice, as we saw in section 1.1, but also the supporting, surrounding community too. This means that one may engage in the practice of chess or painting without actually playing chess or painting, and we will see later that one can play chess or paint without being engaged in the practice of chess or painting.

The goods internal to games, sports, and arts include those to be found in being a spectator, discussing and contemplating those things. A lover of great paintings is less engaged in the practice of painting than the painter is (unless the practice is corrupt or

somehow degenerate), but seeing as the lover of great painting learns how to appreciate painting in a similar way, through acquiring similar sensitivities, dispositions, virtues, though not to the same level and obviously lacks the qualities required to produce worthwhile paintings. On this view a great painter knows more about and is more engaged in the practice of painting than the critic, but the critic may be more engaged than the Sunday painter and whether the Sunday painter is more engaged than the layperson who loves great painting can only be decided case-by-case. If we accept this then the testimony problem and the mastery problem are not problems at all. Testimonies are to be relied upon when there is a perplexing situation or when one is deciding which practices to engage in, but given that engagement is not an all or nothing affair nothing like a ‘leap of faith’ is required.

These considerations have some bearing on the apprenticeship problem. If engagement can be of an indirect kind, of the spectator or admirer, then the engagement criterion becomes less stringent. If all of the goods involved in painting can only be known by painters and yet lovers of great painting are still to be considered as engaged in the practice of painting, then it cannot be necessary for someone to be able to fully articulate the goods internal to a practice to be considered a practitioner. It might appear that in order to solve the problems posed by Muirhead we have left MacIntyre’s concept of a practice open once again to the problems discussed in 1.1. Then a rediscovery-focused notion of systematic extension of ends was invoked in order to avoid an exclusive and/or intellectualist historicism. If, however, knowledge of goods internal to a practice is available to those remaining largely outside that practice, for example, if the goods of painting can be understood even by those who have never themselves painted, then it may seem that the notion of rediscovery becomes inert. This is not so because even those at the fringes of a practice have access to knowledge unavailable to those who have not so subordinated themselves and learned from others with deeper knowledge. A lover of great painting can rediscover what previous and contemporary lovers of great painting have themselves discovered, but not what painters have discovered or rediscovered, or if they can it is not to the same extent. To say that the degree of engagement is dependent on knowledge which itself is dependent on the degree of the cultivation of certain virtues, the humility and honesty mentioned earlier, simply strengthens the robust conception of a practice, it does not leave it open to the problem of vacuous inclusivity. This is why Muirhead’s doubts about whether practitioners have knowledge of their practice are misguided.

Muirhead claims that internal goods may be hard to locate within a practice and in so doing betrays a fatal misunderstanding of the concept. If one has no knowledge of the goods

internal to a practice in which one is engaged then one cannot be acting for the sake of those internal goods, and so one cannot be genuinely engaging in it as a practice or else the practice has degenerated or has been in some way corrupted. If one can truly be said to be engaging in a practice one must be acting for the sake of the goods internal to that practice, and furthermore some knowledge acquisition must be involved or else there could not be a systematic extension of ends and conceptions of ends involved. This is not to say that one must be solely motivated by the pursuit of internal goods in advance of beginning to engage in a practice. Consider MacIntyre's example of members of a fishing crew. MacIntyre notes that a member of a fishing crew may have initially joined the crew for its external rewards (in this case money) but having become progressively engaged in the practice that is fishing as part of a crew, the member may choose to stay even if greater financial rewards can be had elsewhere. The member in this case will have to "have acquired from the rest of the crew an understanding of and devotion to excellence in fishing and to excellence in playing one's part as a member of such a crew."<sup>23</sup> It is important to note that engagement in a practice is not simply a matter of 'doing' an activity in a certain way but also involves living a certain kind of life.

Excellence of the requisite kind is a matter of skills and qualities of character required for both the fishing and for the achievement of the goods of the common life of such a crew... the goods to be achieved in attaining excellence in the activities of fishing and in one's role within the crew will, for as long as possible, outweigh the economic hardships of low wages and periods of bad catches or low prices for fish.<sup>24</sup>

So if the fishing crew is the paradigmatic case of engagement in a productive practice then engagement must require some knowledge of the goods internal to that practice. So in answer to the apprenticeship problem, someone who is completely unable to articulate or locate the goods internal to a practice is not engaged in that practice even if that person is doing the activity that, at one level of description, constitutes the practice. We will have more to say about practices involving living one's life in a certain way in the next chapter. The fisherman who fishes solely for the external rewards has no good reason not to stop fishing as soon as even marginally greater external rewards are on offer elsewhere, and the fisherman who is unable to locate the goods internal to being part of a fishing crew is not engaged in the practice of fishing.

### 1.3 Practices and Institutions

Now that we have seen that MacIntyre's conception of a practice can be defended against the accusations of vacuity, excessive exclusivity or inclusivity, and the various epistemological critiques present in Muirhead's account of practices it is time to further consider the scope of the concept and to explain the institutional setting of practices with the aim of outlining how and why practices can degenerate or become corrupted. These two seemingly different concerns belong together because in order to discuss the former we will need to discuss borderline cases of practices and it is these borderline practices that are most prone to degeneration and corruption, though such a fate can befall even the most paradigmatic of practices.

MacIntyre believes that practices are a universal feature of human societies though their significance can become obscure. Given that the arguments of section 1.2 depend in part on our being able to draw a distinction between someone genuinely engaged in a practice and someone who *does* the activity, so to speak, that a practice partly is without being so engaged, it is important to explain how this is possible.

MacIntyre gives an example of a child learning chess and the process by which that child comes to understand the goods internal to chess<sup>25</sup>. Categorically chess is a practice, but the child initially plays to be rewarded with candy, i.e. an external rather than an internal good. MacIntyre says that eventually the child will come to value the goods and excellences internal to chess, "the achievement of a certain highly particular kind of analytical skill, strategic imagination and competitive intensity"<sup>26</sup>, etc. and play for those goods rather than external reward. In other contexts however it is possible to conceive of the proto-practitioner never coming to be motivated by internal goods. In a fictional world in which every chess grand master were motivated only by money and prestige, chess would still possess the coherence, complexity, social establishment etc. that is required for the status of practice, but none of the chess players would be genuinely engaged in that practice. This obscuring of internal goods is a danger whenever practices are not adequately safe-guarded by institutions. As Knight puts it, the "perspective of individuals *qua* practitioners, the causal order constituted by a practice and an institution is in good order insofar as the goods pursued by the institution are deployed to subserve the good internal to the practice."<sup>27</sup>

Chess, like every other practice can only be engaged in *as* a practice to the extent that there is an engagement with and an understanding of the goods internal to it. This seems to suggest that a putative practice which is almost exclusively done for the sake of external

goods will count as a genuine practice to someone who is alive to and motivated by its internal goods. This is somewhat misleading because the internal goods have to be of a particular kind to satisfy the definitional requirements of the notion of 'practice', that is to say engagement requires more than accepting an activity to be rewarding in its own right and because a practice pre-supposes a community of practitioners. Within the context of a 'practice' in which internal goods have been forgotten, it is difficult to see how genuine co-operation, a co-operation that transcends simple calculation and conditionality, can reliably occur (in chapter 5 I will argue that the notion of communities of practice extends more broadly than MacIntyre himself seems to think). Within practices in good order, the co-operation involved in teaching involves the novice subordinating him or herself to the teacher which requires humility and a commitment to succeed at that practice in ways that may initially seem quite alien, but where these internal goods have been lost sight of it is hard to imagine anyone thus subordinating him or herself to the relevant standards of excellence.

An individual alive to the possible existence of goods internal to that mode of activity will not be able to engage in them alone. Genuine co-operation and engagement in internal goods need not be entirely free from calculations about external goods, but it must be relatively so. A commitment to an internal good, even in the kinds of productive contexts in which the internal good is closely tied to external goods, is revealed by a willingness to continue with that practice even if greater external goods were available elsewhere. Commitment to internal goods and the co-operation required need not be absolute. Someone willing to genuinely co-operate may be dissuaded from doing so if what is being asked of him or her is clearly disproportionately burdensome, and in a productive practice like fishing or farming the pursuit of external goods can never be ignored. If not enough fish are caught to feed the members or sustain the community no amount of teamwork and courage will keep the practice going. However, where pursuit of external goods is the norm, co-operative ties are prone to become contingent and are liable to be broken as soon as a more externally rewarding option appears. The difference between genuine engagement in a practice for the sake of internal goods and a contingent commitment to an enjoyable activity primarily for the sake of external goods is what makes Muirhead wrong to allow any rewarding or fulfilling or enjoyable activity to count as a practice. In certain contexts in which practices cannot be properly engaged in, what is rewarding and fulfilling is precisely what is not co-operative. When aggressive competition is the only option, the most aggressive competitor may well be the most fulfilled. Practices always require some kind of institutional support, such as a school, a string quartet, or a chess club, and in the cases in which external goods are a

necessary end the practice in question must be carefully managed to avoid the loss of focus on internal goods.

MacIntyre himself is well aware that practices can become corrupted and so he acknowledges that "the making and sustaining of forms of human activity - and therefore institutions - itself has all the characteristics of a practice which stands in a particularly close relationship to the exercise of the virtues"<sup>28</sup>. The fact that practices are not self-sufficient is one motivating factor behind MacIntyre's insistence that the concept of a virtue requires two stages in addition to that of a practice, and in the following chapter we will explore the second of these stages. MacIntyre says, "no quality is to be accounted a virtue except in respect of its being such as to enable the achievement of three distinct kinds of good: those internal to practices, those which are the good of an individual life, and those which are the goods of community."<sup>29</sup> Like the concept of any other practice the sustaining of forms of human activity is not an all or nothing affair, and I will argue in chapter 5 that MacIntyrean community - or something like it - can be sustained even in deeply inhospitable environments. 'Detective work' and 'nursing' are coherent, modern police and nursing work are not necessarily so, and the decision as to whether these forms of activity are to count as practices will have to be made case-by-case. Putative practices, such as detective work and nursing, will be practices when they are well institutionalised.

Let us turn to consider what kinds of characteristics an institution will require if it is to sustain practices. MacIntyre's favourite example of this kind of institution is that of a fishing crew. In such a crew, and in other paradigmatic communities MacIntyre mentions in this context, such as that of Welsh miners, farming co-ops in Ireland, and Mayan villages in Guatemala and Mexico<sup>30</sup>, those engaged in the relevant practices depend upon each other. Without the qualities of character and skills of the other members of such a group or community, no individual member can achieve those qualities and skills; no can any individual or the community as a whole pursue any good. These kinds of institutional settings will serve to foreground the internal goods and to prevent the appeal of external goods from dominating. Whilst recognising that external goods are indeed goods and are also essential to the survival of the practice, they must be subordinated to the social and moral requirements of the internal goods. Justice, courage, humility and honesty might make it impossible to maximally accrue external goods and because it is part of the nature and purpose of institutions to accrue external goods, the reigning in of this tendency is of vital importance. One consequences of this is that when external goods are scarce the virtues are threatened.

Let us take another example of a putative practice that requires correct

institutionalisation in order to be a plausible candidate for the status of 'practice'. Muirhead gives the example of banking. He says, "Banking, like most work, aims to generate an economic return. But for banking to be a practice, it must have purposes that are specific to it. Profits, after all, might be realised in many other ways: making refrigerators, flying airplanes, writing sitcoms."<sup>31</sup> Clearly banking, by definition, is not simply the pursuit of profit by *any* means. If a group of bankers decide to take up shoplifting, they are acting outside their role as bankers, even if they are still acting in a way governed by those role demands. But the institution of banking is such that while it is possible for outside observers to talk of a banker who makes good loans as a 'good banker' and a banker who is prone to making bad loans but overall generates far more profit as a 'bad banker', this is not the evaluative schema adhered to by leading bankers charged with selecting others for promotion. The external rewards of effective profit generation are so high (as indeed are the rewards for failure after a certain period of success) and so competitive and uncooperative in the long-term<sup>32</sup> is the institutional atmosphere, that there is usually no reason for bankers to respect the rules of conduct of 'good banking' to any extent beyond legal requirement, or rather any extent beyond which the upholders of the law can prove. This is why high-street banking, which has a purpose other than profit maximisation, might be a candidate for the status of 'practice' (in circumstances rather different from the present, admittedly) but merchant banking seems to be ruled out. In an interview in Prospect magazine, MacIntyre compared being a 'good' banker to being a 'good' burglar: here good can only mean skilful, it cannot mean virtuous.

Sitcom writers might crave success as much as bankers but because the goods internal to sitcom writing are further removed from external goods than are the goods that would be internal to banking (if it were institutionalised in such a way as to be a practice), the lure of including a lame joke cannot have the same lure as the falsification of accounts, or lying, cheating and corruption more generally. A putative practice requires a strong institution and highly virtuous guardians of that institution if it is to resist the ever-present corrupting influences, whereas the current institution of sitcoms is such that writers who use lame, clichéd jokes in the pursuit of cheap laughs, high ratings and financial rewards will miss out on both certain goods internal to sitcom writing as well as external prestige and respect amongst the sitcom community. Institutions are ordered best when the receipt of external goods matches most closely the achievement of internal goods.

## 1.4 Conclusion

We have seen that MacIntyre's account of practices can survive some of the most serious charges levelled against it. The central problem of Muirhead's account is that he has taken the notion of a practice to be wholly independent. The notion of a practice is no doubt instructive when taken alone - it captures something that is lacking in much productive work as we will see in later chapters, but unless engagement in practices is further contextualised with relevant communities and within whole lives, problems like those that emerge in Muirhead's account will likely be irresolvable. Practices are not simply enjoyable or rewarding activities, and they are not simply 'fitting' activities. Were that the case then subjective satisfaction rather than virtue cultivation (perfection of character) would be of over-riding importance. In the following chapter we will explore another key element in MacIntyre's definition of a virtue, that of narrative unity.

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<sup>1</sup> Smith, 2003.

<sup>2</sup> Hager, 2011, Miller, 1994, Hauerwas and Wadell, 1982.

<sup>3</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.187.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*, p.193.

<sup>5</sup> From *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (1988) onwards MacIntyre's distinction is between goods of excellence and goods of effectiveness, but I will retain *After Virtue's* terminology for the sake of simplicity.

<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.188.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p.194.

<sup>8</sup> For instance by McMylor, 1994, and Moore, 2005a.

<sup>9</sup> Sennett, 2008, p.277.

<sup>10</sup> Sennett, 2004, pp.86-87.

<sup>11</sup> For instance by Ron Beadle, 2011.

<sup>12</sup> Sennett, 2008, p.279.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p.279.

<sup>14</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.273.

<sup>15</sup> Muirhead, 2004, p.167.

<sup>16</sup> *ibid*, p.163.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p.162.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, p.163.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, p.164.

<sup>20</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.190.

<sup>21</sup> A point also made by Mason, 1996, p.202.

<sup>22</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.191.

<sup>23</sup> MacIntyre, 1994a, p.285.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid*, p.285.

<sup>25</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.188.

<sup>26</sup> *ibid*, p.188.

<sup>27</sup> Knight 2008c, p.319.

<sup>28</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.194.

<sup>29</sup> MacIntyre, 1994, p.284.

<sup>30</sup> MacIntyre, 1999, p.143.

<sup>31</sup> Muirhead, 2004, p.154.

<sup>32</sup> I am speaking here of the Anglophone model. See the example of Goldman Sachs betting against itself during the 2008 financial crisis.



## **Chapter 2: Narrative unity of life**

In chapter 14 of *After Virtue* MacIntyre notes that an account of virtues in terms of practices could only be a partial account and first account. A life lived in accordance only with virtues as they have been defined in relation to practices would be defective. According to MacIntyre such a life “would be... pervaded by too many conflicts and too much arbitrariness”<sup>1</sup>. In this chapter I shall seek to outline and defend MacIntyre’s thesis that these conflicts are and this arbitrariness is to be avoided by contextualising the virtues within a whole life conceived of as a narrative unity. It is often thought unproblematic that agents should divide their lives into distinct roles, roles which require them to think and to evaluate possible courses of action in distinct ways. My concern in later chapters<sup>2</sup> will be with the way in which the problem of role-structured disunity affects working life in particular, and this chapter will provide the foundation for that later discussion. The notion that one’s ‘work-self’ is distinct from one’s ‘family-self’ is common, and this way of thinking is compatible with there being a variety of other possible ‘selves’ distinguishable within those, and other, categories. Consider the following example:

[O]rganisations, particularly large ones, are complex phenomena, and a given context may suggest multiple potential identities. Take the example of a manager in a task force charged with revamping her company’s vacation policy. Is she there as a manager, a department head, an organisational representative, a minority employee, all or some combination of these, or as something else? There are, in short, many hats of organisational membership.<sup>3</sup>

I give this example not to single out and impugn its authors Ashforth and Johnson, who suggest that this picture is too simple to allow us to adequately understand social identity processes at work, and reject the ‘hats’ metaphor (in favour of the metaphor of facets of a diamond, which itself is problematic). I give the example because it captures a conception of human agency that MacIntyre argues is incompatible with human flourishing.

I will begin, in 2.1, by sketching MacIntyre’s arguments for this narrative unity thesis before outlining various problems as well as some objections raised by John Lippitt and others which I will examine in the later sections. In section 2.2 I will focus on Lippitt’s argument from self-deception and attempt to show that not only can the narrative unity thesis resist this objection but happily accommodates the insight that motivates the objection on the grounds that MacIntyre’s conception of told, as opposed to enacted, narratives is actually a conception best

thought of as an epistemological tool. Furthermore, an appreciation of the value of friendship allows us to recognise that we are partly co-authors of each other's narratives. Finally in section 2.3 I will consider the other arguments put forward by Lippitt, Mulhall and Lamarque. These are the arguments from the temporality of our nature and the argument from the nature of narrative. In this section I will attempt to show that in light of our discussion of narrative and self-deception, and the conclusion that told narratives are epistemological tools than an ontological mode, that this tool is not damaged by the observations that types of narrative vary and that we can only tell narratives about our past.<sup>4</sup>

## 2.1 Unity Versus Compartmentalisation

MacIntyre's basic argument for his view that the narrative unity of life forms a key component in the acquisition and possession of virtues is as follows: i) individual virtues must apply across roles, ii) in order to so apply, virtues require contextualisation in a life that is unified, iii) a life that is not unified tends to be compartmentalised, and within the context of a compartmentalised life virtues are reduced to excellence in role performance, iv) such excellences cannot include crucial virtues such as justice, patience, integrity and constancy, and v) to avoid compartmentalisation the unity of a life must take the form of a narrative unity of the whole life. Below I will distinguish between the closely related concepts of narrative *unity* of a life as lived, and the *narrative* unity of self-understanding but for now let us look at these steps more closely. Of course, each step of this argument will be controversial to some degree and the following is intended as an overview. As with the conception of practices outlined in chapter 1, MacIntyre's ethical theory will receive both application and further defence in the following chapters.

i) *Virtues must apply across roles*. A person who applies a virtue exclusively within the practice in which it was first learnt or in the context of any one practice but in no other contexts cannot be said to possess that virtue: a scientist who feels obliged to be honest only in his professional capacity and is quite happy to lie and deceive in his personal life can hardly be said to possess the virtue of truthfulness even if that professional honesty is unwavering. Someone who is kind to friends but cruel to everyone else could not be said to be properly kind even if that apparent kindness to friends is very pronounced. The virtue of kindness does not of course require that one be equally kind to everyone, but it is not compatible with being unkind to all but a select few. MacIntyre holds this because he adopts the Aristotelian line that virtues must be

settled character traits that are partly valued for their own sake because they are partially constitutive of flourishing, which in turn helps us to distinguish virtues from skills which can be exercised in some circumstances but not in other similar circumstances. This is not a position that can be adequately defended here due to lack of space. Note however that this need not strike us as a claim that stands in need of a great deal of independent support. We simply would not apply the term ‘kind’ to someone if we knew they were frequently unkind to people.

ii) *In order for any particular virtue to apply across roles in this sense, that virtue must be contextualised in a life that is itself unified.* MacIntyre says “the unity of a virtue in someone’s life is intelligible only as a characteristic of a unitary life, a life that can be conceived and evaluated as a whole.”<sup>5</sup> Unless a life can be evaluated in *some* holistic fashion (this is not as yet the claim that a narrative unity of a whole life is required) then it is hard to see how it can be spoken of as a single life. Without some kind of overriding unity we would not be able to identify a ‘self’. If an agent’s life were *utterly* fragmented it would be impossible for that agent to take responsibility for any action or even to plan for the future. MacIntyre however does indeed require us to take this step to be a little more forceful than it might appear. He thinks that fragmentation leads to a lack of self-awareness that is inimical to virtue possession. As he says, in what is his most recent statement of the narrative unity thesis,

The characteristic modern self is in various and varying ways a divided self. This division of the self is at once implicitly acknowledged and yet concealed from view by the increasing compartmentalization of modern life, a compartmentalization whose effect is to have individuals focus attention upon themselves in this particular role in particular area of their lives or in that role in that area, rather than on themselves as unified agents. Thereby there is a lessening of inner conflict, but at the cost of a lack of self-awareness. And this lack of self-awareness obscures the underlying unity of the divided self<sup>6</sup>

So the virtues require unity because they require self-awareness and that adequate self-awareness requires that we understand our lives as constituting a unity.

Both unity and compartmentalization can have the effect of lessening conflict; unity does so by forcing the self to attempt to resolve conflicts whereas compartmentalization can prevent the self, which (ontologically) remains unified in some sense, from becoming aware of that conflict. It might be objected that self-awareness seems to imply conscious reflection but many virtues do not require conscious reflection, or indeed are incompatible with such reflection though we will see below that MacIntyre places special emphasis on some of the more

cognitively demanding virtues, such as justice and patience. Reflection in these cases is rarely a serious flaw. The agent who justified acting kindly by saying that he wanted to exercise the virtue of kindness would in most cases be guilty of a kind of ethical narcissism. Not every virtuous act is in fact justified by reflection, but this is not to say they could not be. The vicious person who wanted to transform his desires so that they aimed at the good might need to force himself to act kindly in just this way. In any case, MacIntyre's claim is not that agents must consciously justify each of their choices - doing so is clearly unnecessary - it is rather that if an agent fails to understand his or her life as being unified, he or she will be unable to recognise potential or actual incoherence.

This is not to say that those whose lives are divided into separate roles have a kind of multiple personality disorder. The self has a basic underlying unity even when it is misunderstood as being disunified. Someone might be able to identify his or her own disunity, but where the self is disunified in the way MacIntyre describes, there is a threat of incoherence and thus of irresolvable conflict. In those rare moments in which self-reflection is unquestionably called for: in trying to resolve an apparent dilemma<sup>7</sup>, in trying to decide what one *really* wants to do with one's life, explicit unity that involves some self-conscious reflection is appropriate. Without such unity, a pair of contradictory commitments is unlikely to be recognised as such and where disunity is recognised it is likely to be distressing as when someone feels torn or unable to know what to think or do about something.

iii) *Without unity a life tends to be compartmentalised.* Let us leave aside for the moment the question of whether this picture adequately captures the 'characteristically modern self' and consider whether compartmentalization does lead to a lack of self-awareness. In the sense in which MacIntyre is using the word, 'compartmentalization' refers both to role-based ethics and a kind of psychological dissociation, so the human being remains a metaphysical unity even when not living as such. If the virtues of one area of life can be sectioned off from everything else entirely then there seems to be no way for virtue-ethics to provide an overall critique of the successful gangster, i.e. the gangster who possesses all of the character traits that might make someone a 'good' gangster. If we want to criticise the gangster it is because qualities needed to excel in a role are not the same as virtues. If we regard the gangster's gangster-like qualities only as characteristics designed to make someone a good gangster, rather than as qualities designed to make someone a good human being, then there will be no reason for us to be critical of those qualities, and the same goes for an agent reflecting on his or her own life.

Though we are initially inculcated into the virtues through engagement in practices, if we allow those practices to remain unrelated compartments of life we will remain unable to possess

certain virtues, as we shall see in the next subsection, and this lack will in turn debar us from adequately possessing the virtues we learn through practices such that we will be unable to flourish. As MacIntyre says,

What are spoken of as the virtues of a good committee man or of a good gambler or a pool hustler are professional skills professionally deployed in those situations where they can be effective, not virtues. Someone who genuinely possesses a virtue can be expected to manifest it in very different types of situation, many of them situations where the practice of a virtue cannot be expected to be effective in the way we can expect a professional skill to be.<sup>8</sup>

Someone acting as a good pool hustler may have to identify with that role very strongly while out hustling in order to be able to exhibit or develop the required manipulative skills (the pool skills are somewhat different). Such a strong identification inhibits the ability to put those skills and that role into question, as I will argue in chapter 4. This lack of self-awareness is best displayed by considering the virtues it prevents an agent from possessing. We can conceive of a pool hustler or a gangster (or worse) who does possess a unity and who says “I accept my hustling ways as an integral part of myself, and thus am in no danger of incoherence”. But this poses no threat to MacIntyre’s account. Narrative unity does not guarantee possession of virtues, though it is a pre-requisite. Incoherence is a grave threat to the virtues, unity is required to avoid incoherence, and narrative unity allows those who face conflicts of the kind that require deliberation to avoid incoherence. It remains possible, on the basis of MacIntyre's account of practices and the narrative unity of life, for someone to possess integrity and live a life of vice<sup>9</sup>.

iv) *Some key virtues cannot be made sense of in role-specific terms.* MacIntyre draws up a list of virtues that are particularly dependent on a unified self-awareness. He says,

[I]n different times and places the catalogue of the virtues is not always the same. But there is a core notion of the virtues as qualities of human beings as such and, central to it, there is an acknowledgement of two virtues, without which the other virtues cannot be possessed. To those virtues I give their traditional names ‘integrity’ and ‘constancy.’ To have integrity is to refuse to be, to have educated oneself so that one is no longer able to be, one kind of person in one social context, while quite another in other contexts. It is to have set inflexible limits to one’s adaptability to the roles one may be called upon to play.<sup>10</sup>

And further,

This divided self has to be characterized negatively, by what it lacks. It is not only without any standpoint from which it can pass critical judgment on the standards governing its various roles, but it must also lack those virtues of integrity and constancy that are prerequisites for exercising the powers of moral agency. It cannot have integrity, just because its allegiance to this or that set of standards is always temporary and context bound. And it cannot have the constancy that is expressed in an unwavering directedness, since it recurrently changes direction, as it moves from sphere to sphere.<sup>11</sup>

MacIntyre also makes a similar claim about justice and patience. Justice, defined as giving each his due, requires that the various practices at which someone might be said to excel be ordered in such a way that it is possible to assess their relative merits and assess the achievements of people engaged in different practices. A brilliant scientist might deserve more praise than an adequate nurse, but an adequate nurse might deserve more praise than a brilliant footballer and it is the same sort of unity that makes a life a whole that makes such judgments possible (I qualify these comparisons with 'might' because they are open questions). That is, for it to be possible for someone to judge the merits of practices and goods as engaged in or achieved by others it must be possible to do so for oneself, and vice-versa. Patience requires unity in that without an overarching hierarchy of goods it will be impossible to decide when to remain patient and when to give up. A brilliant scientist patiently toiling away on some problem late into the night has no reason to give up qua scientist, but he or she does qua parent, or qua member of a *Finnegan's Wake* reading group and so may decide that with little chance of a breakthrough that evening it is worth calling it a day and spending some time being very patient with Joyce. It is impossible to defend MacIntyre's interpretation of all of these virtues in the space available here but it is however worth outlining his view and why he thinks it requires unity in order to render more plausible the interpretation I will give of the narrative unity thesis in the following section.

v) *Narrative unity allows us to avoid compartmentalisation.* So finally we can see that MacIntyre's is a "concept of a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as a narrative beginning to middle to end."<sup>12</sup> If a scientist's behaviour in the laboratory requires contextualisation to be intelligible, then that contextual detail itself requires further contextualisation. The answer to the question, 'why is that person pouring liquid into a test tube?' is that he is a scientist trying to discover something about how two chemicals react under certain conditions. But there are further questions that may be asked about the scientist's behaviour and that will require answers providing a broader context, 'why is it worth knowing that?', 'what is that knowledge worth relative to other research projects?', 'why did the scientist

choose that particular vocation?', 'how important is his work relative to his hobbies?' etc. For it to be possible to provide satisfactory answers to these questions, the life (and the social context) must possess some kind of unity.

When describing a study of the commitments of power company executives in the 1970s, MacIntyre says,

One incidental discovery... was that power company executives tended to a significant degree to answer what were substantially the same questions somewhat differently, depending on whether they took themselves to be responding qua power company executive or qua parent and head of household or qua concerned citizen. That is to say, their attitudes varied with their social roles and they seemed quite unaware of this.<sup>13</sup>

What this shows is that people are liable to meet the demands of the role they happen to play and where they have no standpoint from which to assess their whole lives, such contradictions may pass unnoticed.

Lippitt puts forward three arguments against MacIntyre's account of the narrative unity of a whole life:

A) *Literary Problem*. Taking literary narrative to be the default kind of narrative is misconceived, for narrative can be a rather thin notion which is not necessarily anything to do with the sort of unity MacIntyre has in mind and it is not at all clear that assigning fictional genres to lived lives will be any help when individuals attempt to understand their lives. Furthermore, given that MacIntyre acknowledges that life is characterised by unpredictability it seems that our lives may change genre at any moment, which renders the concept of genre otiose as a method of establishing a stable model of selfhood.

B) *Temporality Problem*. Our status as temporal beings means that we are never fully able to identify with ourselves and so our lives cannot be unified *wholes* in the required sense. Lippitt approvingly quotes Mulhall who says, "to take oneself as one's own intentional object is to take up another state of oneself"<sup>14</sup>. So, when we attempt to understand our lives as narratives so far we cannot subsume either the present self or the future under that narrative.

C) *Self-deception Problem*. There are always different and possibly inconsistent narratives we can tell about our lives or indeed any significant event and so any story we may tell ourselves about our lives so far is in danger of being a retrospective illusion. One narrative may be more appealing than another in virtue of being a more interesting story, or being beautifully

expressed, or simply more flattering to the life of which it is an account and none of these reasons for selecting a narrative has anything to do with truth or unity.

I will outline these objections more thoroughly in the following sections but have provided this outline because I intend to address C), the problem of the possibility of self-deception, first. This is because once we see how MacIntyre's narrative thesis can help us to avoid self-deception we will be in a better position to see how MacIntyre can respond to the temporality and literary problems.

## 2.2 The Self-deception Problem

In his discussion of the problem of possible self deception Lippitt says,

In asking myself whether my life possesses narrative unity, I shall be waging a perennial battle against self-deception. What compounds this problem is that establishing truth in respect of a narrative is a tricky business. I can offer you an account of my life that contains not a single falsehood. And yet the overall narrative can still be false and dishonest.<sup>15</sup>

About this Lippitt is right. One does not need to be a card-carrying Freudian to recognise the danger of this kind of rationalisation. There are, broadly speaking, five things the MacIntyrean might say in response to this problem: i) self deception is not limited to autobiography, rather it is a potential problem even for non-narrative accounts of the self, indeed it is a potential problem for everyone, ii) it may well be more of a problem for the non-narrative account than it is for the MacIntyrean, iii) the notion that a self-serving or fundamentally dishonest person is less likely to flourish due to his or her inability to accurately understand his or her life as a narrative unity squares rather nicely with MacIntyre's Eudaimonism, iv) because of the collaborative nature of MacIntyre's ethics the selection of a narrative is not made entirely alone and so the possibility of a self-serving rationalisation is diminished, and v) the selection of any particular narrative over another can be made on the same rational grounds as any other thesis, such as coherence, explanatory power, etc. Let us examine these responses in more detail.

i) It is not only unified narratives that can be examples of self deception and the danger of self deception is not limited to narratives. Even a moral agent who is resolutely determined not to subsume the various strands of his or her life under a single unified narrative may still create relatively small-scale narratives about his or her life on occasion, and may still fall prey to self deception on such occasions as these narratives may be deceptive. Any moral agent can be faced



with the task of interpreting his or her actions and intentions and so runs the risk of formulating a dishonest or deceptive interpretation. Any individual action can be interpreted in one way or another and an apparently kind offer of help may actually be patronising, and apparently well intentioned and just criticism may actually be born of resentment, and so on.

ii) The non-narrativist may actually be more prone to self deception than the narrativist. One of the purposes of thinking of one's life as a narrative unity is to avoid just this sort of confusion. MacIntyre is explicitly committed to fallibilism<sup>16</sup>, but notes that the motivation for explicitly constructing a narrative of events is to attain a greater understanding of those events. As such explicit narratives will be drawn up at times of epistemological crisis. When the non-narrativist confronts the question of whether his or her criticism was just or an expression of resentment he or she must either draw up some sort of narrative or risk de-contextualising the act to such a degree that there remains no reason to decide one way or the other. The minimal narrative must at least include such elements as the agent's recent dealings and relationship with the recipient of the criticism, and in order to be adequate to the task of achieving self-understanding may need to include various facts about the agent's life which may have caused him or her to be resentful (examples might include recent personal turmoil, stresses, financial problems, or simply ill luck, etc.). It will be objected that this type of piecemeal, modest narrative may be useful on occasion to avoid self deception but that as things stand this in no way vindicates the far grander narrative (of a whole life) thesis. This is true. However, without wanting to beg the question in favour of the narrativist view by simply asserting that a whole life narrative is required to contextualise the smaller narrative we can at this stage note that it is easy to imagine examples in which a narrative far more extensive in scope than these kinds of modest narrative becomes, at the very least, extremely useful to the agent seeking self-understanding. Such an example of a whole life, or most of a whole life, might take the form of the potentially resentful but ostensibly just criticism of one sibling directed at another, the erratic behaviour of someone traumatised as a child, or the callousness of someone who has always been consumed by a desire to be famous. Lifelong psychological quirks will require lifelong narratives.

iii) People are sometimes deluded or lacking in self-honesty. Such vices may exist independently of any attempt to establish the narrative unity of one's whole life. Virtues such as truthfulness and humility are required to adequately tell one's life story and whilst it is true that we may all be "waging a perennial battle against self deception", there are good reasons to think that some are more likely to win that battle than others. According to MacIntyre's account of the virtues it is precisely those most in possession of certain virtues that are most conceivably able account for their lives as a narrative whole, in part because they are less likely to live

compartmentalised lives. According to MacIntyre's view it is in virtue of this narrative unity that such people are better able to possess and cultivate further virtues and therefore more able to pursue their good. But this pursuit might be unsuccessful. The use of a narrative tool does not and could not guarantee self-honesty.

To put things this way might make it seem as though I am making the apparently empty claim that to be a successful moral agent (where success means something like 'possessing the virtues and being able to deliberate correctly') one must already be a successful moral agent. This is indeed what I am saying, though I do not think it is empty on the grounds that, as we saw in our discussion of practices in chapter 1, no adult who is remotely capable of functioning intellectually or psychologically can be utterly devoid of the virtues. To the extent that someone does lack the virtues generally, the virtues of honesty and truthfulness that stave off self-deception, or the virtues required to avoid compartmentalisation specifically, MacIntyre is perfectly willing to admit that his or her life may be defective. The virtues are mutually supporting: honesty and patience, for instance, will give their possessor a greater chance of cultivating other virtues.

iv) Because the process through which an agent may come to identify the good(s) at which he or she should aim and the process through which an agent may come to understand the narrative unity of his or her own life are collaborative processes, something necessitated by an account of the virtues based on practices, the possibility of selfish rationalisation or self-deception is severely diminished. MacIntyre even goes so far as to say that it is partly because others know me that I am able to know myself<sup>17</sup>. It would be hard to have confidence in my judgments about myself if those who knew me most intimately entirely disagreed with those judgements. It is often others who correct or refine my own judgments. It might be objected that some judgments must be made at times or in contexts in which we are fundamentally alone. This may be true. What is important however is that the virtues, character traits and habits of mind that allow anyone to make such a decision will have been forged in relation to others, through engagement in practices. Furthermore, even when we make decisions that must be made alone we are still answerable to others (i.e. fellow practitioners, a category that can include friends and family). This means that there must always be a high value placed on honesty and self honesty, and one upshot of this is that the MacIntyrean will agree with Lippitt's criticisms of Jeffrey Turner's view that moral truth is bound up with interest value. The narrator is both motivated to be honest and exists in a context in which dishonesty and self-deception are kept constantly in check by my relationships with others. In considering my life-narrative part of my concern will be with how I relate to others and why others perceive me as they do.

v) The four responses considered thus far have been primarily concerned with why the problem of self deception is no more of a problem for the MacIntyrean than it is for anyone else, given that some contextualising narratives are essential and perhaps less of a problem for the MacIntyrean. Although the notion that collaboration indicates that discussion can aid decision in such a way that narratives become relatively unproblematic, none of the above has directly addressed how one narrative might be selected over another. The answer to this question must surely be that that we select one narrative over the alternatives for the same reasons as we select any theory over any other. Narratives are not theories, but they are sufficiently similar for criteria such as consistency and explanatory power to be relevant means of assessment. If an agent puts forward a life narrative that renders a whole host of actions and events inexplicable then we would be rightly suspicious of that narrative. If an agent puts forward a narrative that suggests a vast number of actions are to be considered ‘out of character’ whilst offering no further explanation of what caused such behaviour we might quite naturally conclude that the narrative in question is flawed, and is a dishonest account designed to obscure actions that are actually *in* character. In doing so, we would disregard the fact that our judgement might well be unflattering, unattractive, or just plain boring.

When discussing why someone might reflect upon his or her whole life, MacIntyre says,

When from time to time, the plain person retrospectively examines what her or his life amounts to as a whole, often enough with a view to a choice between alternative futures, characteristically what she or he is in effect asking is, ‘To what conception of my overall good have I so far committed myself? And, do I now have reason to put it into question?’ The unity of her or his life about which each human being thus enquires is the unity of a dramatic narrative, of a story whose outcome can be a success or a failure for each protagonist.<sup>18</sup>

What this shows is that while lived lives are enacted narratives, the framing of a life story in a ‘literary’ or conversational narrative, a life narrative as it is told, is designed to allow the agent to better understand his or her life and to be better able to proceed. Lippitt is correct to note that MacIntyre does not adequately distinguish between literary and enacted narratives, and though MacIntyre’s account would have been clearer had he drawn that distinction, something along the lines of this distinction is implicit in MacIntyre’s account. Such a distinction would especially help MacIntyre to avoid the unwanted consequence that his theory seems to permit someone to fatalistically accept their life to be of a set genre<sup>19</sup>.

One consideration that might have led to this omission is that MacIntyre regards as narratives a great multiplicity of things, as we will see later, and so does not want to create a dichotomy between just two types of narrative. Humans are metaphysically unified, and narrative-unity best allows us to understand ourselves. In this sense we can see more clearly why the unity must be understood in narrative rather than simply logical or metaphysical terms. An adequate narrative of my life will focus heavily on the role played by others, and in considering my own narrative I may well test the veracity of my narrative by offering narrative justifications of my actions and choices to my friends and interested members of the relevant community. Others therefore feature centrally in both our lives and in helping us to adequately understand our lives. “Only in fantasy do we live what story we please... Each of our dramas exerts constraints on each other’s”<sup>20</sup>. We are each the major player in our own particular narrative, but our narratives are bound up with the narratives of others and so a narcissistic focus on oneself can only lead to a mistaken interpretation of one’s life.<sup>21</sup>

A life is not the same as a conversation or a confession in which that life is described, but for MacIntyre, “Narrative is not the work of poets, dramatists and novelists reflecting upon events which has no narrative order before one was imposed by the singer or writer; narrative form is neither disguise nor decoration.”<sup>22</sup> The narrative pre-exists the telling of the narrative which is done for the sake of better understanding, so the life is a narrative in terms of its ontological structure, but the telling of the narrative is an epistemological tool. While it is important to resist the “danger of conflating the quality of a *life* with the quality of the *narrative* of that life”<sup>23</sup> (italics in original) because the central purpose of constructing a narrative of my life is vastly different from the central purpose of constructing a fictional narrative, the narrator runs less risk of being seduced by aesthetic factors than Lippitt believes. This is not to say that the two must always be distinct. Someone may write fiction in order to clarify or analyse some aspect of lived life, and obviously some people’s life stories make for riveting biographies. Indeed, part of the appeal of fictional narratives is surely that they do have parallels with life as it is lived. MacIntyre says, “It is because we all live out narratives in our lives and because we understand our own lives in terms of narratives that we live out that the form of narrative is appropriate for understanding the actions of others”<sup>24</sup>. We have the fiction we do because of the lives we lead.

MacIntyre claims that narrative form is to be found in various aspects of life, such as, “battles, chess games, courtships, philosophy seminars, families at the dinner table, businessmen negotiating contracts”<sup>25</sup> as well as fictional narratives found in works of literature. So whilst he does not draw a clear line between literary narratives and enacted narratives, these examples

make it clear that a variety of items fall under the concept. Given that this is the case it makes sense for us to ask, ‘if we construct narratives to make better sense of the enacted narratives of our lives, what relationship must there be between these two types of narrative?’ This is a question we will turn our attention to in section 2.3, but there are some remarks that need to be made here. If it is right to regard the narratives we tell ourselves about our lives as epistemological tools, then some things that are true of our *whole* lives will not be relevant to what is nevertheless a whole account. The fact I was bitten by a dog aged eight plays no important role in my life provided it never caused me to fear dogs. In this case having been bitten neither hinders, helps, nor has any impact upon my life projects and my pursuit of the good. If I was afraid of dogs but managed to overcome that fear it might be a detail relevant to my narrative, it might for instance allow me to have faith in my ability to overcome irrational fears, and if I am still afraid of dogs there is a chance I will never be able to appreciate walking in the park, or to relax when I visit my friend who has a house full of spaniels, etc. Not everything that happens to me is relevant to my life story, and of course the fact that I cannot remember everything that has ever happened to me does not thereby render me incapable of providing a unified narrative account of my life. If the reason for attempting to make sense of my life as a narrative is motivated by the question of what I have committed myself to, then some of the choices I have made and some of my acts will be more relevant than others precisely because they will be more revealing about my overall commitments. So an agent capable of remembering every detail of his or her life and thus capable of writing an *exhaustive* autobiography would not necessarily be giving an adequate narrative of his or her own life.

It might also be instructive to consider why the ability to produce an adequate, unified narrative is not the same as the ability to produce a good autobiography. MacIntyre says that “To write a worthwhile autobiography you need either the wisdom of an Augustine or the shamelessness of a Rousseau or the confidence in one’s own self-knowledge of a Collingwood”<sup>26</sup>. Here we see can see that MacIntyre’s account of the narrative unity requirement does not require explicitly working out every detail, and does not require the laborious, intellectual demands required by an autobiography. We also see that a narrative unity is compatible with having less than complete certainty in one’s self-knowledge. Indeed, if my reading of MacIntyre is correct, engaging in an attempt to account for one’s commitments is one method of coming to acquire greater self-knowledge.

Lippitt is mistaken to demand that a narrative account of my whole life necessarily make sense of my commitments as a gardener and as a soccer fan. If these two commitments are in tension and are of enduring importance to me then that may well be the case, but such

commitments may be so partial, modest, or incidental that they have no bearing over the overall shape of the life. If I spend far more time gardening than I do watching soccer then it might be sensible to draw the conclusion that I value gardening more highly than I do soccer, or if I am bullied into tending the garden by my spouse, missing the game might show that I value a quiet life more than I value soccer. It is also possible that a correct narrative leaves this question undetermined, but more importantly the reason a narrative account of a whole life does not need to take account of every single element is the same reason a literary narrative can be convincing even if details are omitted. We never find out whether Anna Karenina likes her eggs poached or fried, or perhaps we do but it is a fact so unimportant that I have forgotten it. I can understand what is important about Anna without such knowledge, just as I can understand my life without being able to remember or account for every tiny detail. Lippitt might say that in admitting this I have capitulated and shown that the term ‘whole life’ delivers far less than it promises, but if what I have said above is correct then the focus on a whole life is more concerned with the avoidance of compartmentalisation than on accounting for every small detail. If I find out that the begonias will die unless I attend to them immediately and to do so I must miss the game, what I decide to do will reveal, perhaps to me as much as to others, which commitment of the two is dearest to me. The ability to recognise genuine conflicts as such and therefore to be able to set about resolving them is part of the purpose of asking myself about my whole life. Gardening and football are unlikely to ever come into conflict except in the sort of odd case I have described, but there are other roles that contingently might or necessarily must come into conflict. I cannot possibly become a champion body builder and a contender for the Tour de France at the same time, and as the example given in 2.1 about power company executives shows, it is not always possible to be a good power company executive and a good concerned citizen.

Another objection might be that we simply do not live and do not need to live unified lives, that compartmentalisation is not a problem. MacIntyre certainly thinks that ‘we’ do not necessarily live adequately unified lives, as we saw in 2.1. I hope that the arguments presented then about the nature of unity and the arguments presented in this section about the epistemological usefulness of telling unified narratives about our lives has given us some reason to doubt the force of this objection. In the following section we shall examine more closely just what kind of wholeness our lives can have, and we will return to the problematic nature of compartmentalisation in chapter 4.

### 2.3 Temporality, Literature and Wholeness

Lippitt puts forward or endorses a series of further objections to MacIntyre's narrative unity thesis based on Lamarque's account of narrative: i) almost any sequence of events can count as a narrative, so as a concept applied to a human life it is uninformative, ii) MacIntyre's insistence that lives can be assigned genres is, at best, misleading because the unpredictability of life as lived means that the genre could change at any minute, and iii) few people do or could tell narratives about their whole lives.

i) Lamarque claims that "at least two events must be depicted in a narrative and there must be some more or less loose, albeit non-logical, relation between the events"<sup>27</sup>. Even if we accept this minimal definition and its corollary that technically being a narrative tells us very little of substance, is it possible to infer anything against MacIntyre's narrative thesis from this? I think not. This is because, as we saw in 2.2, the casting of a life in terms of a told narrative is done with the purpose of deciding what to do next, to discern the nature of one's existing commitments and whether to put them into question, etc. The fact that something is a narrative is not in and of itself informative, but the narratives appropriate to such questioning must be. MacIntyre says that "The concept of a *telos* of human life is generally first comprehended in terms of outcomes of particular narratives about particular lives"<sup>28</sup> so we know in advance at least something about the type of narrative our telling of our own life story has to take: they are guided by what we take our ultimate ends to be. As MacIntyre says, "Ends provide the measure by which desires... are to be evaluated. Ends provide us with premises for sound practical reasoning"<sup>29</sup>. Those who accept this, even if tacitly, are in no danger of confusing a narrative that adequately accounts for a life with a narrative that links barely related events. Although this is not the place to elaborate here, MacIntyre seems to hold a cognitivist account of literary value. The works of literature MacIntyre most frequently praises, especially works by Austen and Dante, are praised for what they reveal about human life and about the virtues, and MacIntyre even claims that it is not always clear when one is reading philosophy and when one is reading literature in the cases of the writers mentioned<sup>30</sup>. We would not be interested in a fictional narrative that consisted solely of one event and then another, nor are we interested in trivialities when we consider the stories that make up our lives.

ii) According to Lippitt, MacIntyre's claim that we can allocate genres to lives obscures rather than clarifies matters. MacIntyre says that when a biographer contemplates the life of his or her subject it is appropriate to do so with a view to allocating a particular genre to that life. MacIntyre also says that, "We allocate conversations to genres, just as we do literary narratives.

Indeed a conversation is a dramatic work, even if a very short one, in which the participants are not only the actors, but also the joint authors, working out in agreement or disagreement the mode of their production.”<sup>31</sup> Lippitt’s objection to this is that allocating a genre to my own life can prevent me from seeing alternative futures and possibilities. Lippitt says "Judging my life as a tragedy on the basis of critical aspects of it to date may well prevent me from seeing ways in which possibilities open to me right now prevent its continuing along such a trajectory"<sup>32</sup>. Also, given that life is unpredictable and an unexpected event can give me good grounds for interpreting my life in such a way that I must categorise it as belonging to a different genre, the notion of a genre provides no basis for a stable account of the self that the talk of unity and wholeness seems to require. About this Lippitt is surely right. However, it is important to note both that MacIntyre never claims that an agent must allocate an unchanging genre to his or her own life as it is being lived; his point about biographies is to show how close told narratives can be to enacted narratives, and that the requirement that we allocate conversations to genres can help us to understand the non-vacuous flexibility of the concept of enacted narrative.

If we allocate conversations to genres while at the same time being the authors of those conversations, it is possible to see how a change in genre whilst the conversation is ongoing does not mean that conversations lack a kind of unity or wholeness nor that they must stagnate under the pressure of such allocation. If, when engaged in a particular conversation, I come to recognise it as a friendly debate with the norms that this ‘genre’ requires it does not mean that it is impossible for that conversation to become a hostile row or idle chatter. This transition can both be made by a relatively slow process of readjustment or as a reaction to a more abrupt change of tone. Like the narrative as told of a life, the classification of conversations into genres can be seen as an epistemological tool, rather than a restrictive ontological requirement. These two categories cannot be kept entirely separate of course. If MacIntyre is correct, conversations really are narratives that belong to particular genres, but our understanding of those conversations as they are happening is necessarily prone to change and so our decision to allocate them to any particular genre at the time is best understood as a way of coping with and understanding the demands of that particular situation. In the case of someone's life it may indeed be the case that the very best interpretations can be made only after death. In his discussion of social scientific knowledge in *After Virtue*, which we will consider in chapter 6, MacIntyre gives the example of a board game that replicates the *Battle of Gettysburg* which can be won by a moderately good player taking the Confederate side. Such a player is unlikely to be as adept at military command as General Lee, but such a player knows what Lee could not have. Our lives might be easier to



understand in retrospect but that does not diminish the value of doing what we can to understand our lives as we go.

iii) Very few people do and perhaps few people could tell their own life stories in any complete or unified fashion, so “if the unity of a life depends upon the unity of a narrative then most lives will turn out to have no such unity because there is no such narrative”<sup>33</sup>. Without wanting to quibble over the empirical claim that most people could not tell a unified narrative about their own lives (in any case MacIntyre’s thesis suggests that they could not and that this is part of what is wrong with modernity), this is not quite right for another reason. It is no part of MacIntyre’s thesis that it is essential for an agent to regularly tell the story of his or her entire life in order to live a unified life. Were this the case two absurdities would arise, firstly the telling of a life that omits no detail is likely to take longer than that life took to live and so the agent would be in a position, reminiscent of Tristram Shandy, of being likely to die before the narrative caught up with the date that the telling commenced, and secondly, if it were possible to find a more economical way of telling a whole life story, if a life requires being told as a narrative in order to be unified, an agent would have to retell, or at least call to consciousness in some way, that narrative each and every day in order to make sense, (i.e. subsume into the unity of life) of the events of that day. This is not of course MacIntyre’s view, nor does what he says commit him to this view.

As we saw earlier, MacIntyre says that an agent may periodically call his or her life into question in order to make sense of existing commitments and to make decisions about how to go on. The unity of a life does not depend on the telling of that life as a unified narrative, a unified life is narrative in form and can be best understood as a told narrative. It is because we can best understand our lives as narratives that fictional narratives can play such an important role in our moral development, and some lack of ‘wholeness’ is not damaging. We can easily distinguish between a biography that accounts for a whole life even though it omits the subject’s favourite breakfast cereal and one that is fragmentary or covers only a portion of the life of the subject. As MacIntyre says, “we characteristically draw upon resources provided by some stock of stories from which we had earlier learned to understand both our own lives and the lives of others in narrative terms, the oral and written literature of whatever particular culture it is that we happen to inhabit.”<sup>34</sup> Just as we can adjudicate between more and less didactically valuable works of fiction, we can adjudicate between better and worse types of narrative told about our own lives.

Mulhall rejects the notion that human lives can be unified or whole, in Lippitt’s words, “because of our being-ahead-of-ourselves. We relate ourselves to what is not yet, coming to an end only at death”<sup>35</sup>. Furthermore, against MacIntyre’s claim that death is the end of the narrative

of our lives, Mulhall argues that death is something that occurs outside the story of my life and so cannot be part of my life story as told by me. As Lippitt says, “the one person whose unified ‘life narrative’ I can’t in principle have access to is my own”<sup>36</sup>. Let us consider these two related objections.

It seems that MacIntyre is able to deal with the notion that ‘each of us is most distant from himself’ and also with the problem posed by death. Despite never drawing an explicit distinction between a narrative drawn up as an epistemological tool and the narrative structure of life as lived, this distinction allows us to make better sense of a good deal of what MacIntyre does say. We saw earlier that a unified account of a whole life does not need to provide a detailed account of every single aspect of that life. Once we realise that the narratives we tell ourselves about our lives are perfectly compatible with a realisation of the openness of our future, and once we distinguish between wholeness-as-complete and wholeness-as-exhaustive, death does not seem to be much of a problem. One does not need to give an *account* of one's own death in order to give a unified account of life and to be able to take a rational, intelligible next step. In a sense the story of someone's life continues after their death. Consider the example of Oliver Cromwell. He never lost a battle and died one of the most powerful men in Europe, yet within a few years of his death his laws had been repealed, some of his closest comrades had been tortured and killed, and his own body had been exhumed and desecrated. But a generation later his example made possible the Glorious Revolution. In deciding whether Cromwell's life was successful it certainly makes sense to consider such developments. Clearly such events cannot be part of Cromwell's reasoning, but this does not mean that Cromwell was unable to think of his life in narrative terms. As with the example of the *Battle of Gettysburg* game given above, it is not crucial that Cromwell's own narrative understanding of himself is superior to those who judge with hindsight, it is crucial that his self-understanding is better when framed in narrative terms than it would otherwise be, and that this understanding allows him to avoid incoherence.

We do well to realise that our lives have a terminus, and this realisation has certain repercussions. Whilst death may come at any time, it is not entirely unpredictable (there is such a thing as the average life expectancy after all) and a person who is aged 70 and yet totally unprepared for death, as unprepared as a 15 year old might be, has made an irresponsible mistake. This picture of narrative unity is not incompatible with ancient Greek injunction to call no man happy until he is dead. While we are alive we can never be certain that some great misfortune is not about to befall us. A narrative unity is one way in which we attempt to avoid misfortunes that might arise from moral incoherence or confronting an irresolvable dilemma, but no amount of narrative unity can protect someone against a sudden and unexpected death. In a

paper delivered at the Catholic University of America in 2009 entitled ‘Ends and Endings’<sup>37</sup> MacIntyre claims that moral philosophy requires historical and literary narratives as it is through these that we can come to appreciate that the concepts of final ends and subordinate ends have application. This is because the nature of a story depends on the kind of ending it has, and the kind of ending it has depends upon the relationship its central characters have to some end. Without ends we would not be able to understand our projects or our lives and there could be no finality except the accidental finality of death, claims MacIntyre. Does this not suggest that we need to get things exactly right, to complete our central projects, just before our death? No, but we do want to aim at a completed life that prepares us for death. If I die an unexpected death, my narrative still depends upon those ends I had set myself.

The claim that temporality limits unity is more challenging. There are times when one forgets oneself and one can only possibly account for that period in retrospect, and indeed the moment of narrative cannot itself be part of that narrative. This point is made by Lippitt and Mulhall. Lippitt says that, “one can only be conscious of oneself only as one was, not as one is,”<sup>38</sup> and as far as it goes this is right. But it is not clear that this is incompatible with MacIntyre’s position, once the telling of a narrative is interpreted as a tool. What we have been tells us what we are committed to, and what we are committed to tells us what we are. Mulhall puts the same point this way, “the phenomenon of self-consciousness... condemns the self to non-self-identity, to a necessary inability to coincide with itself, to gather itself up as a whole into its own awareness”<sup>39</sup>. In one sense, this point is similar to a challenge made by Lamarque that we considered above. If unity requires exhaustive wholeness then the fact that an agent provided a narrative that did not include the present moment would be problematic. In order to achieve that sort of unity, not only would an agent have to provide an account of every detail in the past, not only would an agent have to retell the narrative after every day or significant event (or indeed every single event, if such a narrative is required to make a decision about what is to count as significant), but the agent would also enter an infinite regress at the end of the telling a narrative: ‘now I am telling myself my narrative’, ‘now I am telling myself that I am telling myself my narrative’, and so on ad infinitum. But we have already seen that MacIntyre’s conception of a narrative unity is not so demanding and so does not suffer from this regress. He says, “An ability to put ourselves into question philosophically thus in key part depends upon the prior possession of some measure of narrative understanding”<sup>40</sup>. What this quotation shows is that narrative unity is not supposed to render perspicuous all of the complexities of human consciousness or phenomenology, but rather to enable us to effectively put our own lives into question. Even if human consciousness must be characterised by some sort of conflict, or absence, or non-identity,

narrative is a tool that can allow us to gain the distance required to avoid indecision or procrastination and to see that we are also complex wholes.

It follows from the points put forward by Lippitt and Mulhall that the future is a threat to unity. The future is an important part of my life, but it is not something I can account for as part of my narrative because it is unpredictable. This unpredictability however is precisely what a narrative can help us to deal with. MacIntyre's remarks on integrity, as we saw earlier, show that it is a virtue concerned with setting 'inflexible limits' to the sorts of roles we will be willing or indeed able to play. MacIntyre points out that our enacted narratives are both unpredictable (and teleological).

[We] live out our lives, both individually and in our relationships with each other, in light of certain conceptions of a possible shared future, a future in which certain possibilities beckon us forward and others repel us, some seem already foreclosed and others perhaps inevitable. There is no present which is not informed by some image of the future and an image of the future which already presents itself in the form of a *telos* – or of a variety of ends or goals – towards which we are either moving or failing to move in the present.<sup>41</sup>

It is our ability to understand our own enacted narratives, in part by telling narratives about them, that we can face the future with confidence that we stand some chance of achieving the good or goods we wish to achieve.

## 2.4 Conclusion

In this chapter I sought to defend and elucidate MacIntyre's conception of narrative unity. The notion of narrative unity is most useful if we distinguish between metaphysical and epistemological senses. Man is "essentially a story telling animal... [and] becomes through his history a teller of stories that aspire to truth"<sup>42</sup>. With this in mind it makes sense to suggest that what matters with narratives about our own lives is that they capture the truth even if they take the form of reconstructions that fail to get the history exactly right. In any case, the reason it is important that we conceive of our lives as having a narrative unity, something stronger than a simple logical unity, is that a human life gets logical unity for free. The self just is unified, a well lived life possesses an extra degree of unity through which commitments can be ordered in relation to some end, and at moments of epistemological crisis an explicit narrative will be an invaluable tool. Having considered two of the three stages of MacIntyre's definition of a virtue,

we will next turn our attention to the question of alienated labour and to contemporary working life. The account of MacIntyre's ethics developed in these first two chapters will underpin much of the argument in later chapters, and the notion of narrative unity defended here is pre-supposed in later discussions of compartmentalisation.

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<sup>1</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.201.

<sup>2</sup> Chapter 4 in particular, but the criticisms made there will be implicit in the chapters that follow it.

<sup>3</sup> Ashforth and Johnson, 2001, p.31.

<sup>4</sup> My account has some affinity with John Davenport's account (forthcoming), especially his distinction between narratives and narratives. There are three crucial differences however: 1) while I agree with much of Davenport's account of narrative realism, and think MacIntyre would also, my concern is not with deepening the metaphysics of the narrative realist position, but rather with showing how some of the problems put forward by Lippitt and others can be avoided if we pay attention to the epistemological role narratives play in MacIntyre's writings. 2) I suspect that Davenport is trying to derive far more from narrativity than MacIntyre. MacIntyre's account of narrative unity is only one part of his definition of a virtue and is not to be divorced from his account of practices and traditions of enquiry and 3) I do not share Davenport's optimism that the agent who relies on delusions about the self is pragmatically self-defeating. Such an agent might be debarred from flourishing, but if MacIntyre's account of our Emotivist culture is correct, such agents can and do function.

<sup>5</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.205.

<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre, 2008b, p.267.

<sup>7</sup> For MacIntyre, all moral dilemmas are apparent only. See MacIntyre, 2006k.

<sup>8</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.205.

<sup>9</sup> Though he comes to accept the unity of the virtues by the time of *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999), this does not pertain to the current argument.

<sup>10</sup> MacIntyre, 2006p, p.192.

<sup>11</sup> MacIntyre, 2006p, p.200.

<sup>12</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.205.

<sup>13</sup> MacIntyre, 2006p, p.196.

<sup>14</sup> Mulhall, 2004, p.23.

<sup>15</sup> Lippitt, 2007, p.50.

<sup>16</sup> See MacIntyre, 2006c.

<sup>17</sup> MacIntyre, 1999, p.95.

<sup>18</sup> MacIntyre, 1998d, p.141.

<sup>19</sup> See Lippitt, *op cit*, p.18.

<sup>20</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, pp.213-4.

<sup>21</sup> Excluding the counter-example of a long-time hermit, although even then the decision to abandon social life might require an explanation that draws on understanding the narratives of others.

<sup>22</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.211.

<sup>23</sup> Lippitt, 2007, p.50.

<sup>24</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.212.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p.212.

<sup>26</sup> MacIntyre, 1998h, p.269.

<sup>27</sup> Lamarque, 2004, p.394.

<sup>28</sup> MacIntyre, 1992, p.141.

<sup>29</sup> MacIntyre, 2009d.

<sup>30</sup> MacIntyre, 1998h, p.275.

<sup>31</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.211.

<sup>32</sup> Lippitt, 2007, p.18.

<sup>33</sup> Lamarque, 2004, p.404.

<sup>34</sup> MacIntyre, 1998d, p.141.

<sup>35</sup> Lippitt, 2007, p.45.

<sup>36</sup> *ibid*, p.45.

<sup>37</sup> MacIntyre, 2009d.

<sup>38</sup> Lippitt, 2007, p.46.

<sup>39</sup> Mulhall, 2004, p.23.

<sup>40</sup> MacIntyre, 1998d, p.142.

<sup>41</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, pp.215-6.

<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, p.286.

## **Chapter 3: Alienation and Modern Work**

In the previous chapter we saw that MacIntyre conceives of the good life as requiring a certain kind of narrative unity, the achievement of which both requires the possession of the virtues and is required in order to secure that possession, which is initially learned through engagement in practices. In this chapter we will consider some ways in which working life might, theoretically at this stage, frustrate our acquisition of the virtues. More specifically, we shall consider how working life may be a source of alienation. Firstly we will examine the early Marx's account of alienated labour and then Braverman's white collar alienation theory in order to frame an examination of contemporary work. We will then look again at the relationship between Sennett and MacIntyre in order to further elucidate MacIntyre's position and to explore how the MacIntyrean would respond to some of the features of modern work that Sennett identifies as being inimical to 'character'. Alienation is a useful concept for the study of working life, indeed for any theory which depends upon a commitment to the existence of a human nature, and this is especially true when that human nature itself depends upon an engagement with practices, or productive activity.

Sennett's account of changes to contemporary work provides us with a useful account which will inform later chapters, but it stands in need of some modification. For instance, whilst Sennett, like MacIntyre, rejects Marxism and Communitarianism, the former's reasons for doing so are questionable and prevent his account of good work from being as strong as it otherwise might be. From a MacIntyrean perspective, both Marxism and Sennett's position are both ethically impoverished. More broadly, the purpose of this chapter is to complete the theoretical groundwork for the more direct investigation of working life in the subsequent chapters by outlining how MacIntyrean enquiry differs from related critical sociologies of work.

### **3.1 Marx's Account of Alienated Labour**

From a MacIntyrean perspective practices are both the crucial determinant of flourishing at work and are marginalised within modernity. It would therefore be natural to suspect, given MacIntyre broadly accepts Marx's account of capitalism, that a MacIntyrean account of contemporary work will be an account of alienation. In this section I will outline Marx's theory of alienated labour, discuss Blauner's theory of subjective alienation and briefly

consider Ollman's systematic and expansive defence of Marx's theory of alienation. My aim throughout will be to detail why Marx's theory of alienation and Ollman's statement of it does not adequately map onto modern forms of work and to outline a MacIntyrean alternative, but also to use Marx's framework to begin to outline the nature of modern work. It is important to note that MacIntyrean philosophy shares many concerns with Marxism. In particular, much of Marx's critique of capitalism and his realisation that all theory must be understood as informed by practice greatly influenced MacIntyre's mature thought. Indeed, MacIntyre was a Marxist in the 1950s and 1960s, and was at various times a member of the Communist Party of Great Britain, The Socialist Labour League, and the International Socialism group<sup>1</sup> before breaking with Marxism towards the end of the 60s, still 10 years away from his 'mature' period, on the grounds that Marxists had failed to adequately theorise revolutionary practice and more generally that Marxism had failed to provide a fully coherent moral alternative to liberalism.

MacIntyre's relationship to Marxism as a whole is too complex a topic to be adequately accounted for in a single chapter (and indeed the present thesis has no space to explore this wider issue). We are concerned here not to assess Marxism but to flesh out MacIntyre's view that Marxism – in particular Marx's account of alienation – does not adequately apply to the modern world<sup>2</sup>. In this sense our concern is primarily with the contemporary workplace rather than Marx scholarship. The early Marx's account of alienation is a useful starting point because it is the most explicitly ethical of Marx's writings and as such is where Marx's Aristotelian commitments are most evident<sup>3</sup>.

Broadly speaking Bertell Ollman considers alienation to be a phenomenon characteristic of capitalist work that operates even when unrecognised by agents rather than a merely subjective phenomenon experienced by particular workers. Ollman does believe that alienation is to some degree relative, but ultimately believes that alienation can only be overcome through the emergence of what he calls 'unalienation' which he believes is possible only in a communist society<sup>4</sup>. Ollman's view is flawed in that it is unable to explain our motivation for being alarmed by the phenomenon of alienation, an explanation which MacIntyre's practice based theory can provide: engagement in practices allows us to experience goods and develop virtues that then ground our ability to recognise and criticise alienating forms of activity, forms of social life, etc. Let us turn now to Marx's own account.

In his 'Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844', Karl Marx elaborated his theory of alienation. Here Marx claims that there are four basic components of alienation:

- 1) *Alienation from the product of labour*. The product of labour is an alien object exercising power over the worker.
- 2) *Alienation from the process of labour*. Working causes suffering in the form of mental and physical degradation.
- 3) *Alienation from 'species being'*. Work in capitalist society is not compatible with human nature as inherently socially productive and thus co-operative.
- 4) *Alienation from other people*. The antagonisms of working life lead to social atomisation and tarnish personal relationships.

Let us consider each of these in more detail and try to make sense of them in a contemporary context, or rather contemporary contexts, as Marx seems to be speaking only of industrial or manufacturing work.

1) *Alienation from the product*. Given that manufacturing in Britain today accounts for less than one fifth of the workforce, in the majority of cases it is not clear exactly what a worker's relationship to the product of his or her labour might be. Indeed if we consider the emergence of the various service sector jobs, it is not even entirely clear what the product is. The last generation or so has seen the advent of jobs like software engineers and management consultants, as well as a significant increase in hairdressers, sales assistants, care workers, and nursery nurses etc. Clearly a management consultant or a hairdresser cannot stand in the same relation to an altered firm or a new hairstyle as an artisan or factory worker might stand to their products, the physical and tangible objects they have made. The products of the consultant's and the hairdresser's labours are necessarily someone else's property so whilst Marx's analysis may capture something of the nature of manufacturing jobs, it is not a useful tool when it comes to making sense of contemporary working life because we have no reason to think that only material production can be rewarding.

Musical free improvisation is unrepeatable (if it is recorded the record is re-playable, but the improvisation itself is not) and yet we have no reason to suspect that improvisatory musicians are alienated. Assuming that 'come the revolution' people retain a desire to be well-coiffed, hairdresser's relation to their product is likely to remain similar to the way it is now. Insofar as this species of alienation concerns the 'sorcerer's apprentice' element of capitalism, i.e. the sense in which capitalism takes on a life of its own and seems beyond our control, it will be considered below in our discussion of alienation from species-being. However, the craft-like nature of some forms of modern work, the forms of work which obviously have an identifiable product, suggests that antagonistic relationships between



producer and product are not as widespread as would be needed to support the claim that all or most workers are alienated from their products. Consider one contemporary example: a software designer – the software is not alien to the designer but may be an expression of his or her creative talents. The designer may have had to work to tight deadlines, may at stressful moments have cursed the prototype versions of the software, and in these senses the product exercises a power over the worker but it is not clear that this can be conceived of as alienating. The important thing to note is that the software designer has discretion over his or her work that Marx's imagined factory worker did not.

2) *Alienation from the process.* Marx, as we now know, was not able to foresee the future but he was capable of a fine rhetorical turn. When discussing alienation from the labour process, Marx treats the reader to the following,

[the worker] does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself... its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labour is shunned like the plague.<sup>5</sup>

Clearly Marx's remarks apply to manual labour. Despite some fairly damning evidence about contemporary Britons' happiness at work this is clearly not true of most contemporary work. While a 2007 survey of 1200 Britons found that 2/3 reported themselves to be 'unfulfilled', 'miserable', or 'drifting' in their jobs and over 1/2 said they'd happily leave to earn less money in a job that made them feel good about themselves<sup>6</sup>, and whilst the Joseph Rowntree Foundation study the 'Job Insecurity and Work Intensification Report'<sup>7</sup> found that 64% of employees reported an increase in the speed of work and 61% reported an increase in the effort they put into their work over the period 1992-1997, figures up from 56% and 38% respectively in 1987, Marx's characterisation again applies to industrial labour in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries more readily than it does to contemporary work. Today people frequently work even without financial compulsion. In fact, a significant percentage of people when questioned claim they would stay in their job even if they won the lottery (18% of Americans according to one study<sup>8</sup>) and relatively few jobs can be considered genuinely exhausting or dangerous to the extent that the work is liable to ruin the bodies of workers. Indeed, while working hours have not (yet) reached the 4-5 hour a day levels characteristic of some hunter-gatherer societies, they have fallen from an average of 14 hours per day in the

period just before Marx was writing to the contemporary levels of a little over 8. If alienation from the process of labour were an unavoidable reality, an objective state, of life in capitalist society and Marx's claim about work being 'shunned like the plague' was true, then it would be mystifying that *anyone* claims to enjoy work.

However, there is some evidence to suggest that there is some cultural pressure on Americans to report themselves as being happy even when they are not<sup>9</sup> and because the attainment of a job one enjoys is a significant status symbol such data may not be reliable. Moreover, the example of a lottery win is misleading. There is a tendency to believe that a life of luxury is better than a life of paid employment (and there is no doubt *something* to this). A more interesting question would be whether people would quit work in the expectation of greater happiness if they were guaranteed their current salaries for life, but I have been unable to find such data. In any case, it would require a prohibitively expensive study to test the veracity of those expectations! In the absence of such empirical evidence to the contrary it seems fair to say that Marx's claim would be a gross exaggeration if applied to the present day.

While we must also note that where compartmentalisation is commonplace, alienating elements may pass unnoticed, although it is clear that work is no longer as brutal today as it was for the 19<sup>th</sup> century proletarian. This does not however refute Marx's contention that workers are often alienated from the process of work. One reason the MacIntyrean should still take Marx's thoughts about alienation seriously, even if they principally apply to forms of work that are increasingly uncommon, is that Marx (like MacIntyre) draws a distinction between humanity as it currently happens to be, and humanity as it might be if it realised its *telos* (though putting it this way privileges MacIntyre's formulation over Marx's). It is this premise that means subjective satisfaction is not the ultimate arbiter of how we should judge work.

Marx's focus is on the nature of the work rather than the material rewards, but these statistics serve to remind us that alongside the emergence of MacJobs (professions, IT) has been the emergence of McJobs (fast food and shop retail)<sup>10</sup>. We should not overstate the extent to which working conditions have improved, and should not misunderstand the story of work as the story of continual improvement. At this stage the central element of the theory of alienation is still unproven, for there is as yet no reason to think that the large number of people in jobs they enjoy, jobs that are mentally challenging and without any punishing physical demands, can be considered as suffering from alienation from the process.

3) *Alienation from 'species being'*. The notion that work alienates us from our 'species being' is rather more serious and alarming than the idea that the process might sometimes, or even frequently, be tiresome. Indeed, sometimes the most fulfilling and worthwhile tasks can be tiresome. Raising children, training for an athletic event, practicing piano scales, and sometimes even keeping up to date with scholarship in a particular academic field can be less than riveting.

It would be an error to overstate the extent to which Marx's notion of species being mirrors MacIntyre's conception of humankind's *telos* but the two notions are similar enough for this prospective form of alienation to be a unifying concern. For Marx, what is distinctive of humanity is our ability to cooperatively transform nature. Indeed so intimate is man's relationship to nature that Marx says nature is man's "inorganic body"<sup>11</sup>, but alienation alters the relation between man and his labour such that labour becomes a means to a person's individual existence rather than a way of fulfilling his nature. Man thereby loses the free control over what he produces that Marx takes to be mankind's advantage over the non-human animals and loses his ability to fully understand and control his labour.

Marx's claim should not be interpreted as meaning that in the absence of alienation individual people consciously realise they are fulfilling some species orientated task; it is rather that under capitalism, man loses control of his productive ability and becomes unable to produce from 'inner necessity' – a creative desire that Marx holds to be one of the unchanging elements of human nature. It is this thought that leads Marx to remark in *The German Ideology* that under communism man could hunt, fish, farm, and criticise without ever adopting any of those roles completely. Marx believed that human production should be engaged in freely and as a source of creative pleasure. Without stating it with the same explicitness as MacIntyre<sup>12</sup>, Marx also clearly believes that humans should be concerned with internal goods, as is evident when he says, "the dealer in minerals sees only the commercial value, and not the beauty and peculiar nature of the minerals; he lacks a mineralogical sense"<sup>13</sup>. While this may seem harsh on the dealer who adores minerals for their beauty yet is not sufficiently wealthy to become a mineral collector, Marx's broader point is clear enough: where the profit motive exists unopposed, the intrinsically valuable becomes invisible and what MacIntyre calls the goods internal to practices may become obscured. Indeed, market competition might even force the dealer with mineralogical sense to adopt the methods and policies of the pure profit-seeking dealer, so his mineralogical sense falls into subjective irrelevance.

MacIntyre says that “the good life for man is the life spent in seeking the good life for man, and the virtues necessary for the seeking are those which will enable us to understand what more and what else the good life for man is”<sup>14</sup>. This might strike us as disappointingly hollow, but we must remember that internal goods can never be fully specified or paraphrased in such a way as to be fully comprehensible to the uninitiated, as we saw in chapter 1, and more broadly that the goods of a specific kind of life lived by those whose lives are shaped by particular practices and a particular community will differ from those whose lives are shaped by other practices and communities. Thus MacIntyre's conception of 'the' good life is inherently pluralistic. Such goods can of course be partially described, and indeed MacIntyre gives some clues as to what he takes the good life for man, i.e. the life in which man most fully realises his nature, to be. MacIntyre, like Marx, has a radically historicised conception of human nature, and practices themselves are relatively open-ended. When MacIntyre says that the good life is not a collection of arbitrarily chosen practices and then explains that the virtues require that our lives be unified, he implies that the good life involves the harmonisation and ordering of goods.

The narrative nature of human life means that rarely will two different lives be beset by identical problems and obstacles (because the exact nature of the obstacles depends upon the perspective of those facing them, including their historical context and place within a particular tradition), and so the question ‘what sort of person do I need to become in order to achieve my good?’ cannot be provided with a single, universal and substantive answer. If the good life is partially constituted by the process through which it is sought it would be self-defeating to attempt a genuinely substantive answer outside of any particular context, and in any case the sort of paraphrase which might be at all accurate would sound hopelessly platitudinous or, like Marx’s ‘free creative production’, be in danger of sounding excessively sentimental or romantic. MacIntyre follows Aristotle in taking the virtues themselves to be partly constitutive of *Eudaimonia* as opposed to being a mere means to happiness, so even in the absence of a comprehensive discussion of MacIntyre’s conception of the human good it is clear that this conception possesses some normative content.

What we have not considered thus far is how accurate a description ‘alienating from our species being’ might be of contemporary working life. The answer to this question cannot be as simple as our discussion of alienation from product or process and this is in part because if it is true that people are alienated from their true nature, their ‘species being’, in modern society, this alienation has possible causes outside working life. For MacIntyre at least, there is more to the human good than free, creative production: there is more to life

than work! Even if we attribute to Marx, and accept as being largely true, the claim that work is a uniquely important feature of human life, the fact that working hours are lower than during the 19<sup>th</sup> century<sup>15</sup>, flex-time is more common, and a greater number of people have the wealth and time to pursue leisure activities, mean that any plausible or satisfactory account of alienation from our species being or human nature would have to be far broader than an account that focused solely on our relation to our work.

It might seem suspect that Marxists start by claiming that people are alienated at work, and then when this appears to be disproved by counter-examples, change their claim to one that postulates alienation resulting from capitalist society as a whole. But this is not as illegitimate a move as it may seem. A decline in ‘community’ (a notion we shall discuss more fully in chapter 5) means that alienation is likely to be a phenomenon that exists on a wider scale, that some of the bureaucratic structures that characterise modern life are themselves a threat to human flourishing. Marx, naturally enough for such a systematic philosopher, situates work within a wider context. When he discusses alienation from species being his basic concern appears to be the loss of control over our work. This loss of control necessarily inhibits our ability to organise production rationally, i.e. in ways that are directed towards the satisfaction of human need. More concretely, this loss of control perverts the development of certain virtues precisely because the acquisitive nature of institutions cannot be resisted and made to serve practices. At this level of generality however, this is no longer a claim about alienated labour.

4) *Alienation from other people.* Marx says “An immediate consequence of the fact that man is estranged from the product of his labour, from his life activity, from his species being is the estrangement of man from man”<sup>16</sup> Alienation from other people follows from the other types of alienation according to Marx because those other types of alienation cause man to misunderstand himself and to project this inaccurate self-conception onto others. This kind of alienation is a kind of social atomisation because alienation from species being prevents fully human co-operation. So Marx and MacIntyre in their different ways hold self-knowledge and healthy social relations to be characteristic of human flourishing. Consider MacIntyre’s emphasis on the importance of friendship, which we considered briefly in the previous chapter. He says that only through friendships can we understand ourselves<sup>17</sup>, and so alienation from others would render such self-understanding impossible. Where competition becomes too important a feature of social life, agents are liable to find themselves in prisoner’s dilemma-type situations (‘business is poker’) in which reason is regarded as formal and calculative and thus cooperation is rationally unjustifiable, despite the best efforts of

innumerable moral theorists, and unconditional commitments such as those required by true friendship become threatened.

The extent to which the early Marx considers alienation to be an objective feature of all workers under capitalism, as opposed to a subjective state that affects some but not others (though of course there need not be so clear a dichotomy between these two poles) is not entirely clear. The concept of ‘inversion’ to be found in *Capital*, which seems to have evolved out of the concept of alienation<sup>18</sup>, is that of an objective state - but the aim of this chapter is not that of Marx scholarship. Marxist orthodoxy has held that alienation is an objective state that can only be overcome through the emergence of an un-alienated Communist society, and the purpose of this section is to argue that this Marxist orthodoxy, rather than Marx’s own view, is false and impedes our understanding – and so also our ability to remedy – the alienating tendencies present in modern work. Davidson and Blackledge, in their introduction to the recent collection of MacIntyre's early Marxist work, lament that during his Marxist phase MacIntyre failed to develop an account of revolutionary practice<sup>19</sup>, but the MacIntyrean laments the failure of Marxism to adequately theorise the goods available to agents within capitalism, goods that justify the moral critique of capitalism in the first place.

### **3.2 Recent Accounts of Alienation**

One corrective to the orthodox view of alienation has been proposed by Robert Blauner. Blauner says that “alienation is a general syndrome made up of a number of objective conditions and subjective feeling-states which emerge from certain relationships between workers and socio-technical settings of employment”<sup>20</sup>. Blauner himself thought that alienation could be completely overcome by technological advances which would free workers from assembly-line drudgery. We need not address this extremely optimistic view here, but what is important is that any adequate conception of alienation must be alive to both aspects - objective conditions and subjective states. Any view of alienation informed by MacIntyre’s thought will hold that it cannot be a uniform objective state because through engaging in practices humans can acquire the virtues essential to and partially constitutive of the fulfilment of their nature, and given that practices are “a universal feature of human cultures”<sup>21</sup>, widespread and comprehensive alienation is all but impossible. Consequently alienation does involve subjective states, though these subjective states need not involve

unhappiness nor conscious recognition of alienation ('alienated' is not a synonym for 'unhappy'). While practices can be marginalised or obscured, these predicaments do not follow automatically from existing within market economies in the way that alienation seems to for Marxist orthodoxy. Indeed, the importance of alienation for MacIntyrean thought is closely related to the importance of institutionally sustaining practices (and of course recognising institutions that embody and sustain practices), and defending ourselves against these processes by which practices are marginalised or made obscure. This must be a goal of politics as it is required by agents to be fully able to rationally pursue the good.

Three possible orthodox Marxist responses spring to mind: A) I have ignored the importance of capital being an impersonal force and thus tacitly accepted the legitimacy of one crucial part of alienation, B) in allowing the possibility of subjective states playing a central role, I have ignored the extent to which alienation itself causes the worker to be complicit in his own exploitation by conditioning him to think he 'enjoys' his work, and C) that I have been too quick to dismiss the claim that modern forms of work are alienating in the way Marx identified 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial work to be.

My response to objection A) is necessarily brief: a MacIntyrean view most certainly does not ignore the impersonal nature of institutions, indeed it recognises it so clearly that correctly institutionalising practices so that the dominance of impersonal forces is minimised is seen as a crucial task. The difference between the two views lies in their accounts of what it is to correctly institutionalise a practice. Loss of control of work is a problem for MacIntyre as well as Marx, but for MacIntyre ownership is not always crucial. On this issue it seems that Marxism is in danger of fetishising ownership and of exaggerating the scope of the force of impersonal capital. I can still engage with chess as a practice even if I do not own the board. Ownership is not required for use or even effective control. We will return to this topic in chapter 7. The example of contemporary financial institutions is instructive here. The owners are kept at a distance and have little control over the institutions, leaving the decisions instead to the managerial 'experts', a topic we will address in chapter 6. Marx's broader critique of the iniquities inherent in capitalism may be correct but this does not imply that flourishing is rendered impossible by private ownership. Problems arise when profit maximisation is the overriding purpose of an organisation, but not when profit is sought for the sake of a practice and the ultimate focus is on goods internal to that practice.

Objection B) is no stronger an objection, but it requires a slightly longer response. Bertell Ollman, author of a notable study of Marx's theory of alienation claims, quoting *The Communist Manifesto*, that "We do not know each other as individuals, but as extensions of

capitalism: ‘In bourgeois society capital is independent and has individuality, while the living person is dependent and has no individuality’<sup>22</sup>. In one sense this is a consequence of alienation from other people, but to put it so strongly is surely incorrect.

For the MacIntyrean it is precisely our knowledge of internal goods, a knowledge which requires healthy relations with others and a genuine engagement in practices to come into being in the first place, that motivates a rejection of dehumanising working conditions. If we were completely unable to experience goods, then we would be unable to criticise the alienating tendencies of capitalism in the first place, and both those who are and those who are not members of the industrial proletariat would have no reason to support anti-capitalist political movements. MacIntyre says of Marcuse’s *One Dimensional Man*, a work which more or less claims that every aspect of life is tainted by capitalism, that “if its thesis were true, then we should have to ask how the book came to have been written and we would certainly have to inquire whether it would find any readers.”<sup>23</sup> This query would also have to be directed at Marx if Ollman’s conception of alienation were adequate.

We must take the gradations between alienation and unalienation seriously if we are to avoid positing a dichotomy between the alienated, who cannot possibly see the need for revolution, and the unalienated, who also cannot see the need for revolution. It is possible to imagine an elite class of the unalienated attempting to make a revolution on behalf of the alienated, though it seems we have good reason to think such an attempt doomed to failure and the existence of the unalienated would be mysterious. One suspects that Ollman has taken a rhetorical flourish from a populist pamphlet too seriously. This mistake is made possible by Marx’s failure to provide a more detailed account of the ethical dimension of his theory to be, that is, what exactly constitutes ‘free creative production’.

According to MacIntyre’s essay ‘Theses on Feuerbach: a road not taken’, it is precisely Marx’s failure to give an account of the ethical content of his position, that is of his conception of ‘free creative production’, that prevents Marx’s theory of alienation from succeeding in the way that MacIntyre’s conception of practices does. We might prefer Blauner’s fourfold theory of alienation to Marx’s, but it remains unable to explain how and why particular practices are important i.e. why and how they play a central role in the pursuit of the good life. As MacIntyre notes, a great failure of Marxist thought generally is that it takes it “for granted that the only goals that workers could have reason to make their own are the goals of socialism and communism”<sup>24</sup>, thus Marxism is unable to account for the heterogeneity of goods actually pursued by communities, and the continuing existence of local traditions and rationalities<sup>25</sup>. If conceptions of the human good and indeed the human



good itself are rooted in specific engagements with particular practices, themselves rooted in particular social and institutional settings, then what it is rational for members of these communities to pursue politically will not always be identical. Any theory that assumes local customs and traditions to be always irrational or uncivilised is itself likely to have alienating consequences. We will consider the importance of personal relationships in the following two chapters.

Whereas for Marx this ‘alienation of man from man’ followed from the three prior types of alienation, for the MacIntyrean the existence of the first two types of alienation is questionable (it is certainly not universal: practices exist within capitalism), and the third type of alienation, i.e. from species being, is of a very different kind. Indeed, because MacIntyre’s view of the human *telos* reserves a very important place for friendship and concrete social relations, the last two types of alienation are not separable and nor are they a direct result of working conditions. The dis-unified self and the breakdown in social bonds are grave ills for MacIntyre, but they do not follow from our alienation from the product and process of labour, at least not in the predominant working environments of 21st century capitalist society. Instead alienation can result from the character of particular types of work and particular institutional settings in which work takes place. Work and the institutions in which it took place may have been close to uniformly alienating for the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial worker, but that is not the case today.

Objection C) requires us to consider Braverman's account of white-collar alienation. Braverman’s thesis implicitly takes the view that alienation is a relative and variable subjective state, though of course one largely determined by objective features of work. This is demonstrated by the very notion of work being degraded by a process of deskilling. If alienation were not relative then the level of skill required by a job would have no bearing on whether or not it is alienating. It is likely that this was Marx’s view given that in his 1844 manuscripts he often talks as if artists and artisans do not suffer from alienation. Braverman does not claim that deskilling is entirely universal. Rather he thinks that it is a general tendency to be resisted and avoided where possible.

Simply stated, Braverman’s thesis is that Taylorist scientific management techniques, which originally found application in the measurement, surveillance and control of manual labour, and which often required that tasks be broken down into constituent parts in the name of efficiency, have now become prevalent in white-collar office work. Braverman claims that management under capitalism is principally concerned to control the way work is organised so that the pace and duration of work can also be controlled, and because the discretion of

workers can be an obstacle to this goal, management aims to limit the control employees have over their own work. One crucial way in which discretion can be reduced is through a reduction in the skill required by any particular job, and so Braverman claims that management has a general tendency to implement measures which deskill workers. Thus Braverman's account is essentially a restatement of Marx's alienation from the process: work does not develop our physical and mental capacities.

Deskilling takes two primary forms for Braverman: organisational and technical. Organisational deskilling is the separation of the conception and the execution of work where creative planning is the preserve of management and the execution of such plans alone is left to the worker. Braverman claims:

[A] necessary consequence of the separation of conception and execution is that the labour process is now divided between separate sites and separate bodies of worker... The production units operate like a hand, watched, corrected, and controlled by a distant brain.<sup>26</sup>

Technological deskilling is the process whereby machinery is used to reduce shop floor discretion. Instead of machinery offering the possibility of new skills of control over the machinery, Braverman thinks there is a tendency for those who use the machinery to be unable to alter or repair the workings of the machine and thus be dependent on external technicians and external automated control of the machinery. What is important is not a Luddite reaction against technological advancement, but the particular forms of the advancements and the uses to which they are put. Where workers are subordinated to the technological processes of work, and this can be the case in either blue or white-collar work, what is active is not the full human being but a mere element or handful of elements and it is this subdivision that is alienating. Braverman says,

While the social division of labour subdivides *society*, the detailed division of labour subdivides *humans*, and while the subdivision of society may enhance the individual and the species, the subdivision of the individual, when carried on without regard to human capabilities and needs, is a crime against the person and against humanity.<sup>27</sup>

However, because Braverman does not think this deskilling process to be an ineluctable universal process, he is committed to maintaining the possibility that there are cases in which technology has allowed work to be 'up skilled'. Even if, as Bennett Harrison

has argued, the computerisation of work has actually shown a drop in economic productivity<sup>28</sup>, it has certainly allowed for the emergence of a whole new set of skills and competences which from a MacIntyrean point of view is preferable, unless the drop is severe enough to threaten a community's other goods. Satisfaction of material needs is a precondition for the virtues, and this fact itself calls for some balance between efficiency and pursuit of internal goods. Electronic tills might mean that cashiers have less opportunity to develop their arithmetical skills, but their accuracy and reliability is an undeniable advantage. If a drop in productivity has indeed occurred, it clearly has not been so dramatic that the satisfaction of human needs has been imperilled. On the other hand there are many white-collar jobs that are similar to monotonous factory work, with call-centres being the most notable example.

It might be argued against Braverman's deskilling thesis that a service economy is more innovative, diverse, and subject to change than a productive manufacturing economy could possibly be, and that this calls for a kind of 'flexible specialisation' which itself requires a greater level of skill on the whole than the old industrial economy. *Prima facie* this view is at least as hopelessly optimistic as Braverman's claim that there is a general tendency towards deskilling appears to be hopelessly pessimistic. However we need not seek to resolve this debate for it treats 'skill' as a basic, simple, unified concept and as such does not develop our capacities as do practices. Almost any activity admits of some level of skill. Up skilling may be a good thing, indeed it is one of the most significant boosters of subjective satisfaction at work<sup>29</sup>, but it is not necessarily conducive to flourishing. As we noted in chapter 1, practices, which are crucial to the development of virtues, cannot be identified with a "set of technical skills"<sup>30</sup>. In the same way that flourishing in the relevant sense cannot simply be about reported happiness or job satisfaction, nor can it simply be about the technical complexity of the job. The relevant skills must be coherent and complex forms of socially established co-operative human activities, and so on, in order to encourage virtuous flourishing.

A MacIntyrean account of work therefore resists reduction to a Marxist account of alienation. Modern, industrialised capitalism might have led to the "destruction of craftsmanship"<sup>31</sup>, but MacIntyre's conception of engagement in practices in accordance with narrative unity is ethically richer than the notion of craftsmanship. However, much of what Braverman says rings true. Braverman was writing in the 1970s, and so to better evaluate whether contemporary work is alienating we now turn to more recent developments. In

particular we will examine Richard Sennett's account of changes to work in contemporary capitalism.

### **3.3 Alienation, Fragmentation, and Organisational Change**

Sennett argues that the emphasis placed on flexibility by the 'new capitalism' is characterised by a winner takes all mentality that leads to a tendency to focus on the short term pursuit of external goods in such a way that encourages 'downsizing' (read 'redundancies'), thereby undermining job security, and in turn traditional communities. According to MacIntyre this process began when production left the household, and entered a new phase which has increased social atomisation. This atomisation is incompatible with the development of character. While Sennett's use of the word 'character' suggests that its requirements are not identical to the requirements of MacIntyre's conception of a virtue, there are again important similarities. Sennett says "Character is expressed by loyalty and mutual commitment, or through the pursuit of long term goals, or by the practice of delayed gratification for the sake of a future end"<sup>32</sup>. This does not commit Sennett to the stronger elements of MacIntyre's ethics, but it certainly captures something of the spirit of MacIntyre's practice-based conception of the virtues, and Sennett's view that the disappearance of long term careers, "pathways along which people can travel; durable and sustained paths of actions"<sup>33</sup> again suggests some affinity with MacIntyre's narrative unity of life requirement that we discussed in chapter 2. Although these parallels between Sennett and MacIntyre mean that the former's sociology can inform the latter's philosophy, let us first consider an important difference.

Sennett and MacIntyre are both at pains to distance themselves from communitarianism, but in very different ways. In an interview with Giovanna Borradori MacIntyre is quite explicit about the matter, he says, "I am not a communitarian. I do not believe in ideals or forms of community as a nostrum for contemporary social ills"<sup>34</sup>. Elsewhere MacIntyre explicitly states that some forms of market economies can, in his view, be conducive to the virtues.<sup>35</sup> Nevertheless MacIntyre does place a firm emphasis on the importance of local community. Indeed in the same interview quoted above MacIntyre says that despite the barrenness of large scale political movements, "what is not thus barren is the politics involved in constructing and sustaining small scale local communities, at the level of the family, the neighbourhood, the workplace, the parish, the school" etc.<sup>36</sup> So while he is not

a card-carrying communitarian, he may well be a communitarian in Sennett's sense. Furthermore, because MacIntyre has indeed been claimed/categorised as (or perhaps *accused* of being) a communitarian elsewhere<sup>37</sup> and because much of what Sennett says when rejecting communitarianism can be aimed at MacIntyre it is worth turning our attention to Sennett's arguments.

Sennett recognises that a strong sense of community is valuable, but he denies that communitarianism is as conducive to this good as its proponents think. Sennett says:

[Communitarianism] falsely emphasises unity as a source of strength in a community and mistakenly fears that when conflicts arise in a community social bonds are threatened... [instead] people are bound together more by verbal conflict than by verbal agreement... [as they] have to work harder at communicating... the scene of conflict becomes a community in the sense that people learn how to listen and respond to one another even as they more keenly feel their differences.<sup>38</sup>

The MacIntyrean response to this is to say that of course conflict *threatens* social bonds, but this threat does not entail that conflict is always and necessarily damaging to social bonds. The threatened social ill in question, that of bond severance and perhaps irreconcilable conflict, does not ever need to be realised in the same way that a misunderstanding might threaten to turn into a row without ever actually doing so. Indeed, in both cases it may be down to the virtues of those involved to avoid the breakdown in social bonds. Social bonds can be caused to fade gradually over time, but it is hard to imagine conflict not constituting at least a potential threat. There is a sense in which the joint overcoming of adversity can strengthen bonds, but this requires a good deal more unity than Sennett seems to realise. Such conflict resolution presupposes agreement on aims and legitimate methods of resolution. This does not mean that MacIntyre is forced to disagree with Sennett's subsequent points, quite the contrary. Indeed if we see conflict as a threat to social bonds then we can better explain just why it is that people work harder at communication in times of conflict. According to this view it is not the scene of conflict that becomes community but the scene of resolution. The hard work is justified precisely because the conflict is a threat and the alleviation of that conflict is a good. It is crucial on the MacIntyrean view that there is a substantial agreement about values if the development of the virtues, or of 'character' is to be possible, for without shared standards of excellence and

shared notions of human goods and ends, people will be prevented from properly engaging in practices.

So, because the extent of Sennett's rejection of the goods of community goes beyond what is warranted, in examining the details of Sennett's account of the changes which have degraded work, or as he puts it, corroded character, we may well have to modify his account so that it fits our MacIntyrean concerns more closely. The three changes which Sennett claims characterise work in the new flexible economies are, i) the discontinuous re-invention of institutions, ii) flexible specialisation, and iii) the concentration without centralisation of power. Let us consider these in turn.

1) *Discontinuous re-invention*. Sennett draws a distinction between change which is the result of an organic process which is intelligible and coherent, even if unwelcome, and change which takes the form of a discontinuous rupture. Sennett says that a

cornerstone of modern management practice is the belief that loose networks are more open to decisive re-invention than are pyramidal hierarchies which ruled the Fordist era. The join between nodes in the network is looser; you can take away a part, at least in theory, without destroying other parts. The system is fragmented; therein lies the opportunity for intervening. Its very incoherence invites your revisions.<sup>39</sup>

Such radical reorganisation is a threat to practices and practice-based communities which require relative permanence. The corporate re-engineering that discontinuous re-invention involves, often means a wave of redundancies. Unemployment is an ill not only because it means poverty, but also because it leads to a deep sense of social exclusion. This is especially so if it takes the form of being arbitrarily excluded from a practice because of corporate down-sizing initiatives. In addition to relative poverty leading to the inability to lead what is socially regarded as a normal life, unemployment can be alienating in that it leads to a feeling of powerlessness. Hegel, whose account of alienation partly inspired Marx's, is instructive here. Hegel's myth of the master and the slave suggests that the slave receives the benefits of work (even though he does not own the means of production) because he is able to make a mark on the world, and thus regard himself as an active agent<sup>40</sup>. Although evidence from empirical psychology supports the view that employment is better for people's mental health than unemployment<sup>41</sup>, Hegel himself is aware that the worst work is hardly better than the exclusion experienced by the workless<sup>42</sup>. About this, Sennett and MacIntyre would agree.

However, what is especially damaging, as is noted by both Sennett and MacIntyre, is that in an age of discontinuous re-invention rising unemployment is often treated as a good thing on the stock market and companies are pressured into sacking staff solely in order to demonstrate their ‘flexibility’. This lack of security is a threat to the virtues in another way. Where competition for survival is intense it is inevitable that social bonds are weakened because one person’s gain will be another’s loss. In this way insecure workers may be alienated from their fellows; each views the other as a competitor first and a colleague with whom co-operation is a good, second<sup>43</sup>. In this way too, genuine engagement in practices can be imperilled because in such situations external goods may become the priority.

Another notable aspect of discontinuous re-invention is that companies have become de-layered which has had the consequence that a smaller number of managers have a greater number of subordinates to manage (made possible by various technological advances), and so workers have less chance of having a personal relationship with their bosses which in turn makes it harder for trust to flourish in the work place. We will examine the importance of personal relationships and trust in the following chapter.

2) *Flexible specialisation*. This makes use of the technological changes described by Braverman. It is now possible for an organisation to change the nature of its production in a relatively short space of time. Machines and operating systems can be reprogrammed relatively quickly and so the nature of the work within an organisation can too change. Implicit in Sennett’s discussion of flexible specialisation is the idea that the flexibility makes undemocratic demands and gives workers little discretion over their work. A completely flexible specialisation is inimical to a genuine engagement in a practice because there is no chance of achieving genuine excellence. This is because there is not sufficient time to understand the nature of the activity or putative practice that would allow its internal goods to be enjoyed.

Work may increasingly involve many diverse tasks, but this is not the same as up-skilling and it is certainly not to be confused with genuine engagement in a practice. Practices can of course involve many diverse tasks: a medical doctor may deal with vastly diverse cases in quick succession, and a farmer may even find time to plant turnips between putting up a new scare crow and tending to his prize pigs, but each of these practices has a degree of unity that means they amount to more than their description as a series of unrelated specialisations would suggest. We can see that MacIntyre is able to highlight the pitfalls of flexible specialisation in a way that Sennett simply cannot. Sennett bemoans the fact that flexible specialisation has led to growing economic inequality (though he is also obliquely

aware that this growing inequality has depended on the demise of union power). This is indeed a matter of serious concern. Inequality is a threat to wellbeing and significant inequality threatens possession of the virtues but it does not explain why this particular feature of changes in the way work is carried out is damaging. MacIntyre's conception of practices is so able. Flexible specialisation hinders flourishing in its own right because it means that tasks become piecemeal, temporary, and so ultimately they are not character forming even when they enable workers to develop skills. Practices require a long term commitment, a period of discipleship that cannot be achieved where specialisation is subject to radical change.

3) *Concentration without centralisation of power*. This is the most important of the three elements identified by Sennett. In organisations which no longer have "the clarity of a pyramid... domination from the top is both strong and shapeless."<sup>44</sup> The top down power of an organisation remains strong, indeed new modes of measurement and surveillance may well have made them stronger, but actual production is fragmented by subcontracting and subdivision. This means that whilst the overall scale of organisation has increased, those who actually make the most important decisions have less accountability to the workforce and in fact the possibility of consultation with the workers becomes diminished as it is difficult to achieve even when it is a goal, which is rare. Workers are thus treated like raw materials: human resources. When the possibility of workers having the power to shape the institution in which they work is thus diminished, the workers are unable to exercise their practical reason to institutionally safeguard their practice. In this way they are alienated from their nature as rational agents and denied access the goods internal to their putative practices insofar as practices presuppose a community of practitioners.

In addition to the drawbacks of immense, large scale power (a problem MacIntyre is more able to explain than Marx), there is a problem with shapeless power in that it is inherently unaccountable. Largeness of scale makes it difficult for members of an organisation to receive a hearing, and so they become excluded from decisions that affect them. Although the agent may still coherently make decisions, the future comes to appear arbitrary. An agent's pursuit of his or her goals always involves a confrontation with the unpredictability of the future (which is why we can agree with Aristotle that *Eudaimonia* requires luck), and this is a source of anxiety.

In a sense the concentration without centralisation of power can be interpreted as leading to alienation from our species being. For Marx it is man's nature to rationally transform the natural world to meet our needs. Where power is entirely diffuse, need-claims



go unheeded because there is nowhere for them to be directed. The Marxist would argue that this claim, and therefore this form of alienation, applies to capitalism as a whole. Perhaps there is some truth in this. However, making the claim separately for smaller units, such as particular organisations or local forms of capitalism (Anglo-American as opposed to Rhinish, for instance) allows us to explain the possibility of practice-based communities operating within capitalism. If there is a substantive and universal element to human rationality, it might be correct to argue that any substantial division implies an alienation from species-being<sup>45</sup>. Our purposes depend on the more modest claim that people need to form communities in order to achieve their ends, and that doing so is at least an important part of our 'species-being'. When such communities become characterised by a concentration without centralisation of power they become unable to meet the requirements which justifies their existence.

### 3.4 Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to lay the foundations for the following chapters. While a MacIntyrean account of work is not fully Marxist due the ethical core provided by MacIntyre's conception of practices, elements of Braverman's Marxist account of work accurately applies to much modern work. Marx's own description of alienated labour applies principally to factory-based work, but Sennett's account of contemporary work suggests such work can be alienating. Indeed, Sennett's account shows that most contemporary work is not only not an engagement in practices, it is also carried out in contexts that threaten any sense of community. This characterisation of much modern work will inform the chapters that follow. From the account developed so far, it is clear that the best work will be that which is practice-based, but it should also be clear that practice-based and practice-like work is threatened by how work happens to be institutionalised within the present order. In the following chapter we will consider how workplaces might avoid being so alienating.

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<sup>1</sup> For an illuminating discussion of MacIntyre's period as a Marxist see the editors' introduction to Blackledge and Davidson (eds.) *Alasdair MacIntyre's Engagement With Marxism*, 2009. McMyler, 1994, is also instructive on MacIntyre's indebtedness to Marx.

<sup>2</sup> In *Marcuse*, 1970, MacIntyre claims that Marx "says nothing about how or why the workers will learn and assimilate the truths which Marxism seeks to bring to them... Indeed, one might write the history of the age which Marxism illuminated so much more clearly than any other doctrine did, the period from 1848-1929, as one in which Marx's view of the progress of capitalism was substantially correct, but at the end of which the Marxist script for the world drama required the emergence of the European working-class as the agent of historical change, the working-class turned out to be quiescent and helpless" pp.42-43.

<sup>3</sup> For an account of Marx's Aristotelianism see, for instance, Meikle, 1985.

<sup>4</sup> Ollman, 1976, p.132.

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<sup>5</sup> Marx, in Tucker (ed.), 1978, p.74.

<sup>6</sup> Norwich Union Life study: <http://www.aviva.co.uk/media-centre/story/3240/britains-bosses-to-face-a-rush-of-resignations-as-/>.

<sup>7</sup> Burchell et al, 1999.

<sup>8</sup> According to "Preparing for Uncertainty", conducted for CIGNA by Yankelovich, a part of the Futures Company, March 2010.

<sup>9</sup> See James, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> Terminology from Goos and Manning, 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Marx, 1978, p.75.

<sup>12</sup> Although given that the 1844 manuscripts were not intended for publication, it would be unfair to criticise Marx too severely for the moments of vagueness and prolixity therein.

<sup>13</sup> Marx in Tucker, 1978, p.89.

<sup>14</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.219.

<sup>15</sup> See Bunting, 2004, who also documents that working hours are on the rise in many jobs.

<sup>16</sup> Marx, in Tucker 1978, p.77.

<sup>17</sup> MacIntyre makes this claim most recently in Voorhoeve, 2009.

<sup>18</sup> Collier, 2004, p.22.

<sup>19</sup> Davidson and Blackledge (ed), 2009, Editors' introduction.

<sup>20</sup> Blauner, 1964, p.15.

<sup>21</sup> MacIntyre, 1994g, p.287.

<sup>22</sup> Ollman, 1971, p.144.

<sup>23</sup> MacIntyre, 1970, p.57.

<sup>24</sup> MacIntyre, 2008a, p.270.

<sup>25</sup> The rigidly monovalent theory of cultural development adopted by some Marxists yields its most preposterous result in literary critic Terry Eagleton's claim that a future socialist society would probably have no regard for Shakespeare. See Eagleton, 1996.

<sup>26</sup> Braverman, 1974, p.86.

<sup>27</sup> *ibid*, p.51.

<sup>28</sup> Harrison, 1994.

<sup>29</sup> Warr, 2007, p.156

<sup>30</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p193

<sup>31</sup> Braverman, 1974, p.94.

<sup>32</sup> Sennett, 1999, p.10.

<sup>33</sup> *ibid*, p.147.

<sup>34</sup> MacIntyre, 1998g, p.265.

<sup>35</sup> MacIntyre, 2008b, p.268.

<sup>36</sup> MacIntyre, 1998g, p265.

<sup>37</sup> Notably in Mulhall and Swift, 1996.

<sup>38</sup> Sennett, 1999, p143.

<sup>39</sup> Sennett, 1999, p48.

<sup>40</sup> See Hegel, 2003, §119.

<sup>41</sup> See, for instance, Sheeran, P. and Abrams, D. and Orbell, S., 1995.

<sup>42</sup> See Hegel, 2005, § 243-245.

<sup>43</sup> This adversarial attitude is documented by Ehrenreich in 'Bait and Switch', in the context of networking events for 'downsized' white collar workers. What is most striking about Ehrenreich's account is the sheer level of dissimulation she encounters among career coaches and the like. The following chapter will explore similar concerns.

<sup>44</sup> Sennett, 1999, p.57.

<sup>45</sup> This is a question for another time. I will assume throughout this thesis that MacIntyre is right to think that rationality is inherently more local and contextual than the universal-alienation thesis requires.

## **Chapter 4: Commitment and Emotion At Work**

Call centre operators have joined, with flight attendants, shop assistants, fast food and waiting staff, the swelling ranks of service workers whose performance at work is shaped by the object of customer satisfaction. All these employees, in various ways, are required to conform to pre-determined phrases, scripts, and modes of behaviour and delivery. If anything distinguishes the call centre worker it is both the extent to which they are subject to monitoring and the unrelenting pressure to conform to acceptable forms of speech, whether scripted or not. It is difficult to conceive of another occupation where the entire working shift requires the articulation of the same vocal patterns in such a repetitive and uninterrupted sequence.<sup>1</sup>

Here we have a characterisation of one of the most typical kinds of emotional labour, the disingenuous expression of positive emotion, which is the defining characteristic of call centre work. In this chapter, I will explore some ways in which emotional labour and emotion work can escape this bleak, alienating picture. I will do this through a discussion of the worthwhile elements of emotion work, the problem of role identification and its threat to unity and integrity, and lastly the conditions of trust under which it becomes rational or desirable to engage in the difficult task of transforming oneself, particularly in the context of employment.

In section 4.1, I will distinguish between emotional labour and emotion work, and between identification with brands, identification with roles, and ordinary soft skills. For MacIntyre, one of the central tasks of ethics is the transformation of our desires so that we aim at the good. For healthy emotion work to be possible, working contexts must be relatively small scale and personal as it is these contexts that best allow us to understand ourselves and others well enough to transform our desires in this way. The problem of role identification and its threat to unity and integrity will be the focus of 4.2. The strong *identification* with a role and adoption of standards of excellence appropriate to that role brings with it the possibility of a conflict between being good *qua* human being and being good in a role. From a MacIntyrean point of view the demands of being a good human being, living a good whole life, always trump the demands of being good in a role whenever the two are in conflict. Furthermore, according to MacIntyre, people ought to avoid putting themselves in situations in which such conflict is endemic. As we saw in chapter 2,

conceiving of one's life as a narrative unity is an invaluable tool when it comes to clearly understanding oneself as a whole human being over and above any particular role that one happens to occupy. We would do well to notice however that this transcendence of any particular set of roles is not a transcendence of particularity *per se*, nor does it imply that roles are ethically unimportant. MacIntyre's unity requirement does not entail the rejection of the adoption of working roles, but it does entail the rejection of Swanton's role ethics. Lastly, in 4.3, I will examine the conditions of trust in which it becomes rational or desirable to engage in the difficult task of transforming oneself, particularly in the context of employment. I follow Kohn in distinguishing between thick and thin trust. Thin trust might be more useful in some social situations as it lubricates basic interactions (in contexts which are already large and largely impersonal), but thick trust is indispensable when it comes to the pursuit of virtuous flourishing. Thick trust also lubricates more complex social interactions, and safeguards thin trust against enfeeblement. It is for this reason, and because the changes to contemporary work described by Sennett and discussed in chapter 3 reduce the likelihood of thick trust emerging, that companies attempt to foster relations that at least approach genuine friendship, through team building exercises and so forth. However, where these lose sight of the goals of long term collaboration, thick trust and security they can become misguided or even coercive attempts to guarantee superficial lip-service to the goals of teamwork.

#### **4.1 Emotion Work and Emotional Labour**

'Emotion work' differs from 'emotional labour' in that the former refers to "the act of trying to change in degree or quality an emotion or feeling"<sup>2</sup> i.e. 'deep acting', whereas the latter often refers to the presentation of emotional states that are likely to be feigned, or at least ostensibly superficial and obviously role-related attitudes of the kind associated with jobs in customer service, retail, hospitality etc. In this chapter, I will be primarily concerned with emotion work in a work context, and emotional labour as it relates to emotion work, rather than emotional labour *per se*. The emotional labour in the kinds of employment mentioned above may involve the exertion of a kind of self-control required in order to acquire the virtues, but it is not itself conducive to virtuous flourishing and indeed can be incompatible with such flourishing. The damaging effects of emotional labour can be quite serious. That numerous studies show prolonged and acute expression of unfeared emotion to be detrimental to

employees' 'subjective wellbeing'<sup>3</sup> and self-validation<sup>4</sup> is unsurprising. Emotional dissonance resulting from prolonged emotional labour has been described as creating a "sense of being false, mechanical, no longer a whole integrated self"<sup>5</sup>, and other research has shown that emotional labour is more damaging the less authentic the expressions of emotion<sup>6</sup>. Also, and again unsurprisingly, the damage of emotional labour is diminished by employees having greater autonomy and control over their work<sup>7</sup>.

Of course, surface acting may be harmless. When it is brief, such as a smile and a nod at a colleague when one is in a bad mood; flexible, for example when friendliness is required but expressed with a significant degree of personal discretion (the significance caveat is required to rule out unscripted but carefully monitored and encouraged false perkiness alluded to in the quotation from Taylor and Bain with which this chapter began); or perhaps when it is entirely voluntarily chosen; the alienating tendencies of prolonged emotional labour are absent.

However, the enforced suppression of genuine emotion and expression of unfeeling emotion even when outside the context of call centre work and its kin may be not only emotionally exhausting and unpleasant, but a threat to personal relations (and thus alienating). This threat is a result of the decline in levels of trust likely to exist between people in contexts in which emotional expressions are constantly and obviously fake. The threat also results from the likely absence of the energy required to continue being friendly once the shift has ended in places of work that make very great emotional demands on employees. The demands of repetitive and unrelenting customer focused 'perkiness' is liable to diminish people's inclination to engage in the voluntary emotion work required to forge friendly collegial relations, thus diminishing the chances of genuine relations of friendship that may follow. As Hochschild, who has done more than anyone to put the concept of emotional labour on the academic map, says, emotional expressions

are symbolic with reference to certain taken for granted agreements as to which gesture goes with which meaning in which context. Like money, expressions work on a basis of trust that this expression (e.g. a clenched fist) corresponds to that range of inner experience (e.g. anger, exuberant bravado). So our trust in a gesture rests on a public trust in the general validity of such expressions, their general link to inner experience.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, the more counterfeit money there is in circulation the less people can trust the currency, and where mistrust becomes the norm authentic personal relations are threatened.

Indeed, where mistrust becomes the norm, even basic co-operation is threatened. We will return to the topic of trust later, but for now our topic is emotion work and, more specifically, the place emotion work might play in a MacIntyrean account of working life.

Central to MacIntyrean ethical theory is the notion that not only is it possible to alter emotional responses but that the “hard work of morality consists in the transformation of our desires, so that we aim at the good”<sup>9</sup>. So it is important to note that emotion work can go beyond even deep acting, but we will retain the term emotion work for cases in which people have to modify their behaviour due to the demands of a role or when the social context demands that they display affect in ways in which they otherwise might not. In this way, even when *acting* has become redundant the exercise of control over affective display can still count as emotion work, so we are dealing with a broad concept. An account of emotion work in its most elementary sense, from an Aristotelian (and MacIntyrean) perspective, will note that a genuine transformation of an emotion characteristically requires deep acting, which itself characteristically presupposes an ability to surface act e.g. a child feigning gratitude for an unwanted present. This feigning of gratitude itself probably requires encouragement at an earlier stage e.g. a younger child being encouraged to express gratitude: ‘what do you say?’. This may be similar to MacIntyre’s example of a budding chess player being encouraged to play with the reward of candy<sup>10</sup>. It is only through playing chess or expressing gratitude that it is possible for someone to appreciate the goods of chess or of gratitude. That gratitude is of value is clearly explicable from a MacIntyrean perspective. Indeed, there has even been a substantially MacIntyrean account of manners which notes that they, the ‘little virtues’, are required to sustain a community<sup>11</sup>. We will consider below how small, civil, social interaction can sustain trust and how it is, therefore, of great importance.

There is a line of thought according to which emotion work as emotional labour constitutes a betrayal of the self. According to C. Wright Mills,

In a society of employees dominated by the marketing mentality it is inevitable that a personality market should arise. For in the great shift from manual skills to the art of ‘handling’, selling and servicing people, personal or even intimate traits of employees are drawn into the sphere of exchange and become commodities in the labour market,<sup>12</sup>

and further that

Men are estranged from one another as each secretly tries to make an instrument of the other, and in time a full circle is made: one makes an instrument of himself and is estranged from it also.<sup>13</sup>

We discussed the concept of alienation from other people in the previous chapter. However, the call for 'soft skills' need not be so sinister. As Hochschild puts it, it is not "that the modern middle-class man 'sells' his personality but that many jobs call for an appreciation of display rules, feeling rules, and a capacity for deep acting."<sup>14</sup> So what is 'commodified' is a capacity not a character, a skill not a personality. Let us not overstate the extent of this commodification. The capacity is not sold as a product might be; possession of the personal quality is not relinquished. An accountant sells his or her ability with figures but still possesses this ability when not at work. We can imagine a gruelling schedule leaving the accountant unwilling to exercise that ability at home, but where the job is well-institutionalised and such burn out is avoided, the sale of accountancy skills need have no unpleasant consequences.

The notion that emotion work as emotional labour can only take one form, the unpleasant and alienating sale of personality, betrays a conceptual confusion. Indeed the notion that a personality not already consumed by a desire for external goods might be sacrificed for the sake of external goods is puzzling! Such a commodification would require a person to be seriously corrupt, or a character to be seriously corroded, to use Sennett's terms, in advance of the imaginary exchange, while also having an exceptional aptitude for emotion work. In such a case, it would be inaccurate to call such a transformation emotion *work*, though it is doubtful whether an agent genuinely capable of such voluntarism has ever existed. As MacIntyre notes when discussing how plain persons make moral decisions, even a skeletal explanation of a moral transformation requires a large body of contextualising information. MacIntyre has been consistently critical of accounts of moral choice that emphasise freedom at the expense of context-dependent deliberation. This is a key feature of both MacIntyre's conception of narrative unity, and of his account of moral traditions<sup>15</sup>.

It is not that emotion work as emotional labour never takes a form similar to that suggested by Mills, it is that such a fate is not universal or inevitable. Indeed, if we leave to one side the metaphor of the sale of personality, Mills' account may well be an accurate, though partial, description of what happens when a compartmentalised conception of life becomes standard, as MacIntyre suggests has happened in contemporary Western culture. Both in the previous chapter and in the above allusions to jobs that require repetitive emotional labour, we saw reasons why something like a Marxist account of alienation is not

to be abandoned altogether (and we will do so again in the brief discussion of brand identification below). However, for MacIntyre, it is extremely rare and difficult for anyone to fall into a *comprehensive* state of alienation, a state that affects the whole of someone's character. What is more likely is that someone can come to understand him or herself in a compartmentalised way. Comprehensive alienation is rare because engagement in practices of various kinds is required in order to become minimally autonomous, rational, moral agents, and an engagement in practices requires at least relatively healthy relations with others. Such practices may be as simple as childhood games and being part of a family, and even if Larkin is right about parents, the damage done to children who do not play and have no genuine, healthy nurturing relationships is well documented. Because alienation, where it exists, is a partial phenomenon, we would do better to ask how varieties of emotion-work-as-emotional-labour might be alienating and how we can best immunise ourselves against this alienation.

Now, someone's character might be corrupted by external pressure to identify as completely as possible with a work organisation, or even as a result of a spontaneous desire to do so, and in such a case the metaphor of selling one's personality may be a helpful one. But there are at least four distinct ways in which emotion work characteristically occurs in the context of the contemporary workplace in addition to the kind of alienating emotional labour undertaken by call centre workers repeating the same cheery words throughout the day: 1) identification with a brand, 2) identification with a role, 3) a more nebulous commodification of affect such as an enthusiastic adoption of a role, and 4) 'soft skills', or non-obligatory surface acting. It would doubtless be possible to identify innumerable distinct categories between and beyond those listed, but these four are sufficient for our purpose of outlining where healthy relationships to one's work end and where relationships inimical to flourishing begin. Let us consider these in turn.

1) *Identification with 'brand'*. Here 'brand' has a broader reference than commonly associated with the word. 'Brand' identification involves a significant level of loyalty to the values of an organisation or its product. When any organisation is oriented towards cultivating identification with its 'brand' something like Mills' account of the white collar worker will be plausible. In such cases, the strong emphasis on aligning with an organisational culture demands significant emotional work, and its benefits may include greater productivity and morale. However, the attempt to implement such measures can lead to what Irving Janis called 'Groupthink' – "A mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members' strivings for unanimity



override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.”<sup>16</sup> This is clearly inimical to virtuous flourishing, but even where groupthink does not obtain, the demands of such thorough-going emotional labour are quite worrying in themselves as we can see by considering the account Barbara Ehrenreich gives of the high demand, high energy, high burn-out rate, corporate culture at Microsoft<sup>17</sup>. The demand for, and realisation of, a strong emotional attachment to a brand can only be good when that brand is itself good and even then may be excessive: moderate goodness does not warrant utter devotion.

Identification with a brand in this strong sense is therefore another very real candidate for a contemporary version of alienation. Even though brand identification is in some ways the opposite of alienation from process and product, it is clearly a threat to our ability to order our lives as narrative unities and to our ability to adequately appraise our engagements in practices. For, unless we define the good life as a practice, it would be a mistake to completely identify oneself with any one activity<sup>18</sup>. There is of course much that needs to be said about this topic, but now is not the time - the subtleties of the remaining kinds of emotion work are more immediately relevant to our investigation.

2) *Identification with a role*. It is no part of MacIntyre’s ‘narrative unity of self’ requirement that role-playing be eschewed, but identification with a role, in the sense intended, does have a tendency to breach this requirement. For MacIntyre, the role player must always be able to ask him or herself “How is it best for me to play this role? ... By what standards am I to judge what is best?”<sup>19</sup> such that whenever the demands of a role conflict with the demands of being a good person over and above that particular role, the latter must always be given priority. Nevertheless, the latter will of course take role demands into consideration as the self is partially shaped by roles and cannot be conceived of as being entirely free from role demands. We will consider this point in more depth in the next section.

3) *Enthusiastic adoption of a role*. The adoption of a role in this sense is distinct from the identification of a role in that when a role is adopted enthusiastically that enthusiasm is of a person considered over and above the role. Almost all work, and indeed very many kinds personal relationship, involves the adoption of a role, but to be a sullen waiter involves no emotion work even if the suppression of outright hostility may have to be accounted some form of emotional labour, but insofar as the job is done at all some role is adopted. To adopt a role enthusiastically means therefore that the enthusiasm is judged as being the best way to play the role for the person as autonomous, independent rational agent<sup>20</sup>. This, like all of the four forms of emotion work as emotional labour described here, admits of degrees and can be more or less commodified. Hochschild says,

Conventionalised feeling may come to assume the properties of a commodity. When deep gestures of exchange enter the market sector and are bought and sold as an aspect of labour power, feelings are commodified. When the manager gives the company his enthusiastic faith, when the airline stewardess gives her passengers her psyched up but quasi-genuine reassuring warmth, what is sold as an aspect of labour power is deep acting.<sup>21</sup>

In this sense a person can be a competent waiter without being genuinely friendly, a knowledgeable teacher capable of helping students to achieve high grades (which is not to say a *good* teacher) without genuinely caring, but the affective enthusiasm is required to be *fully* good at either role.

4) *Ordinary 'soft skills'*. Were it not for the sake of preserving readability this might be termed 'Non-obligatory surface acting'. This is simply politeness, civility, agreeableness etc. exercisable in a variety of ways. Such politeness and civility is required by good manners. Such friendly signals importantly safeguard the small level of trust required by ordinary social interaction. It is worth highlighting it as a feature of working life because the maintenance of professional relationships differs from the maintenance of even trivial personal relations, even relations with strangers. It is permissible to ignore obnoxious strangers (by, for instance, withholding friendly nods of recognition from the mobile phone ring-tone fixated fellow train passenger), or to passively allow a feud with a former friend to continue where one sees no hope of genuine reconciliation; it is impermissible or at least substantially less permissible to treat a colleague in either of those ways. This is because there is always some sense in which work colleagues are engaged in a collaborative enterprise and always a chance that one's role will require contact with those colleagues one may find obnoxious. Even in highly competitive and/or unfriendly working environments in which collaboration is severely reduced, the level of enforced contact and the desirability of maintaining the subjective well-being of others means that collegial civility is always important. Indeed, such civility is essential if the work is to be compatible with the good life.

It is common for friendships to begin at work; indeed, it is not uncommon for people to meet their future spouses at work. The opportunity for social interaction provided by work, along with the self-esteem provided by contributing to society in some way rather than being idle, and of course remuneration, is one of the most commonly cited benefits of work<sup>22</sup>. That social interaction is so praised might tell us more about contemporary society in general than it does about work, but one important feature of the sociability afforded by work is that one is

often thrust together with people one would not have otherwise met or socialised with. This initial diversity, that is, diversity before relationships have been forged and common goals adopted, means that 'soft skills' are especially important in the workplace for many people.

2) Identification with role will be our focus in the next section of this chapter, and 4) ordinary soft-skills, or non-obligatory surface acting, will be our focus in the third section. Our focus here is on 3) enthusiastic adoption of a role.

There is much in Hochschild's account of emotion work that is compatible with a MacIntyrean case for the importance of small work communities, and a life lived as a narrative unity. Hochschild says

...feelings take on their meaning and full character only in relation to a specific time and place in the world. And each context has a normative, an expressive, and a political dimension...both feelings and feeling rules are socially induced, as is the potential conflict between the two. The expressive dimension of any context has to do with the relation between a person's feelings and other people's understanding of and response to those feelings, that is, with the issue of communication.<sup>23</sup>

This focus on context and on a kind of understanding that goes beyond the simple communication that is required for basic interaction suggests that the management and negotiation of such feeling rules will operate best when long term relationships are allowed to develop. These relationships need not only be relatively long term, they must involve frequent face-to-face interaction so that regular and relatively detailed communication is possible. Hochschild continues, "The many small decisions that lead us to discount or take seriously an expression rest on a variety of factors: our style of interpreting, our knowledge of another's smiling habits, our knowledge of events prior to the encounter, and so on."<sup>24</sup> This resonates with MacIntyre's emphasis on both the continuity of personal relations and the importance of small-scale communities. In order to be able to accurately interpret the subtle meanings that might be communicated by a particular person's smile or gesture one would have to know that person well, which takes some time. To know the (quite possibly) ostensibly trivial prior events itself requires that the milieu be relatively small. It is possible to cultivate virtues such that one can respond well to people's behaviour generally, but the ability to respond in the best way requires that one know an individual reasonably well.

It is said that doctors and bank managers tend to assess people quickly, but this is because there are likely to be time restrictions on both – there is no point in indulging a

talkative patient or customer if their requirements can be met quickly – and because both positions involve looking out for a limited number of things. The ability to spot patients who under or over-state the severity of their symptoms is invaluable for a doctor, and will in all likelihood require doctors to pay attention to a handful of warning signs. Insofar as bank managers are still entrusted with decision making in this era of computerised credit checks, there are likely to be signs that differentiate reliable and unreliable customers. Excessive speed of judgement may also result from a cynical complacency too. The difference is that there is no comparable collaborative element to one's relation with one's doctor. One wants one's doctor to perform well, and one will probably comply with requests/volunteer accurate information, but one is not part of a working team. A brisk bedside manner might be a little rude, but does not alter one's relation with the doctor in any relevant sense. At work however, being insensitive can chip away at the good feeling that sustains informal relationships, and ultimately threatens the free-flow of informal information that is crucial in almost any workplace.

The upshot of Hochschild's MacIntyrean elaboration of conditions under which healthy emotion work takes place is that the enthusiastic adoption of a role cannot be a merely 'professional' process. This is to say, these conditions are not impersonal or bureaucratic; "The more bureaucratized our society, the more standardised, commodified, and depersonalised are public displays of feeling, and the more discounting we do."<sup>25</sup> Standardisation (and of course commodification) tends to be ruled out where relationships of or approaching genuine friendship exist. Friendship plays a crucial role in MacIntyre's ethics for without it we may fail to understand both others and ourselves, as we saw in chapter 2. If we are to genuinely transform our desires in order to facilitate a collaborative enterprise, this understanding will be crucial. People tend to be influenced far more by their relationship with their profession and with their immediate work group than their organisation or broader department<sup>26</sup>. In a profession, there is, and in a work group there is likely to be, some degree of homogeneity in terms of conceptions of goals, and so professions are often prima facie candidates for the status of MacIntyrean practices<sup>27</sup>. As MacIntyre says, "reasoning together with others about my and their good requires some significant measure of agreement on our goals – where there is no common ground concerning ends, there can be no common deliberation"<sup>28</sup>. A flight attendant might be obliged to offer warm and friendly service, but this is likely to require less emotional labour when working relationships are long term and safeguarded, and generally the more people are afforded the opportunity to meaningfully

deliberate about their working goals the more possible a genuinely enthusiastic adoption of the working role becomes.

In this section, we focused on the enthusiasm more than the role, but now we turn to consider the nature and extent to which it is legitimate to adopt role-demands as one's own. Emotion work may be furthest from emotional labour under conditions of semi-permanence and close acquaintance but roles themselves do not necessarily change on account of such features.

## 4.2 Roles and Role Ethics

The strong *identification* with a role and adoption of the standards of excellence appropriate to that role brings with it the possibility of a conflict between both various particular roles and between being good *qua* human being and being good in a role. Clearly, from a MacIntyrean point of view the demands of being a good human being, living a good whole life, always trump the demands of being good in a role whenever the two are in conflict. Furthermore, according to MacIntyre, people ought to avoid putting themselves in situation in which such conflict is endemic such as working for companies involved in the arms trade or responsible for polluting the environment and so on<sup>29</sup>. As we saw in chapter 2, conceiving of one's life as a narrative unity is an invaluable tool when it comes to clearly understanding oneself as a coherent whole, a human being, over and above any particular role that one happens to inhabit. We would do well to notice however that this transcendence of any particular set of roles is not a transcendence of particularity *per se* nor does it imply that roles are ethically unimportant. Obviously, MacIntyre's unity requirement does not entail the rejection of the adoption of working roles<sup>30</sup>, but it does entail the rejection of the role-ethics developed by Christine Swanton.

Swanton is one of the leading non-Eudaimonist virtue ethicists, and is perfectly clear about some of the ways in which her view differs from that of an Aristotelian like MacIntyre. She says:

In Aristotelian virtue ethics, the answer to this question lies in a hierarchical approach to goodness, with the hierarchy terminating in goodness *qua* human being. The goodness of a role is determined by reference to its place in the life of a good human being, and there is no conflict between role virtues and 'ordinary' (role undifferentiated) virtues: namely those making one good *qua* human being.<sup>31</sup>

For MacIntyre, ordinary virtues are not completely role undifferentiated. It is important to spell this out in some detail here as the plausibility of Swanton's account will turn on her contrast between role-differentiated and role-undifferentiated virtues. According to MacIntyre's practice-based account, virtues must always be understood contextually, that is to say, they are always to some degree role-differentiated. Virtues receive their primary, though partial, definition in terms of practices. As Christopher Lutz points out in his study of MacIntyre's account of tradition-based rationality, it is not disembodied or autonomous ethical standards that guide our acquisition of the virtues for such standards do not exist independently of the practices through which virtues are acquired. Lutz says,

Practices are the sources of standards. There are no standards prior to practices, because standards arise organically from practices themselves... Pursuing the goods internal to practices entails the development of certain moral qualities, and it is a consequence of this that practices are bearers of moral standards.<sup>32</sup>

One must be the master, or pupil, or collaborator and one's motivation to engage in a putative practice is always going to be informed by the roles one plays in relation to those from and to whom one seeks and gives advice, respect, obedience, and so on.

Swanton continues to explain the nature of her position. She says, "There is another, non-Aristotelian, possibility for a virtue ethical role ethics. Role virtues make one good qua role occupier, and those roles must themselves be worthwhile or valuable."<sup>33</sup> Swanton claims that there is characteristically no conflict between roles. Thus on her view it is not the case, for instance, that the role virtue of artistic passion can lead to a mistreatment of friends and family when the artistic stakes are very high. For Swanton the artist's passion is tempered by other demands. We will consider this move in more detail below. However, let us note that Swanton does not think it is the case that where "there is some conflict between being good qua human being and being good in a role, goodness in-a-role is always to be subordinated to being good qua human being"<sup>34</sup>. This should strike us as being a bizarre claim and Swanton offers little in the way of elucidation other than the allusion noted above that 'other demands' can prevent us from vice in such cases of conflict. Given that those other demands are not the demands of being a good person it is worth looking more closely at what Swanton envisages roles to involve and why roles might be thought to be good (to the extent that they are not to be subordinated to being a good person).

Swanton's pluralistic ethics precludes the possibility of there being one answer to the question of what makes a role good. Discussing business roles specifically, she says that they might be said to be "good because the institution or practice of business as a whole increases prosperity, and is therefore worthwhile". Though, Swanton explains,

It does not follow from this that the target or aim of a business role virtue is to promote the overall prosperity of society as a whole, or the prosperity of the worse off. For the nature of a role virtue in an individual agent is determined by the purpose or function of individual business organisations, and it is not necessarily the case that the purpose or function of *individual* business organisations is to increase the overall prosperity of society, or the prosperity of the worse off.<sup>35</sup>

And further,

business organisations have a distinctive purpose such as promoting or maximising (within limited constraints) owner value over the long term by selling goods and services...[and] that, nonetheless, there is characteristically no conflict between pursuing this aim in a business role and being a good human being.<sup>36</sup>

Even if we accept this set of claims, such an observation is useless when it comes to deciding what to do in cases where there *is* a conflict. Swanton has given us some indication of why she thinks such roles might be valuable, but not a sufficient criterion (or, more plausibly given her pluralism, a set of criteria) of value such that conflicts between commitments can be resolved. A role can be worthwhile because it broadly tends to increase prosperity without the increasing of prosperity being the purpose of the role, but what of cases in which role-demands contingently and unfortunately count against prosperity or some other good? Swanton says, "it is both the case that A) being good as a human being is itself shaped by role demands, and that B) role demands are constrained by the requirements of being good as a human being"<sup>37</sup>. MacIntyre would agree with claim A), although his conception of those roles is different to Swanton's, but not claim B). Claim B) means that for Swanton role demands are constrained by, but not necessarily subordinate to, the demands of being a good person. Is such a view plausible? There is no contradiction here – constraint does not imply subordination - but the MacIntyrean will be extremely sceptical about this because while being a good person *involves* roles it is not 'constrained' by them. If role demands and the

demands of being a good person were equally and mutually constricting any conflict between the two would, *ipso facto*, be irresolvable. In order to answer this question properly however we need to be clear about what Swanton takes the demands of being a good person to be.

Swanton's account of the demands of being a good person involves the concept of a 'prototype virtue'. For Swanton these demands are role-undifferentiated and so general that they can make no reference to social circumstance, cultural conventions, or the narrative particulars of a life<sup>38</sup>. Swanton says,

Not only do they (prototype virtues) not provide universal principles, they do not even provide rules that are specific enough to provide guidance of the form: 'characteristically you should do thus and so.' For example, the prototype virtue loyalty does not prescribe that, characteristically, you should stick with your employer for several years. The prototype virtue honesty does not prescribe that, characteristically, you should state the bad features of your product or not overhype or exaggerate its good features when advertising or selling it.<sup>39</sup>

That loyalty does not prescribe staying with an employer for several years tells us nothing about the nature of loyalty. It is obviously the case that some people are often motivated primarily by external goods and so will sell their skills to the highest bidder, which may involve changing jobs regularly, just as some employers will sack employees if doing so is thought to be profitable or likely to lead to a rise in share price<sup>40</sup>. Loyalty in this sense is completely inappropriate in such contexts; just as patience cannot mean waiting endlessly for just anything, loyalty cannot mean remaining faithful to just anything. The increasing likelihood of employers announcing redundancies at times when their companies are doing well<sup>41</sup>, and the growth of short/fixed term contracts and ensuing "atmosphere of pervasive insecurity"<sup>42</sup> means that loyalty to most work organisations in any real sense is increasingly irrational. Brand identification is at times almost pathological. Consider an anecdote: I once met someone who worked on an advertising campaign for a brand of beer. Having been partly responsible for the 'brand message' of the beer, he came to identify with that message to such an extent that he never drank other brands. When questioned about this he would, quite without irony, almost quote the slogans he had played a part in coining, describe how he fitted the specified target market, and yet never mentioned the taste of the product as a reason for his preferring it.

For Swanton the 'business virtue' of loyalty does not make the same demands as loyalty in friendship. But it seems that nothing is gained by postulating the existence of a set



of 'business virtues'. We can easily and economically say that loyalty, and indeed *every* virtue, varies in terms of correct application depending on the context. Friends can make greater legitimate demands on our loyalty, *ceteris paribus*, than do business organisations, family members more than strangers. We can acknowledge that loyalty is more important in some especially trying situations and certain cultural contexts than others, and so on. Swanton says that in order to combat high staff turnover "management may refuse to re-employ good staff begging for their jobs back, in order to help create a climate where loyalty is seen as an important virtue."<sup>43</sup> Such a measure might increase managerial control, but can hardly be said to foster genuine loyalty. The institutional measures suggested by Swanton may increase staff retention because they instil in the workforce a fear of losing the external goods provided by the organisation or indeed the goods internal to the job, and as a result may increase productivity as the combined result of retaining good staff and reducing the cost of recruiting and training new staff, and ultimately may lead to an increase in lip-service paid to loyalty, but it would not increase *genuine* loyalty. This lip-service would be akin to the superficial emotional labour of a call centre worker and rather unlike the emotion work that is required for the development of genuine loyalty. Loyalty can of course be fostered in the workplace by the preservation of long term working relationships that become friendships even if they are largely restricted to the workplace, and through the creation of environments in which workers feel both valued (and relatively secure) and autonomous<sup>44</sup>. In these cases, what we are talking about is not 'business loyalty' but loyalty.

Swanton's categorisation is mistaken because, although we might draw a distinction between colleagues and 'work friends' and draw a further distinction between the latter category and friends outside of work, we might also draw a distinction between university friends, five-a-side team friends, home-town friends, and so on without ever thinking that there is a serious difference in the nature of friendship in these different cases. These categories are more like descriptions, and we do not think there is a distinct relationship that has the name 'home-town-friendship' any more than we should think there is a distinct virtue called 'business loyalty'.

The case of honesty is more straightforward. Any account which is compatible with deliberately misleading someone about the nature or quality of a service or product is not, *ipso facto*, an account of honesty at all. It would seem that Swanton's account of business role ethics, in trying to be sufficiently broad to include the great variety of business roles that exist has become so permissive that it has unwittingly excluded the ethics. One need not accept MacIntyre's own very pronounced scepticism about 'business ethics' – he is said to

have once replied, when asked why he refused an invitation to address a business ethics conference, that it was ‘for the same reason he would not attend a conference on astrology’<sup>45</sup> – to remain critical about behaviours common in certain industries or aware of the unethical ways in which otherwise legitimate business is practised. Many people sceptical about the praise lavished on the banking sector by the incumbent Labour government were shocked by the revelations that accompanied the 2008 crash, so it is clear that we can distinguish between the demands of roles in themselves and roles as they happen to be particularly institutionalised. There is an enormous difference between raising public awareness of a product and using underhand methods to manufacture desire. Misleading and manipulative statements in advertising, marketing, public relations, journalism and any other industry for that matter are ruled out by honesty if anything is.

Swanton’s problem is that her definition of ‘good person’ is too vague and inclusive, and her definition of ‘prototype virtue’ is too minimal, to be considered virtues at all. Moreover, these aspects of her account are certainly far more minimal than is needed to sustain even a pluralistic conception of what it is to be a good human being.

One feature of Aristotelian Virtue Ethics is that the virtues are acquired by acting in a way that is virtuous before the relevant virtues are genuinely possessed. To reintroduce an example given above, a child may learn gratitude by being taught to act gratefully at appropriate times. In this sense, there is an acceptance of role-appropriate exaggeration within Aristotelianism. Is Swanton’s tacit acceptance of exaggerating about a product similar to the child feigning or exaggerating gratitude for a present? No: the child’s laboured response is partially dependent on his or her status as child (and therefore not to be accounted a fully morally responsible agent) but is ultimately justified by the significance it has for his or her life as a whole, and perhaps by the benefits expressions of gratitude has for community as a whole. School children are taught Newtonian physics because this is the only way they could learn the concepts needed to understand more advanced physics (And because Newtonian physics adequately describes almost all of the physical phenomena they will ever meet). For the exaggerating and over-hyping advertiser this is not the case. Whereas for MacIntyre we attempt to alter our desires so that they aim at the good, deception in advertising is designed to transform desires so that they aim at what is profitable for some group of people.

It is the context that stops an actor from being a liar every time he performs; the game-show ‘Call My Bluff’ was many things, but grossly immoral it was not. The ‘bluffs’ told in the game-show occur in a context in which ordinary rules of trust and belief are suspended because the audience knows 2/3s of the claims are false, and although most people

are wary of the claims made by advertising, the misrepresentations (“*only* 400 calories per 200g serving!”) and half-truths (“more of the pain relieving agent doctors recommend most!”) may still be believed and are ostensibly designed to convince. Moreover because the Advertising Standards Agency is committed to the belief that you cannot derive an ‘ought’ from an ‘is’, highly dubious value judgements are allowed to pass, even if these take the form of exaggeration or implication. Where the purpose of the deception is profit-maximisation, there exist no effective separate standards by which the advertisements can be judged. Where victory in football is to be pursued at all costs, the ethical distinction between an expertly executed feint and an expertly executed dive becomes blurred.

Swanton continues to elaborate her version of context-dependency. “Creativity is part of vice in business if it constitutes inefficiency, self-indulgence, or grandiosity, but in a very talented artist what may be called grandiosity in the business world may be virtuous creativity.”<sup>46</sup> This analogy does not work. Of course a focus on efficiency that is excessive from the point of view of a human being may make one a successful business person, and the prudence required of someone *qua* friend, or father, or brother may prevent that person from fulfilling his potential *qua* artist. The possibility of conflict is very real even if it is not ‘characteristic’. Whatever is to be accounted genuine creativity in the context of business cannot be mere grandiosity. It is for this reason that Aristotle claimed that bravery does not mean being entirely without fear, and to place oneself in danger for something that is not good makes one rash<sup>47</sup>. The context determines whether a mode of thought or behaviour is to be considered a virtue and which virtue it is. Wearing a suit and carrying a briefcase would not necessarily make an artist ‘business-like’ but might rather constitute one more form of eccentricity.

Swanton seems to be happy to allow the demands of the institution and/or role to govern the virtues rather than vice versa. Indeed, if Swanton's pluralistic role ethics is correct it is hard to imagine how anyone could devise criteria by which they could assess and then alter an institution or a role, whereas for MacIntyre this institutional safeguarding of practices is a key task. When Swanton attempts to explain why her view does not amount to the belief that business is about maximising shareholder profits, instead it is about serving shareholder interests ‘excellently’, she says “a woman may practice private business, but eschew maximising on the grounds that caring, demanded by her role as parent and spouse, precludes maximising in her business role”<sup>48</sup> Despite the fact that on her view prototype honesty is compatible with regularly lying, Swanton also claims that a number of prototype virtues may rule out maximising – this is presumably what is meant by ‘serving excellently’. However,

unless there can be a place made for narrative unity, or at least some other form of hierarchy, in her theory it is not clear that such a move is available to Swanton. This is because it is not clear what grounds there could be for allowing the demands of being a parent or a spouse to outweigh the demands of a business role. Furthermore, whilst Swanton has indicated (albeit inadequately) why the woman in the example may not maximise even if a role demanded it, she has not demonstrated that business roles do not involve such maximising. For the MacIntyrean, some roles do and some roles do not involve maximising shareholder profits, and where these roles are in conflict with roles such as those of a parent or a spouse, the demands of the latter roles win out because they are more important in terms of being a good human being.

It is possible to imagine an example in which a role demands profit maximisation such that caring for a child is precluded, and if 'parent' and 'businessperson' are merely two separate roles that are not hierarchically ordered, it seems that if we accept Swanton's view there is no satisfactory way to resolve this conflict. One role might happen to be more important to an individual than another but unless the demands of being a good person are allowed to trump role demands, which of the competing role demands are obeyed is merely a matter of subjective preference. On MacIntyre's Aristotelian view, it is easy to see how and why someone might attempt to change an institution or a role such that its demands were more in line with what is required of us in order to be good *qua* human beings but on Swanton's view this remains mysterious.

Swanton identifies what she sees as the problem of supposing the demands of prototype virtues to be so stringent that the demands of the business purpose may be seriously compromised. I hope I have said enough about the concept of prototype virtues to show that this accusation is unlikely to have much force. Swanton goes on to say that this mistake follows from drawing a false dichotomy between the moral and the 'merely' practical, and regarding business purposes as being merely practical. She says that this "spurious" separation has the effect that,

the 'merely practical' is downgraded in significance relative to the moral. However, doing one's (worthwhile) job properly is a moral requirement, and if problems such as a printer not getting course books ready in time for the first class are seen as 'merely practical problems', then they may not be attributed to the moral failings of individuals, as opposed to, for example, 'systems' failure where no one takes responsibility for contributing to the failure. The mistake of reducing many morally important features to the merely practical is not always made, but it

is still common nonetheless to think of many institutional goals such as business goals as amoral. It is harder to make this mistake with respect to other worthwhile institutions such as medicine. It would be very odd indeed to regard the saving of life and the reduction of health related suffering to be an amoral (or 'merely practical') goal.<sup>49</sup>

Obviously, the MacIntyrean recognises the moral as being importantly practical and agrees that a disregard for medicine would indeed be odd. The problem with Swanton's surprisingly brief dismissal of this objection is that there seems to be no way of giving a satisfactory account of what is worthwhile. Moreover, the problem is that there is nothing about something being a 'business goal' that guarantees its being worthwhile, indeed some are amoral and some are immoral. One of things we legitimately expect from a moral theory is that it be able to help us adjudicate between good and bad actions, roles, business practices and particular jobs<sup>50</sup>. Aristotelian Eudaimonism in general and MacIntyre's formulation in particular can easily account for the difference between medicine, good business, and certain amoral business goals without drawing an unsustainable distinction between the moral and practical. It can also explain why it is commonly and correctly held that medicine is more intrinsically good than, say, advertising.

All activities require the adoption of roles to some extent, and all of these roles have at least some standards of success (or 'excellence' in Swanton's sense), but if this is enough for a role to be 'worthwhile' then all we are left with is the glorification of whatever happens to be done. This is an unacceptably broad set of limits. A more robust conception of virtues and of being a good person allows us to avoid the problems we encountered with Swanton's account. MacIntyre provides just such a robust conception. MacIntyre's practice-based ethics is sometimes criticised for being unable to rule out 'evil practices'. Aside from the fact that such accusations rest on a misinterpretation of MacIntyre's definition of a practice, they can be ignored because on his account nothing is to be accounted a virtue in terms of practices alone<sup>51</sup>. Swanton's account invites similar accusations, but it seems she has no way open to her to adequately distinguish between morally good and bad roles. Whereas MacIntyre subordinates roles and practices to the demands of being a good person, Swanton lacks a plausible conception of a 'good person'. If roles are allowed the dominant position which Swanton grants them then there can be no resolution of conflict.<sup>52</sup>

### 4.3 Trust and Authority

We saw above some ways in which, in certain contexts, a focus on ‘soft skills’ and emotion work helps to make contemporary work more conducive to virtuous flourishing, for instance by protecting personal relationships. However there are at least two ways in which this promise can be undermined: 1) by being instantiated in an environment in which trust is absent or severely threatened, and 2) by requiring subordination to the standards of a particular activity without the presence of legitimate authority specifically or rational grounds more generally. There is an enormous difference between someone engaging in emotion work in order to become a better worker because they recognise and accept the goals of doing so as internal goods and doing so for the sake of external goods or to avoid punishments of whatever kind. These two threats to flourishing have been gestured at in previous chapters in our discussion of the epistemological difficulties facing would be practitioners and in our discussion of alienation.

As we saw in the first chapter, MacIntyre’s practice-based ethics requires an account of rational authority. This is because if we are to subordinate ourselves to expert practitioners and dedicate ourselves to the practice (or indeed putative practice) so that we can become better able to engage in and thus appreciate the goods internal to the practice in question and if we cannot have a sufficient understanding of that practice in advance, we, as potential practitioners and as theorists of practices need some way of deciding whether a putative authority who recommends such subordination and dedication is genuine. We both need an account of the nature of the authority and an account of the conditions under which it is rational to yield to an authority. Traditional expert authorities are becoming less respected, as Christeen George puts it,

Patients may, for example, question a medical decision and demand explanation taken by the medical professional. Students may question a grade given for a piece of work and may request additional feedback to provide justification of the grade. Whilst the knowledge and expertise is acknowledged, their judgements and actions are increasingly scrutinised. Social changes, particularly within the UK, have led to a decrease in deference and a more customer –rather than client- focused relationship.<sup>53</sup>

Excessive or undue deference can be a hindrance to anyone’s pursuit of the good. However, this change to customer-focused relations is not unproblematic. No one believes the customer

is always right. The need for an account of authority may be especially acute when deciding whether to engage in a new practice, or persevering with one through difficulty, but it is also present when it comes to the practice of sustaining a community, a practice in which we are all, to some extent, engaged. Even being a well mannered customer contributes to this in a minimal sense. However, community is not a good absolutely and so we must, if we are to form and sustain communities conducive to flourishing, be able to both question the worth of goals set by a community and the authority of any person or social or organisational structure that calls for emotion work that serves that particular community. More accurately, it is not the ability to question authority that is important here, but the conceivability of those in authority answering that question. Being able and permitted to question authority is of little value if one lacks the resources to understand when that authority is illegitimate and the ability to remedy the situation.

Clearly, in work contexts certain people have authority in the sense of power, but what we are interested in here is trust in authority (based as it may be on faith in someone's moral or technical competence or knowledge). In this sense, we place trust in someone both because we do not suspect that they will deceive us and because they deserve trust on the grounds that they know what they are talking about. Here we might follow Kohn in distinguishing between three broad kinds of trust: 1) trust without goodwill of the sort that allows us to store money in banks<sup>54</sup> or trust in expert systems more generally<sup>55</sup> or indeed trust strangers to fulfil contractual and legal obligations, 2) the freer but still thin trust that exists between a shop-keeper and his or her customers, and 3) the thick trust that exists between friends. In the context of contemporary work (and contemporary society more generally) thin trust is still relatively common and freely available, but has in many respects become thinner still with the increase of bureaucratisation. To use an example given by Kohn, where a newspaper editor might be inclined to informally commission an opinion piece from a journalist he or she knew, the paper's corporate policy might dictate that a formal contract is required, thereby increasing the time and effort required. This resort to legal obligation betrays a lack of trust and reduces our dealing with people to dealings with roles. We can trust a person *qua* person on the basis of an informal promise, but we cannot trust a person *qua* role-occupier if that role dictates that there would be some benefit from breaking such a promise. Indeed the thinning of trust must partially account for increasing efforts to manage the psychological contract, a concept that was once unheard of, which then became a metaphor, and has become increasingly literal and is perhaps a genuine phenomenon now that employers take it into consideration. Indeed, the more employers focus on it the more real

will its effects become, and the more contractual will become what were once ordinary relationships. Transactions that do not require contracts run more smoothly, as Kohn notes<sup>56</sup>, but this makes them harder to manage.

Kohn thinks thin trust is more useful than thick trust because it extends beyond firsthand experience, but it seems that we need to be able to have relatively thick trust beyond firsthand experience on the basis of rationally grounded authority. For instance, we might have firsthand experience of a friend's ability to be a good judge of character and then go beyond firsthand experience and trust a new friend of this friend, and this relatively thick trust derives from the faith we have in the friend. Certain types of church group or humanist organisation might welcome a new member with fellowship because of shared moral commitments upon which trust can be founded. Robert Putnam notes that as "the social fabric of a community becomes more threadbare, however, its effectiveness in transmitting and sustaining reputations declines, and its power to undergird norms of honesty, generalised reciprocity and thin trust is enfeebled"<sup>57</sup>. This indicates that there are severe limitations to the usefulness of thin trust. Thin trust is most reliable in contexts in which thick trust is a possibility because in such circumstances it can resist being so enfeebled. Actual thin trust operates best against a background of potentially actualisable thick trust. The task of creating such circumstances is up to us, and depends on our possession of the virtues. The creation of small scale communities in contexts such as the workplace or neighbourhood cannot solve wider social problems, but it can allow thin trust relationships to come closer to thick trust.

There is a venerable liberal tradition of arguing that the common good supervenes on enlightened self-interest. Consider the following classic statement from Adam Smith's (Book IV, chapter II, paragraph IX) *The Wealth of Nations*

By preferring the support of domestic to that of foreign industry, he intends only his own security; and by directing that industry in such a manner as its produce may be of the greatest value, he intends only his own gain, and he is in this, as in many other cases, led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was not part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it. I have never known much good done by those who affected to trade for the public good. It is an affectation, indeed, not very common among merchants, and very few words need be employed in dissuading them from it.



Smith's position is plausible when applied to individual merchants but does not apply in a era in which corporate entities are vast and vastly powerful. Mr. Butcher does not want to overcharge Mr. Baker because he does not want to be overcharged himself, but Mr. Tesco cannot be harmed by Mr. Independent-Farmer so the former can do as he pleases. Moreover it is already a mistake to regard society as being composed of free and equal persons even where, for the sake of argument, there are no power disparities of the sort that divide global corporations from local producers because, as MacIntyre is at pains to argue in *Dependent Rational Animals*, we are all born into relationships of dependency in which uncalculated co-operation is required. For the MacIntyrean, flourishing requires more substantial goods, a thicker conception of the common good, and a recognition that our relationships with others go deeper than Smith Liberalism allows. Given that our unconditional commitments to others are grounded by the virtues, and so ultimately derivative from our pursuit of the good life, the common good is still a matter of enlightened self-interest for MacIntyre. The difference lies in what each party counts as enlightenment.

According to MacIntyre we must be aware that we can learn from everyone<sup>58</sup>, that is to say, we can regard every human being as potentially worthy of thick trust, i.e. friendship. Thin trust would then operate against a background of possible thick trust, and non-obligatory surface acting, 'soft skills', may approximate genuine emotion work. However, the larger the scale of the social group the less feasible it becomes to invest in these relationships characterised by thin trust, and the more likely it is that they will be reduced to merely contractual relations or the most minimal 'trust-without-goodwill'. The standard numbers bandied around in management books for the optimal group size for decision-making is between 5 and 12. More broadly, estimates for optimal size of a social group are still relatively small. For instance Dunbar's 'number', a cognitive upper limit on how many people it is possible to maintain stable social relationships with, is 150 (based on the volume of the human neo-cortex compared to other primates) and Bernard, Killworth et al estimate that the number is closer to 230 based on field studies of actual human populations<sup>59</sup>.

Thin trust might be more useful in some social situations as it lubricates basic interactions (in contexts which are already large and largely impersonal). Thick trust is more 'useful', indeed, it is indispensable, when it comes to the pursuit of virtuous flourishing. Thick trust also lubricates more complex social interactions, and it safeguards thin trust against enfeeblement. It is for this reason, and because the changes to contemporary work described by Sennett reduce the likelihood of thick trust, that companies attempt to foster relations that at least approach genuine friendship, through team building exercises and so

forth but where these lose sight of the goals of long term collaboration, thick trust and security they can become misguided or even coercive attempts to guarantee superficial lip-service to the goals of teamwork. That ordinary workers find this harder to lose sight of is suggested by the surveys which show people prefer ordinary work nights out, meals, and the like to the wackier end of team building exercises. This is perhaps part of the explanation of why people often resist the reorganisation of working groups<sup>60</sup>, and perhaps why people are sometimes disinclined to accept promotions that they think will damage their relationships with their peers<sup>61</sup>.

#### 4.4 Conclusion

We can draw some conclusions about the conditions of flourishing at work at this stage. These are that working in an environment that involves a say over how one's workplace is organised, and possessing working autonomy, and long term relationships with valuable commitments to fellow workers are all required if one is to flourish at work, though as we will see in chapter 7, they cannot be guarantors of such flourishing. These factors are simply a partial description of MacIntyre's practice of sustaining and organising and institutions. It is also a reasonable partial description of the mandate of trade unions, in addition to the task of securing external goods such as higher wages, and traditionally more leisure time (one of the union movement's great successes). When a form of employment is not a practice and cannot be made to be rewarding in terms of internal goods, it is crucial that it be organised such that those engaged in it have some control over it. It is an ideal, though one that is probably unrealisable, that all employment be an engagement in a practice. As MacIntyre says,

Much work of course is necessarily tedious and fatiguing. But, if in addition it is carried out under oppressive and exploitative conditions, if it is organized so that the maximization of surplus value to be appropriated by others is the overriding consideration in organizing it, then work becomes something inflicted on the worker... This is why strong and independent trade unions, controlled as far as possible from their grass roots, are necessary for the good life under any form of capitalism. This is why strike action, provided that the striking workers have some chance of success, is almost always to be supported.<sup>62</sup>

This support for trade unions flows partly from MacIntyre's recognition of the iniquities of capitalism and partly from his emphasis on the importance of community (although the two

are not entirely unrelated concerns). MacIntyre's tradition-based account of rationality and his account of practices mean that judgements from those outside particular trade unions will always be more liable to error than judgements from within. While a thorough account of MacIntyre's politics is beyond the scope of the present thesis, the following chapter will examine one key facet of that politics, the nature of community and how communities might be fostered and protected in even inhospitable workplaces, and we will return to the question of how they might be fostered more generally in the final chapter

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<sup>1</sup>Taylor and Bain, 1999, p.109.

<sup>2</sup>Hochschild, 2003, p.94.

<sup>3</sup>Zapf 2002, Zapf and Holz 2006, Lewig and Dollard 2003.

<sup>4</sup>Brotheridge and Lee 2002, Warr 2007.

<sup>5</sup>Mumby and Putnam, 1992, p.472.

<sup>6</sup>Schaubroeck and Jones, 2000, p.179.

<sup>7</sup>Wharton, 1993.

<sup>8</sup>Hochschild, 2003, p.83.

<sup>9</sup>MacIntyre, 2009a, p.117.

<sup>10</sup>MacIntyre, 2007, p.188.

<sup>11</sup>Johnson, 1999, p.20.

<sup>12</sup>C. Wright Mills, 1951, p.190.

<sup>13</sup>ibid, p.193.

<sup>14</sup>Hochschild, 2003, p.102.

<sup>15</sup>See *After Virtue* chapter 15. MacIntyre devotes most of *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* to outlining the details of his account of tradition-based rationality.

<sup>16</sup>I. Janis, 1972, p.9.

<sup>17</sup>Ehrenreich, 2005.

<sup>18</sup>I take it that this is consistent with Aristotelian ethics even on the dominant interpretation of Eudaimonia, which MacIntyre holds, because we do not 'identify' with contemplation in the sense I intend.

<sup>19</sup>MacIntyre, 2006p, p.201.

<sup>20</sup>It is important to note that whenever I talk of autonomy or independence I in no way mean to deny the more fundamental dependence we all have on others. For MacIntyre self-sufficiency, even as Aristotle conceived of it in his great-souled man, is an illusion. See, for instance, MacIntyre, 2009a.

<sup>21</sup>Hochschild, 2003, p.102.

<sup>22</sup>See Terry and Hogg, 2005, amongst others (including, as we saw in the previous chapter, Hegel).

<sup>23</sup>Hochschild, 2003, p.81.

<sup>24</sup>ibid, p.83.

<sup>25</sup>ibid, p.83.

<sup>26</sup>Ashforth and Johnson, 2001.

<sup>27</sup>Although the institutional contexts of most of the recognised professions suggests they are liable to become corrupted.

<sup>28</sup>MacIntyre, 2009a, pp.120-121.

<sup>29</sup>See MacIntyre, 2006p.

<sup>30</sup>ibid, p.201.

<sup>31</sup>Swanton, 2007, p.208.

<sup>32</sup>Lutz, 2004, pp.41-42.

<sup>33</sup>Swanton, 2007, p.208.

<sup>34</sup>ibid, p.210.

<sup>35</sup>ibid, p.208.

<sup>36</sup>ibid, p.210.

<sup>37</sup>ibid, p.211.

<sup>38</sup>ibid, p.211.

<sup>39</sup>ibid, p.214.

<sup>40</sup>See, for instance, Worrell et al (1991) which found that share prices rose by on average 4% in the days after redundancies are announced. Sennett also notes this in his *Corrosion of Character*.

<sup>41</sup>This was discussed earlier with reference to Sennett, but see also P. Cappelli 1995.

<sup>42</sup>Allen and Henry, 1996, p.66.

<sup>43</sup>Swanton, 2007, p.217.

<sup>44</sup>Stichler, 2005, p.405.

<sup>45</sup>A story told by Kelvin Knight in 'The MacIntyre Reader', p.284.

<sup>46</sup>Swanton, 2007, p.216

<sup>47</sup>Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, 1115a20-1116b.

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<sup>48</sup> Swanton, 2007, p.221.

<sup>49</sup> *ibid.*, p.222.

<sup>50</sup> I ignore for now the claim that virtue ethics is a flawed enterprise because it cannot help guide action. Insofar as this objection means that virtue ethics reserves an essential place for practical wisdom and has a deep sensitivity to context, it is no objection at all and insofar as it is warranted I take it that it does not apply to MacIntyre.

<sup>51</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p200.

<sup>52</sup> I suspect also that Swanton would be unable to maintain the distinction between emotion work and emotional labour I set up in the first section because she allows roles to be self-sufficient.

<sup>53</sup> George, 2009, p.74.

<sup>54</sup> Kohn, 2008, p.12.

<sup>55</sup> *ibid.*, p.69.

<sup>56</sup> *ibid.*, pp.89-90.

<sup>57</sup> Putnam, 2000, p.136.

<sup>58</sup> MacIntyre, 2009a, pp.129-130.

<sup>59</sup> McCarty, C., Killworth, P.D., Bernard, H.R., Johnsen, E. and Shelley, G., 2000.

<sup>60</sup> Kotter, 2007, found that 70% of all corporate change efforts fail and attributes this to workforce resistance.

<sup>61</sup> A phenomenon noted by Elton Mayo, 1949. Recent research suggests that promotions tend to be damaging to health. See Boyce and Oswald, 2011, who found that there is little evidence that greater job status leads to greater mental well-being and considerably more evidence that it leads to a decline in such well-being.

<sup>62</sup> MacIntyre, 2008b, p.275.

## **Chapter 5: Institutions and Communities**

MacIntyre frequently lists workplaces as sites in which practice-based communities can exist. This claim is implicitly qualified by MacIntyre's repeated and unequivocal criticisms of the dominant institutions of modernity and by his claim that in order to flourish, people must be part of relatively small-scale, local communities. In this chapter I will argue that workplaces can house communities and that we need not read this claim as pertaining only to workplaces that house separately identifiable practices, or workplaces that are explicitly subversive of the dominant order. My argument does not, however, involve a paradoxical repositioning of MacIntyre as pro-business<sup>1</sup>. Instead, I argue that MacIntyre has not fully accounted for the widespread disengagement from contemporary work<sup>2</sup> and the informal communities that resist the compartmentalising tendency of much modern work. Even where Breen's claim that the "workplace has no connection with their wider aspirations or goals, with who they are or who they wish to become, but is instead a realm of existence that is to be contrasted negatively with the realms of familial life and of leisure"<sup>3</sup> holds true, alienation can be avoided through communities, or quasi-communities, of tacit resistance. Workplaces that house practices or strong, active trade unions get community for free. I am concerned to show that they can survive in even the most hostile environments. In chapter 3 I argued that comprehensive alienation was likely to be rare, and the present chapter serves to underline that point.

I will begin in section 5.1 by outlining MacIntyre's definition of a practice-based community. What distinguishes such communities is the shared commitment to certain ends. Without a shared set of premises that can be no genuine community. I will then consider John Dobson's objections to MacIntyre's criticisms of the contemporary workplace. Dobson argues, in his 'Utopia Reconsidered', that large-scale institutions such as the modern firm might fulfil the role of practice-based communities. In section 5.2, I will explore three key areas of MacIntyre's account of communities: compartmentalisation, inequality and myopia, and I will argue that Dobson's own arguments about these three topics are mistaken. However, in answering Dobson's challenge I will outline some reasons to adopt a less hostile attitude towards the institutions of modernity than MacIntyre himself apparently holds. In support of this claim, I will outline some ways in which workers might be resistant to modernity without being ostensibly subversive, for instance by disengaging from their non-practice-based work and by carrying out such work for the sake of other, practice-based,

ends. Finally, in 5.3, I will head off the possible counter attack by outlining the argument, developed most convincingly by Ron Beadle, that business itself cannot be regarded as a practice.

### 5.1 MacIntyre's 'Communities' and the Workplace

For MacIntyre sustaining communities is the practice of politics, and he specifies certain necessary conditions for a political or social institution to be conducive to the achievement of individual and common goods. He says:

[T]hey must afford expression to the political decision-making of independent reasoners on all those matters on which it is important that the members of a particular community be able to come through shared rational deliberation to a common mind.<sup>4</sup>

It is only under such conditions that a substantive conception of the common good is possible: only in small scale communities can there be a politics that is not dominated by competing interests. Where fundamentally different interests do compete, rational persuasion is secondary to leverage in negotiations and the ability to manipulate others becomes crucial. MacIntyre says, "The practice of the virtues...is something difficult to reconcile with functioning well in the present economic order."<sup>5</sup> This is because of the systematic exclusion of practices and the overwhelming emphasis on pursuit of external goods that is characteristic of the dominant institutions of modernity, in particular the market economy and individual corporations. I shall argue below that for many people, functioning well in the present economic order is not among their over-riding goals.

Perhaps the best known element of MacIntyre's objection to contemporary work is his argument against managerial expertise in *After Virtue*. This will be the topic of the following chapter. However, in an earlier essay MacIntyre says:

The dominant way of understanding [industrial work and its rewards] under capitalism...is that whereby workers, management and investors all share in the distribution of what is jointly earned, in order that each gets as much as possible, and what matters is that as much as possible be produced...On this view men are primarily consumers and they work in order to consume...

MacIntyre goes on to outline a rival view:

We ought to eat in order to work, not vice versa. The classical expression of this view is Aristotle's, but all artists, most professors and some socialists believe it too. Only sentimentalists believe that work ought or can be always interesting, but in an order where work serves consumption it is bound to be always uninteresting. On the first view my fundamental interest as a member of one group is in how large a share of the product of work I consume; on the second view I can have *no* fundamental interest in the continuance of an order that represents work, interest and rewards in the way that the first view does. It is clear that if the first view is universally or even just widely held, the concept of interest employed will be such that conflicts over interests will be local, manageable, and, if the managers are sufficiently adroit, marginal; but if the second view were ever to be held by even a minority of workers, then conflict between them and the managing and investing classes would be endemic, central and possibly interminable.<sup>6</sup>

MacIntyre might be right in his claim that most work exists to serve consumption, but work that is practice-based does exist. In chapter 1, we saw that the notion of a practice is more malleable than it first seems, and in chapter 3 we explored some reasons to reject any sweeping claims about the alienating tendencies of modern work. Such practice-based work can be threatened by the acquisitive tendencies of institutions, but it can also survive such threats. People whose work answers to the title of 'practice' may well have no *fundamental interest* in the continuance of the present order, nor indeed may people who willingly comply with their non-practice-based work, but to have no interest in that order's continuance is not the same as having a compelling reason to work towards the overthrow of that order. People engaged in practice-based work certainly have an interest in resisting threats to the focus on internal goods, and people whose work is not practice-based have an interest in opposing intrusive managerial measures such as excessive control or monitoring, and in avoiding work that is uninteresting.

In a series of works MacIntyre claims that people often begin to ask questions about their good in a fundamentally Aristotelian way<sup>7</sup>, but that this starting point is perverted by, for instance, the way in which lives are compartmentalised in the modern order. I am suggesting that this perversion is easier to avoid than MacIntyre suggests because communities, even in MacIntyre's restricted sense, are all but ineliminable and so that this compartmentalisation is not as pervasive a feature of modern life as MacIntyre suggests.

Note that between the former work-to-consume view and the latter Aristotelian view,

there remains space for a third view. People can regard work as a necessity to be done in order to pursue other ‘work’, i.e. engagement in practices outside their paid employment, and so the fundamental concern need not be with how much of the product of work they consume. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre claims that insofar as productive work is carried out within the household it contributes towards the practice of sustaining communities, but

As, and to the extent that, work moves outside the household and is put to the service of impersonal capital, the realm of work tends to become separated from everything but the service of biological survival and the reproduction of the labour force, on the one hand, and that of institutionalised acquisitiveness, on the other... Where the notion of engagement in a practice was once socially central, the notion of aesthetic consumption now is, at least for the majority.<sup>8</sup>

The aim of the argument that follows is to show that working groups can be communities and that this means that even forms of employment in which the workers own neither the means of production, nor their product (where these terms still have application), they may still be engaged in the practice of sustaining their community. This is so even though that community is likely to be less unified and less conducive to the virtues and to flourishing than household communities that existed before the ‘great transformation’, to use Karl Polanyi's term. Notice that in the above quotation MacIntyre does not require that the activity of work itself be a practice, for many of the individual tasks involved in sustaining a household and other kinds of practice-based communities do not themselves answer to the title of practices. Not *everything* hangs on whether particular forms of modern work can be shown to be practices and I shall argue below that the conditions under which non-practice based work can be carried out and the relationships that exist between workers determine whether a particular workplace can be accounted a MacIntyrean community.

MacIntyre is surely right to note that what he calls ‘aesthetic’ consumption rather than engagement in practices is now socially central. As individual consumers, people have no reason to attempt to tutor their desires. Someone may have reason to attempt to transform a lower-order desire for junk food so that it accords with a higher-order desire to be healthy, but where individualism is the dominant mode of thought, there is no reason for someone to call into question their fundamental preferences<sup>9</sup>. Being a member of a working community in which the virtues have a purpose provides an agent with a defence against this individualism, for as part of a group with some common ends an agent is answerable to



others, in this case to co-workers, in a way that they are not as private consumer. Such membership affords people some opportunity to think about their good rationally and critically<sup>10</sup>. As Keat notes, people very seldom leave one job for another as soon as marginally more money is on offer<sup>11</sup>. People do not blindly accept the criteria of success characteristic of modernity.

In order to explore MacIntyre's account of community more fully we will now consider a number of criticisms put forward by John Dobson. In the remainder of this section, we will consider Dobson's central claim that modern firms are new forms of community and that in attempting to exclude them MacIntyre has incorrectly drawn the boundaries of his own concept. In the following section, we will consider some of Dobson's more particular claims about MacIntyrean communities.

Dobson claims that MacIntyre is mistaken in his assertion that modern market relationships undermine communal ties, and instead suggests that the modern firm is itself a *new* form of community. Dobson says “the modern firm is simply creating different types of community: more fluid, more all-embracing, more virtual, and no less virtuous”<sup>12</sup>. On the topic of virtual communities, Dobson suggests that social networking internet sites are “all about building communities”<sup>13</sup>. There is good reason to be sceptical about this claim for one notable difference between communities as MacIntyre defines them, i.e. as requiring face to face interaction and mutual accountability, and virtual communities is that it is very easy to construct a false identity, to lie, to remain anonymous on the latter in ways that preclude accountability and genuinely deliberative conversations about goods. Such goods are most available when the contact tends to be long-term<sup>14</sup> and, as we saw in chapter 4, sufficiently regular to sustain thick trust.

Nevertheless, it would be incorrect to rule out the possibility of 'virtual' communities altogether. However, MacIntyre is at pains to point out that community is not *intrinsically* valuable. It is valuable because it allows for the collaborative pursuit of various common goods. Such community is unavailable at the level of entire firms. Large firms are usually dispersed across many individual workplaces. Someone might be able to identify a common good with the members of their department, that is people with whom they have daily face-to-face contact, but it is harder to imagine this relationship obtaining between people whose only contact is via email. The goals of a large company are likely to be too vague or diverse to ground a sense of common enterprise, and in an era of flexible specialisation are liable to change. Indeed the sheer size of such companies is an obstacle, but this is not so at the level of team or department, and it is not necessarily so of small companies which plausibly

possess the requisite homogeneity of purpose.

Dobson's main claim, that modern large-scale corporations are new forms of utopian community is therefore unpersuasive. Innovative methods adopted by companies such as Microsoft, Google, eBay, and Apple might have some long term benefits in terms of morale and productivity.<sup>15</sup> However, it is probably too soon to be certain about this and also about whether such methods are applicable to other kinds of company, such as firms which are untouched by the remnants of the 1970s fusion of IT and 'hippy' ideals (insurance, financial, or professional services companies for example). Moreover, as MacIntyre points out, we should not readily accept as definitive research into the subjective states of employees to provide evidence about genuine flourishing<sup>16</sup>, given the additional ethical import of the latter term.

Dobson praises modern firms for, amongst other things, their geographical diversity. However, it is this very lack of rootedness that makes them susceptible to MacIntyrean criticism. At the level of the neighbourhood or the workplace team, genuine friendships may flourish and so ground commitments that outweigh pursuit of merely external goods, which can also be grounded by enjoyable work. Geographical diversity rules out the daily face-to-face interaction that can foster friendships. Moreover, Dobson's account is vulnerable on the grounds that the lack of a substantive common good seriously hinders shared deliberation.

Although Dobson has set out to engage directly with communities in MacIntyre's sense, it seems that he tends to use the word in its ordinary sense or perhaps even its rather degraded contemporary sense i.e. 'any group with something in common, however otherwise dispersed and heterogeneous', and therefore misses much of the point of MacIntyre's emphasis on communities. We can concede that the companies he lists are new forms of community in a broad sense without allowing them to be practice-based communities, communities in which shared deliberation and pursuit of internal goods is possible. But if community *per se* is not intrinsically valuable, this is no real concession at all.

Dobson questions whether the demise of 'traditional' community is such a bad thing. MacIntyre himself recognizes that communities are "always open to corruption by narrowness, by complacency, by prejudices against outsiders, and by a whole range of other deformities, including those that arise from a cult of local community"<sup>17</sup>. The demise of these kinds of communities is a good, but that does not alter the central MacIntyrean contention that membership of a community is a precondition for acquiring the virtues and thus for flourishing. There is no sense in which MacIntyre values community for its own sake, but there is no doubt that he regards the demise of household-based economies as a loss, and this

is because he regards this demise as marking the severance of the virtues from “their traditional context in thought and practice”<sup>18</sup>. Contemporary contexts in which the virtues *are* so contextualised escape MacIntyre’s censure. We saw that such communities are crucial to MacIntyre’s ethics in our discussion of the decision and testimony problems in chapter 1, and in our discussion of the self-deception problem in chapter 2.

While denying that the dominant institutions of modernity can be practice-based communities, MacIntyre lists schools, hospitals, chess clubs, farming co-operatives, fishing crews, small towns and neighbourhoods as being the kinds of formations that can exemplify the traits definitive of practice-based communities to ‘a significant degree’<sup>19</sup>. What is striking about this list is that some of these formations are not entirely separate, or indeed separable, from the dominant institutions of modernity. Fishing crews and farming co-ops are relatively clear examples of practice-based communities that are substantially independent of modernity<sup>20</sup>, but small towns – for instance - have visitors, people move away, people vote in general elections (without necessarily consulting the village council), and some might also commute to nearby large towns to work for large-scale modern firms.

MacIntyre’s inclusion of neighbourhoods is noteworthy. Neighbourhoods are of course parts of larger towns and cities and the possibility of a neighbourhood of a large city significantly exemplifying the characteristics of a practice-based community raises the question of whether there can be any grounds for excluding those often distinctly individuated parts of modern corporations such as teams and departments. Such putative communities are sometimes prey to disruption and dissolution, and can be victims of damaging inequality (a topic we will come to below). They can also, when the relationships within them are allowed to develop over time, and when the relationships possess a degree of security, become sites of genuine deliberation and pursuit of common goods.

Unlike the more rigidly bounded practice-based communities such as chess clubs and string quartets, looser associations like clinics and small towns do not possess powers of censure through which threats to harmony and cohesion can be excluded - and at times workplaces can be characterised by a great degree of conflict. This is not to say that a MacIntyrean community requires unwavering conformity, far from it: the point of some practice-based communities and a feature essential to all is an ongoing debate about the goods of that community in which dissent is to be encouraged.

However, certain forms of dissent may be excessively disruptive and corrupting. A member of a string quartet who goes rogue and insists on putting some rock’n’roll into Mozart, the irremediably lazy fisherman, the cheating chess player, the data-fabricating

scientist, the holocaust denying ‘historian’<sup>21</sup>, can be excluded from their respective communities in ways that the noisy neighbour cannot be excluded from a small town, or sometimes quite seriously unruly pupils and patients cannot be excluded from schools and clinics. These communities are not entirely without resources. Problematic neighbours cannot be removed from a neighbourhood, but they can find themselves excluded by being generally ostracised if their behaviour is deemed intolerable.

Such communities lack full institutional control and so might always be more exposed to threats than more bounded and more comprehensively internally-governed communities. MacIntyre does list workplaces as possible communities and workplaces like neighbourhoods face external threats to their status as communities. In exceptional circumstances such as war or natural disaster, or indeed in less catastrophic circumstances such as the building of an Olympic village or a surge in house prices that prevents locals from finding housing, neighbourhoods can be fragmented or eradicated from the outside. Neighbourhoods, necessarily fuzzy at the boundaries, can exercise some measures of control: they can petition local government over a variety of issues (when prudence dictates that the members go beyond the local), and can reach informal agreements, make exceptions to laws, exchange goods in order to satisfy needs. For all that, they can be powerless to prevent certain kinds of anti-social behaviour, unemployment etc. affecting the community from the outside.

The contemporary workplace is similar in this respect to the neighbourhood. The fact that work is not generally practice-based means that it is not an education in the virtues when considered as a particular *activity*. But as a collaborative challenge and as a challenge to maintain community and solidarity in the face of institutional pressures it can provide such an education. Even in a highly acquisitive institution in which the work carried out lacks internal goods, there remains the possibility of a community and of an informal quasi-institutionalised pursuit of external goods that prevent the corporation-institution from threatening that community. The informal quasi-institution is simply the group of workers who can safeguard the community by seeking to covertly achieve goods of effectiveness when there is a threat of ‘down-sizing’ or other forms of restructuring that fragment or otherwise damage the working community. Examples might include closing ranks in the face of a complaint, making sure everything is in good order when the inspectors arrive, covering for a colleague who is having a hard time at home so that the personnel dept is kept at arm’s length, or subtle forms of obstinacy and obstruction when faced with an intrusive managerial edict.

MacIntyre underestimates the extent to which conflict within the contemporary workplace *is* endemic. This conflict is, however, often covert. Even people in dull, repetitive,

low-skilled jobs that lack a significant union presence can still exercise a solidarity that is indicative of a community. People in jobs they find rewarding or exciting, even where these jobs fall short of full ‘practice’ status, can resist bottom-line thinking, being excessively ‘managed’, and other such intrusions. Even where people are treated institutionally as mere means, they can still exercise moral agency because of the informal institution of the group which might be characterised by tacit rules and elliptical deliberation about the good (people need not be moral *philosophers*<sup>22</sup>).

It is central to my argument that such communities can exist by degree. The admission of partial MacIntyrean communities can give us cause for hope; it does not alter the need to prioritise practices and more thoroughly practice-based communities that enable us to live distinctive kinds of life. In particular we must attempt to ensure that such working communities can avoid compartmentalisation and the ill effects of inequality.

## 5.2 Compartmentalisation, Inequality and Myopia

In this section we will consider three charges MacIntyre makes against the modern firm and defend them against Dobson's criticisms.

1) *Compartmentalisation*. MacIntyre argues that characteristically, the demands of roles people occupy within most modern institutions are incompatible with the demands of other roles they might occupy, and that the ends of these roles are usually pre-given and unavailable for criticism. As we saw in chapter 2, MacIntyre argues that a person whose life is compartmentalised will have no effective way of deciding between commitments when they come into conflict. Indeed the person whose life consists in a variety of role-structured activities may well be unable to recognise such conflicts between role demands, and will almost certainly be unable to resolve it for he or she will have no access to a point of view from which commitments can be considered as more important within the context of a whole life. Dobson asks,

Is MacIntyre correct? Does the modern firm induce moral compartmentalisation? Do the managers of modern firms frame every decision in terms of a narrowly defined cost-benefit analysis? Do they leave their humanity and morality at the door when they enter the boardroom?<sup>23</sup>

The answer to *these* questions is 'no', but to frame them in this way betrays a

misinterpretation of MacIntyre.

The firm can induce compartmentalisation without *every* decision reducing to cost-benefit analysis. Pressure to identify with a role can be far more subtle. MacIntyre's criticism of management is not that people employed as managers become narrowly calculative as soon as they enter the workplace. MacIntyre's point is that people working in modern firms are often under institutionalised pressure to be narrowly calculative, and to always act in accordance with the pre-given character of the manager. Moreover, success in one role might require the exclusion of considerations that are fundamental to other roles and that through adopting and coming to identify with a role people can become blind to morally conflicting demands, as I argued in chapter 4. Cost-benefit analysis is part of the structure of some roles and to fail to excel at such analysis is to fail as occupier of that role.

Dobson's conclusion that "moral agency lies at the heart of managerial decision-making in the modern firm"<sup>24</sup> is misleading. Managerial decision-making may involve moral agency, but insofar as it is distinctly *managerial* decision-making rather than decision-making *simpliciter*, it is a compartmentalised *appearance* of moral agency. I argued in chapter 4 that there is no such virtue as 'business-loyalty'. Similarly, managerial decision-making is simply decision-making.

Dobson advances as evidence for his claim the ever expanding business-ethics literature and the fact that even hardcore finance textbooks *acknowledge* non-financial considerations. MacIntyre would find this evidence unpersuasive. He regards the business-ethics literature as one more symptom of compartmentalisation because it tends to be "focused upon the dilemmas or other predicaments confronting individuals within institutionalised and professionalised situations, rather than on the structures which determine the character of those situations"<sup>25</sup> and because the business ethicist, like the medical ethicist and other kinds of specialist applied philosophers, becomes another narrow expert and debates about what justifies this expertise are limited to each particular field. The lip-service that financial textbooks pay to ethics is even less persuasive. Following fashion and claiming that ethics is important does not make it so any more than a Victorian schoolmaster telling the pupil he is about to cane that "this will hurt me more than you" makes it so. The assertion that value judgements are central to management is not a refutation of compartmentalisation. Compartmentalisation tends to render moral agency incoherent, it does not rule out value judgements.

A further point to note is that the compartmentalisation of life is not a merely accidental effect of modernity, but something its bureaucratic institutions are geared towards

producing. People are expected to act in a way that is job-capacity specific. The means by which life becomes compartmentalised are, however, often ineffective and generally inefficient. People learn to pay lip-service to the latest management fad, learn what to write in application statements and pass interviews without genuinely identifying with the roles they occupy. All involved in a job interview know that candidates could not possibly have commitments to roles they have yet to adopt, and yet proceed as if answers which appear to demonstrate just that commitment are legitimate.

Work in a modern firm is still for the most part actually a matter of working in small teams or departments that are often characterised by a collaborative resistance to rules imposed from without that threaten the group-life (although some unfair rules might seem fair or unthreatening because of the ideology of bureaucratic authority, the presentation of managerial edicts is crucially important) and even by active disengagement. Unneeded sick days, lack of ambition or desire to gain promotion, constant internet browsing, saving up just enough money to be able to downshift and so on suggest that not all people are concerned either to succeed at work regardless of what they do (as we might expect of fully compartmentalised agents<sup>26</sup>), or to succeed in all areas in a way that we would expect of people ideologically conditioned by modernity. Indeed, in many instances in which people work diligently without identifying with their job role, they do so to spare colleagues an additional burden, and so the work is done out of a spirit of fairness or for the sake of friendship or camaraderie rather than pursuit of external goods. The mere payment of lip-service to the goals of bureaucratic institutions is a key feature of modernity that MacIntyre has failed to adequately note.

There is a tension involved in claiming that work is both a mere means to an end *and* a serious threat to integrity, except where the work done as a mere means is so alienating that the very activity threatens integrity (e.g. telesales, assassinations) – which is not the case for most people employed as white-collar workers. If work is a mere means, it is done for some other end. This might be an abstract acquisitiveness or a desire to support ‘aesthetic’ consumption, but it might also be to serve engagement in practices outside paid employment (even if it is the practice of simply supporting a family).

Someone might say: “I wait tables but I’m *really* an actor.” This might seem to be an unhelpful example on the grounds that such a claim might be delusional, but even a waiter/actor who does more waiting than acting is still able to avoid the role-identification symptomatic of compartmentalisation. The waiter/actor’s life can remain shaped by a focus on the goods internal to acting. If a situation arose in which the best thing to do *qua* waiter

hindered the agent's acting then that course of action would be eschewed.

In 'Three perspectives on Marxism', MacIntyre says that the modern economic order "provides systematic incentives to develop a type of character that has a propensity to injustice"<sup>27</sup>. But the modern economic order cannot fully destroy the systematic incentives to develop a just character that are present in almost all human social formations. Even where work teams exist for the purpose of capital, as communities, as practice-based sub-institutions, they cannot easily be made into mere means. The agency of the members as members of a group with shared interests prevents such instrumentality.

MacIntyre makes the point that success in delimited roles sometimes requires a fragmented self which lacks the resources to ask what is good and best for a whole life, but it is notable that there are at least three ways in which people avoid 'success' as it is commonly defined in the modern economic order. Firstly, active disengagement from their work as was mentioned above. Secondly, people can display their rejection of the ideological norms of capitalist modernity through seeking practice-based work. This is problematic as the consumerist, individualistic tendencies of job applicants might preclude subordination to the practice or respect for the authority of master-practitioners, but as MacIntyre's oft-repeated fishermen example shows, people do not need to seek out the practice in advance in order to be able to come to appreciate its internal goods. If this is so then it is surely the case that people seeking work that satisfies their pre-existing, untutored, but excellence-focused desires will be at least as able to appreciate internal goods, and make the sacrifices that the practice demands of them. People who vaguely and apart from any particular practice want to do something 'good' may well initially think in terms of subjective preferences, but they are undeniably resistant to any conception of success that focuses primarily on external goods. And thirdly, people can avoid this 'success' by partially disengaging from the typical norms of the modern order through the prioritisation of community or camaraderie. Here we have resistance without revolt, but it is not merely passive. It does not merely consist in withdrawal from modernity; if my argument is correct then modernity can be 'outlived' from within more easily than it might appear.

This is not to suggest that we should adopt a propitious attitude towards the modern firm. What I claim is that the modern firm cannot *ensure* that employees fully identify with their work roles. I am not denying managerial effectiveness; I am asserting the ability of groups to form communities that can survive this managerial effectiveness because obedience to bureaucratic power is often merely an act. However, the power of bureaucratic authority is very real and usually far greater than that possessed by workers. Let us consider the effects of



this imbalance of power.

ii) *Inequality*. Dobson's argument against MacIntyre's charge of inequality is that it is not clear that equality is conducive to communities or to flourishing. What is clear is that there is a very pronounced degree of financial inequality between the owners of large-scale modern firms and the average employee of such firms. Consequently, the owners possess a great deal more power than the workers. Such an imbalance is always liable to threaten the autonomy of a group and thus threatens its status as a practice-based community. Deprived of any institutional power, the virtues of members of such communities can go unrewarded. MacIntyre goes on to say "What is necessarily absent in such markets is any justice of desert"<sup>28</sup>. Given that this is so, the seductive power of external goods becomes more pronounced. The chess-playing child in *After Virtue* may never have come to engage with the goods internal to chess if he were rewarded with varying amounts of candy regardless of how he played the game. To have a great access to external goods is to have the power to influence or manipulate people, and so injustice and inequality of wealth is directly related to inequalities of power.

Clearly total equality is not required for a community to function well, but excessive inequalities of power are liable to produce undue deference that can hinder or even prevent rational deliberation. Managerial decisions can seem fair as a result of the power of the ideology of bureaucratic authority. In modern corporations, edicts from the boardroom can dismantle a team or department immediately, and to come across a pedantic or incompetent middle manager who disrupts the team or department is, over the course of a working life, very likely.

Members of neighbourhoods and members of workplace groups might function as communities, but based on the considerations discussed here, it seems that this is likely to be threatened precisely by inequalities of power. No one in a town can prevent a house being bought as a holiday home by someone who contributes nothing to the community for ten months of the year. In most companies, the rank and file have no say over who manages them. Because this is so, a greater degree of ingenuity and commitment is required to sustain these communities than is required to sustain, say, a chess club. Workplaces in which inequalities of power are minimised are more likely to house genuine MacIntyrean communities precisely because leverage in competitive negotiations becomes less important. However, even a significant lack of leverage cannot prevent workers from forming communities of tacit resistance which (without being able to transform their working life directly) can furnish them with a deliberative community.

iii) *Myopia*. MacIntyre says that the “failure to be responsible for the future is not just a product of the negligence of individuals, but is rooted in the forms and tendencies of organisational and corporate life”<sup>29</sup>. The Weberian bureaucrat, who might consider himself capable of devising the most efficient means to achieve a pre-given end, cannot effectively decide whether delayed gratification is rational because it is impossible to adequately quantify: Is it rational to make sacrifices now for greater profits in ten years? One hundred years? Company performance is usually measured quarterly so executives are under role-specific pressure to think in terms of short-term profits even when they know it is unwise in the long run. Short term underperformance will lead to investors taking their money elsewhere. The avoidance of temporal myopia is not simply to be achieved by individuals exercising virtues such as prudence, for myopia is often the fault of structures. Where someone occupies a role that has the pre-given end of maximising short-term profits, their personal prudence is likely to be irrelevant. But Dobson is not merely concerned to show that the modern firm can avoid ‘bottom-line thinking’, he also wants to claim that myopia is more likely to be a characteristic of small-scale societies.

Dobson gives the example of Easter Islanders damaging the ecology of their homeland through deforestation. This example proves nothing, however, because MacIntyre is not committed to the plainly foolish claim that any community that pre-existed industrial capitalism or any community in which there is some notion of the common good is automatically wise or maximally virtuous. Nevertheless, despite Dobson’s unfair statement of the case, there remains something to the charge that the small scale of local communities can be a hindrance. The size of small scale communities does impose limits on the possibility of effectively responding to demands that require large-scale action, but again, this is precisely because of the lack of power most small-scale communities will have in comparison with the large-scale institutions characteristic of modernity. Small scale communities are therefore less likely to have the resources necessary to deal with large, long term problems single handed. This is not temporal myopia, but the threat of chronic impotence and where such impotence exists it is always a threat to practice-based communities, so Dobson’s criticism is ineffective and reinforces MacIntyre’s assertion that practices require institutions. It is through institutions that communities acquire the external goods needed to safeguard a practice. Tacit workplace communities of resistance are especially vulnerable because they are unable to rely on formal institutions.

### 5.3 Business as a ‘Practice’?

Having seen that Dobson has not established that the modern firm is a new MacIntyrean community, we now turn to another way of arguing for this thesis. If business itself were a practice, then modern firms would all house practices and so the challenge of fostering practice-based communities through which goods can be achieved and virtues fostered would be easily met. The modern firm would not be a new form of MacIntyrean community, just a contemporary example of one. If business were a practice, then the organisations Dobson cites as examples of new practice-based communities would indeed be candidates for such status. However, this section will argue following Ron Beadle that business is not in fact a practice.

Beadle's target is Geoff Moore, who claims that MacIntyre is his own worst enemy when it comes to his rejection of business. Moore's argument, put forward in a variety of papers<sup>30</sup>, is that because MacIntyre thinks practices are productive crafts, and because business is a productive craft, business itself is a practice. As Beadle points out, Moore is not especially forthcoming with examples of the internal goods distinctive of business. Indeed, his only example is customer service. There is an obvious danger here of conflating two senses of 'productive craft', but more significant is the problem of identifying the relevant internal goods. From this, it follows that if institutionalised correctly business can provide an education into the virtues like any other practice. We will explore Moore's account of how good governance policies might 'crowd in' virtues in chapter 7. For now, let us consider Beadle's case against Moore.

According to Beadle, Moore misses some of the crucial elements in MacIntyre's discussion of practices and institutions. Beadle further argues that Moore's account is also flawed in that he fails to define 'business' adequately and his examples of businesses are those which are productive crafts, such as fishing, already identifiable as practices whether they are businesses or not. This does not support the claim that business is a practice, "it simply reinforces the case that MacIntyre himself makes as to why the productive crafts that he cites (such as fishing) are requisitely coherent and complex to constitute a practice"<sup>31</sup>

Unlike goods internal to practices, customer service, even excellent customer service, "is available only to those who can pay"<sup>32</sup>. In this sense, the goods of business are motivated by the pursuit of external goods in a way that is incompatible with MacIntyre's definition of a practice. Business, like management (which will be the subject of the following chapter), is not a practice because it does not consist in a distinctive activity and thus does not have a

distinctive internal good. A particular business can serve to institutionally safeguard practices, but business is not itself a practice. Beadle points out that in this sense business is like teaching: subjects taught are practices, but teaching considered in isolation of any particular subject is a mere means<sup>33</sup>. There are no doubt certain skills or techniques that can allow teachers and managers to be more effective, but effectiveness is not an internal good. Another analogy might be that of physical fitness, which is useful in a variety of sporting practices – a basic level is a prerequisite just as basic abilities to think and communicate are prerequisite for teaching or management. Good business cannot focus solely on profit just as good teaching cannot focus solely on exam results. However, where performances are measured along these lines it is inevitable that the goods of practice-based institutions (we will address the possibility of managing well outside of practices in ch.7) and the goods of particular subjects become secondary.

Beadle also claims that Moore's account is flawed because it relies on the possibility of someone engaging in two practices simultaneously, which Beadle claims is impossible and threatens the coherence of MacIntyre's account of practices. He says:

If Moore is correct and each and every business is a practice then the crew that abandons fishing simultaneously maintains and abjures its commitment to practice by remaining in business (a practice) and abjures fishing (another practice). That this is incoherent and that it follows from Moore's position is evident. The coherence of MacIntyre's definition of a practice would be undermined if the same set of practitioners can coherently simultaneously engage in two practices. They cannot.<sup>34</sup>

This final element of Beadle's account seems questionable. He claims that it is impossible for someone to be engaged in two practices simultaneously. However, my account of quasi-communities requires that this is indeed possible, because we cannot always clearly demarcate when someone is doing their practice-based job and when they are engaged in the practice of politics by resisting threats to their working community. Furthermore my account of practices in chapter 1 requires that the concept of a practice be more fluid than Beadle allows. Though I disagree with Beadle about this one element of the concept of a practice, I believe we can still avoid Moore's conclusion. An example might be a keen chess player from an unhappy family playing chess with a sibling at Christmas. The chess player certainly loves chess and appreciates its internal goods, but is not in the mood to play and forces himself to do so with the sibling in order to sustain familial life, to ease tensions, prevent arguments and

make some effort toward making common deliberation possible. Here chess and 'politics', the practice of sustaining a community, are engaged in simultaneously. Similarly, philosophy and history have distinct goods and related but distinct ends, but these subjects might easily be fused without thereby creating a new practice, and without the coherence of either practice being undermined.

The real problem for Moore is that he cannot specify what the distinctive goods of business might be, and the incoherence of his position comes from the fact that those who give up fishing for (any other) business can remain engaged in the *same* practice regardless of what it is they actually *do*. Practices can be transformed over time, but they do not admit of this kind of rupture. To regard engagement in practices as being more fluid than Beadle allows enables us to solve some the difficulties discussed in chapter 1 and to account for the behaviour of those in communities of solidarity discussed in the present chapter without having to accept Moore's conclusions and by extension without having to accept that every firm is a MacIntyrean community.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

We have seen that MacIntyre's criticisms of the modern firm are largely defensible but also that practice-based communities can exist not just alongside but within bureaucratic institutions, and where this occurs it does so because of an informal quasi-institution. The widespread disengagement from tedious capitalist work, and the widespread prioritisation of fellow workers and external practices over success as it is ideologically defined under the current economic order reflects an absence of moral compartmentalisation. However, the need for communities to cope with inequalities of power and their possible inability to deal with long-term problems because of a lack of institutional power means that the distinctively modern communities such as workplaces and neighbourhoods face challenges similar to those faced by more quintessential MacIntyrean communities, such as farming co-ops and fishing crews. We have also seen that not every workplace houses a practice, and so the modern firm cannot be accounted a practice-based community on that ground. Business is not itself a practice because it lacks a distinctive internal good.

I have not sought to deny the general claim that "the institutions of contemporary market economies frustrate the achievement of goods central to human flourishing"<sup>35</sup>, I have sought to show how partial and partially avoidable this frustrating tendency is, and that the

virtues can be sustained in the most unlikely of places. Although the typical contemporary (i.e. non-practice-based) workplace does not satisfy MacIntyre's requirement that communities make space for open deliberative debate, the lesser but still important level of elliptical debate, and resultant partial common good mean that compartmentalisation and identification with norms geared solely towards pursuit of external goods are avoidable even from within the modern firm. Knight is wrong to claim that, "it is only insofar as people are treated institutionally as practical reasoners and not as managed resources that they can exercise moral agency"<sup>36</sup>. Moral agency is more robust than that. Having seen that MacIntyre's criticism of the modern workplace is overstated, we next turn to the most notorious of his reflections on corporate modernity: his attack on the manager.

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<sup>1</sup> As Horvath, 1995, attempts to do.

<sup>2</sup> See Bolchover (2005) for the following examples: 20% of US office based employees send 20 personal emails a day (survey for Vault.com). Only 1 in 10 Britons feel guilty about bunking off work (BBC news website). According to the Daily Telegraph, 1/3 of UK young professionals are hung-over at least twice a week on work days. According to a 2004 Reuters survey, ¼ Europeans had fallen asleep at work. According to The Times, the dept. of work and pensions conducted an investigation into staff internet use and found that 2.3 million pages of pornographic material had been accessed in an 8 month period in 2004.

<sup>3</sup> Breen, 2008, p.19.

<sup>4</sup> MacIntyre, 1999a, p.129.

<sup>5</sup> MacIntyre, 2008a, p.6.

<sup>6</sup> MacIntyre, 1998b, pp.55-56.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. MacIntyre, 1998d, 1999a, 2006g.

<sup>8</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, pp.227-8.

<sup>9</sup> See Brecher, 1998, for a statement of this view.

<sup>10</sup> MacIntyre, 2006b, p.156.

<sup>11</sup> Keat, 2000, chapter 6.

<sup>12</sup> Dobson, 2008, p.73.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid.*, p.73.

<sup>14</sup> On this matter see in particular the discussion of the importance of friendship in MacIntyre, 2009a.

<sup>15</sup> Of the examples given by Dobson Google in particular does well in 'best companies to work for' lists, placing in the top 5 of the Fortune 100 list for the past 4 years.

<sup>16</sup> MacIntyre distinguishes sharply between questions of flourishing and questions of subjective wellbeing in 2008a, p.3.

<sup>17</sup> MacIntyre, 1999a, p.142.

<sup>18</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.228.

<sup>19</sup> MacIntyre, 2006b, p.39.

<sup>20</sup> By which I mean that could exist largely as they are after capitalist modernity or in isolation from it.

<sup>21</sup> About this particular example see MacIntyre 2006p. MacIntyre argues that the holocaust denier should be excluded by the community of historians, but the denial should not be illegal.

<sup>22</sup> MacIntyre, 2006i, p.37.

<sup>23</sup> Dobson, 2008, p.70.

<sup>24</sup> *ibid.*, p.71.

<sup>25</sup> MacIntyre, 2006f, p.118.

<sup>26</sup> See *Hello Laziness* (2004) by Corinne Maier for a manifesto of disengagement. It must be noted that Maier did manage to succeed, becoming a senior economist at EdF.

<sup>27</sup> MacIntyre, 2006n, p.149.

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*, p.149.

<sup>29</sup> MacIntyre, 1982, p.357.

<sup>30</sup> Moore 2002, 2005a, 2005b.

<sup>31</sup> Beadle, 2008, p.235.

<sup>32</sup> *ibid.*, p.235.

<sup>33</sup> I leave open the question of whether teaching very young children differs relevantly. J Dunne asked MacIntyre about this in an interview in *Education and Practice* (Dunne and Hogan, 2004), but the answer focused on other parts of the question.

<sup>34</sup> Beadle, 2008, p.238.

<sup>35</sup> MacIntyre, 2008b, p.268.

<sup>36</sup> Knight, 2008, p.120.

## **Chapter 6: MacIntyre's Attack on the 'Character' of the Manager**

In the last chapter we saw that even within workplaces that are hostile to practices and MacIntyrean communities, quasi-communities of resistance can continue to exist. This should give us some reason to be optimistic because it implies that organizations which aim to be conducive to practices, to rewarding work, and to a sense of community will have a real chance of success even within corporate modernity. Given that MacIntyre says "The making and sustaining of forms of human community – and therefore of institutions – itself has all the characteristics of a practice, and moreover of a practice which stands in a peculiarly close relationship to the exercise of the virtues"<sup>1</sup> we might assume that managers are well placed to be guardians of MacIntyrean communities<sup>2</sup>. However, MacIntyre's attack on the manager, or to be precise, the *character* of the manager, plays a key part in his critique of modernity. According to MacIntyre,

The manager represents in his *character* the obliteration of the distinction between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations... The manager treats ends as given, as outside his scope; his concern is only with technique, with effectiveness in transforming raw materials into final products, unskilled labour into skilled labour, investment into profits.<sup>3</sup>

I will argue that MacIntyre's two central prongs of criticism, that managerial authority is unjustified and that management is an embodiment of emotivism - in MacIntyre's sense of being manipulative rather than persuasive - are correct. However, in so doing I will disagree with some of MacIntyre's own argumentative strategies. This is primarily because MacIntyre writes as if technocratic, Weberian management is all there is. This view may have been plausible in the period up until 1981 when *After Virtue* was first published, but since the 'leadership' boom of the 1980s it is no longer tenable.

Given that, as the above quotation suggests, MacIntyre's critique applies to the *character* of the manager I devote section 6.1 to outlining this concept. My aim is not to defend MacIntyre's notion of a *character*, but to elucidate it so as to better understand MacIntyre's critique of the *Manager*. In 6.2 I will explore management in order to assess the veracity of MacIntyre's critique. I will support the central tenets of MacIntyre's attack, including his claim that managerial expertise is impossible, but argue that it is incomplete because it is possible for managers to pay lip-service to the values characteristic of

management without fully identifying with them, and because of the changes in managerial work alluded to above. In section 6.3 I will explore leadership as a form of management that does not explicitly depend upon expertise. I will argue that despite the fact that some of MacIntyre's arguments do not apply to the manager-as-leader, leadership as it is embodied within modernity is deeply Emotivistic and that the power and authority afforded to leaders is unjustified, in part because the illusion of expertise lingers on.

## 6.1 'Characters'

MacIntyre's examples of what he calls *characters* are the *manager*, the *therapist*, and the *rich aesthete*. There has been a lack of scholarly attention paid to MacIntyre's notion of characters, and where the topic is addressed it is usually only done so briefly. Knight is wrong to claim that when MacIntyre uses words like 'character' and 'characteristic' in the early 1980s he means 'essential' because large parts of *After Virtue* make far more sense if the dramatic metaphor is taken seriously, which MacIntyre himself urges us to do<sup>4</sup>. McMyler does not broach the topic of *characters* in his discussion of MacIntyre's account of management. David Solomon says in footnote to his paper 'MacIntyre and Contemporary Moral Philosophy' that "The notion of a 'character' is one of the most difficult in MacIntyre's repertoire"<sup>5</sup>. Sandra Borden seems to use the concept too freely and identifies several different characters within journalism.<sup>6</sup> D'Andrea's only discussion of characters is a brief note that although faithful to MacIntyre's text sheds no further light on the concept<sup>7</sup>, and away from MacIntyre scholarship those who discuss MacIntyre's conception of characters tend to do so haphazardly<sup>8</sup>. Ron Beadle pays more attention to the details of MacIntyre's account. Beadle says *characters* "are social roles of a particular type because not only do they involve definitions of obligation and relationship (as do all social roles) but they also bear particular moral ideals and become representative of their social order through so doing"<sup>9</sup>. This is quite right, but we will need to explore the concept in more depth if we are to be able to assess the force of MacIntyre's criticism of the *Manager*.

MacIntyre claims that *characters* are "masks worn by moral philosophies" and thinks that *Characters* are moral representatives of their culture. What follows is a discussion of the various attributes of *characters* according to MacIntyre: A) the dramatic metaphor is serious, B) *characters* are culturally central, C) *characters* partially define the possibility of plot and action, D) demands made of *characters* exceed those of ordinary social roles, E) those who



play the roles of *characters* understand themselves as such, and F) *character* roles are non-exclusive.

A) *The dramatic metaphor is serious*. MacIntyre explicitly states "I intend this dramatic metaphor with some seriousness... I choose the word 'character' for them precisely because of the way it links dramatic and moral associations"<sup>10</sup>. *Characters* are crucial to our understanding the "social drama of the present age"<sup>11</sup>, according to MacIntyre. I argued in chapter 2 that we must understand MacIntyre's conception of narrative unity in part as an epistemological tool. Here again, in a related although distinct sense, we see that narrative is used as a method of enhancing our understanding. Given this requirement it is unsurprising that MacIntyre also holds:

B) *Characters are culturally central*. *Characters* "are those social roles which provide a culture with its moral definitions"<sup>12</sup>. This is one thing that sets them apart from ordinary social roles. The essence of this requirement will become clearer as we explore the others. MacIntyre also claims that characters are instantly recognisable. Intuitively this seems true of the figures MacIntyre lists. But it also true of countless other roles and figures, so nothing of importance can rest on this. We might immediately discern what MacIntyre has in mind when he discusses the *Manager*, i.e. the bureaucratic expert, but the comically inept, David Brent-style manager is easily recognisable too. However, the incompetent and unintelligent David Brent is not a moral ideal for any section of our culture so there will never be pressure to behave as Brent does on any real manager. Mere stereotypes and negative caricatures might be widely recognised but they cannot be culturally central in this sense of providing a culture with its moral definitions, or justifying power or institutions.

C) *Characters partially define the possibility of plot and action*. This is an extension of A and B. Characters possess sufficient cultural power that any adequate story of our age must make essential reference to them and their effects. What it also shows is that there is no need for cultural unanimity. There is, that is, no need for characters to be universally regarded as legitimate nor for there to be universal assent to their key contentions<sup>13</sup>. Even those who are critical of particular characters still define their positions relative to such *characters* and continue to understand the wider culture with reference to those *characters*. That *characters* partially define the possibility of plot and action shows that positions of cultural power, and the extent to which this cultural power creates norms, matter more than the extent to which characters and their positions of power are actually accepted as legitimate. I take points A - C to be merely definitional. It might be the case that there are no *characters* in reality, but at

this stage there is no reason to object to what are essentially coherent stipulations. D - F will require closer critical attention.

D) *Demands made of characters exceed those of ordinary social roles.* *Characters*, claims MacIntyre, "are a very special type of social role which places a certain kind of moral constraint on the personality of those who inhabit them in a way in which many other social roles do not"<sup>14</sup>. MacIntyre's own argument for the claim that characters necessarily make greater demands proceeds as follows:

- Social roles and individuals can and do embody moral beliefs and theories, but they do so in a very different way from characters.
- Characters are the object of regard for some significant section of a culture and as such provide them with a moral ideal, so the demands are imposed from the outside in that people who inhabit the relevant roles use the ideal of the character to understand and evaluate themselves.
- Therefore there is a requirement that personality and role be fused in some way.

As it stands this argument is unconvincing because there can be external demands at a much more local level than that of a whole culture and because external demands can easily fail to be met. There is no doubt that external demands can be converted into internal compulsion, and our culture regards work, and doing one's job well, as being important. As Weber puts it, "what is most characteristic of the social ethic of capitalistic culture...is the obligation which the individual is supposed to feel and does feel towards the content of his professional activity, no matter in what it consists"<sup>15</sup>. The identification with a role will be more likely if there is considerable external pressure. Such pressure is, however, neither necessary nor sufficient for the occurrence of such identification. Therefore it is imperative for MacIntyre to provide us with a fuller account of how *characters* differ from ordinary social roles, and thus how they create more powerful norms for those who occupy such roles.

Before we consider MacIntyre's further arguments we should, however, note that MacIntyre would do well to take his own claims about cultural fragmentation more seriously at this point. The Priest, a figure MacIntyre does not include on his list of contemporary characters, is a moral ideal for some part of our culture, clearly embodies certain beliefs, and requires a certain type of personality. If MacIntyre is right about our culture being morally fragmented, then either what is shared is likely to be very insubstantial or 'some part of our

culture' refers to some *small* part, and thus there is a danger of the role failing to meet the 'cultural centrality' criterion.

Furthermore, assuming that our culture lacks a shared and substantive conception of the good, even the appearance of shared commitment to the ends of a particular role would not be decisive. My account of disengagement from work and quasi-communities at work in chapter 5 suggests people can play along without accepting the criteria of success dominant within modernity. *Characters* are special kinds of social role, and their centrality, prestige and power might make them more likely to make strong demands of those who play them, i.e. by encouraging role-identification, and they might also define the possibility of plot and action without this particular element of MacIntyre's account being entirely accurate. At the very least this part of MacIntyre's account of *characters* requires further support.

E) *Those who play the parts of characters understand themselves as such.* MacIntyre claims that those who inhabit the roles of *characters* use their understanding of those characters to guide their behaviour. This is an important extension of D) and one of the ways in which MacIntyre takes *character* roles to be more demanding than ordinary social roles. This surely depends not only on the degree to which a particular character is socially central — the shift from Victorian culture in which the Public School Headmaster, the Explorer, and the Engineer were dominant, according to MacIntyre, to modernity in which the Manager, the Therapist, and the Aesthete are dominant did not occur in an instant and so inevitably the dominance of Public School Headmaster would not have entirely waned before the dawn of the *Manager* et al — but also on the other commitments of the agent who plays that particular role.

As MacIntyre acknowledges, any social role is liable to make some demands. Priests and Soldiers are clearly defined roles and can require particular kinds of personality. MacIntyre's examples of the Priest who has lost faith and the Trade Unionist who questions the existing goals of organised labour<sup>16</sup> show that someone can become jaded and therefore no longer committed to the role they play. This is also true of those who play the role of *characters*, again even if it is less common. One example of this is the existence of dissenting books by former managers, such as *The Management Myth* by Stewart and *Bonjour Paresse* by Maier. This is not to deny that culturally central roles that enable us to understand the drama of a particular age, because they partially determine the moral and cultural possibilities of the age - call them '*characters*' - do tend to be demanding, and that their demands do tend to be met with a degree of personal commitment. Nevertheless, the requirement that only those committed to certain precepts of a particular role can possibly occupy that role is

clearly an over-statement. We do however need to pay attention to the likely ramifications of our living in a fragmented culture and in MacIntyre's account of characters he seems to pay insufficient attention to this insight which informs much of the rest of his account.

We might reasonably assume that a Spartan soldier identifies with his role to a greater degree than the contemporary young Finn doing national service. It is not that we cannot imagine a young Spartan who wishes he were Athenian and the would-be warrior Finn. Rather, the cultural centrality of the role of a soldier in Sparta, the fact that the Spartan soldier provided a large section of that culture with a moral ideal, means that there is a greater weight of expectation on the Spartan than the Finn. The fragmented nature of contemporary culture means these latter imaginary figures strike us as being less conceivable. At the very least they appear to be less compatible with how we understand ancient Sparta and contemporary Finland. Indeed, such figures begin to approach the ridiculousness of Don Quixote. Sparta was a smaller and more tightly-bound community than any contemporary European nation. *Characters* are less available when there is less agreement within a culture because there is less scope for a uniform cultural pressure. Therefore, the claim that any social role can be so socially central for us today that certain personalities are genuinely *required*, is an exaggeration. This point is made yet more clear when we consider the final aspect of characters:

F) *Character-roles are non-exclusive*. MacIntyre says that it is possible for someone to partition his or her life between two or more characters<sup>17</sup>. It follows that such a person may also be able to further partition his or her life such that there are elements of his personality that do not bear the traces of any particular character. A person so compartmentalised will lack the integrity required by genuine moral agency - such potential malleability means that under certain conditions, role demands which are incompatible with the requirement of being a good person might be felt as compelling - but such a person is not necessarily manipulative in every role. Indeed, such a person may engage in particular practices with all the commitment to the canons of excellence required. We must remember that practices only allow us to account for virtues partially - narrative unity is also required. The unpleasant, 'Emotivistic', elements of the character do not infect a person's whole life, even if compartmentalisation is a serious ill.

Unless we have some further reason to accept MacIntyre's claim that character demands necessarily entail personality demands, the non-exclusivity of character demands might also be exhibited by the mere payment of lip-service to the *character's* demands, which, although it does alter relations with others who buy into the act, does not involve a

deep compartmentalisation. The person who pays lip-service to the demands of a character-role might go along with the elements of that role that are good, neutral or occasionally a little unwholesome, but still be able to stop short when the demands are incompatible with the demands of being a good person. In this sense genuine compartmentalisation is avoided. Lip-service to role-demands in roles that are liable to require morally dubious actions might be to risk complicity in evil, but such lip-service does not render genuine moral agency and integrity impossible.

The upshot of this discussion is that cultural centrality is again insufficient to ensure that personality and role are fused. On this view, such a claim would require a degree of empirical evidence that exceeds what MacIntyre provides. An account of each of the *characters* MacIntyre identifies in our present culture, and of other contenders for such status, is obviously beyond the scope of this thesis. In the following section we will examine the nature of modern management in order to assess the extent to which MacIntyre's critique of the *manager* is correct.

Our discussion so far suggests an individual therapist, for instance, can avoid being (the character of) the *therapist*. Now let us consider some further reasons why we might accept MacIntyre's claim that demands apply to certain roles in virtue of their cultural prominence. How might certain social roles require identification with the role, the ills of which were discussed in chapter 4, and how might those roles prohibit those who occupy them from partaking in the tacit communities of resistance discussed in chapter 5? We saw above that the fact that demands are external does not guarantee that the social expectations of those who occupy character-roles is more efficacious than the social expectations of those who occupy other roles. In support of MacIntyre's claim is the fact that the power possessed by *characters* changes their relationships with those who lack it.

Powerful roles do not have additional demands as such, but they do alter relationships, and the nature of these altered relationships allows us to retain something of MacIntyre's original formulation of his concept of *characters*. *Characters* are most plausibly regarded not as culturally central moral ideals but as representations of cultural power, both in the sense of possessing a significant degree of authority in a wider, political sense and of possessing personal power over others. The Priest might have some influence over small parts of society, but does not possess the wider power or significance that MacIntyre takes *characters* to possess. Such wider power allows for authority even when the legitimacy of that power is disputed. When the Priest was a *character* one can imagine a closet atheist deferring to his instruction, whereas that is hardly conceivable today. However, to

foreshadow our later discussion somewhat, a manager — who does not regard him or herself as an expert — can issue an instruction to a subordinate — who also does not regard the manager as an expert — and the result is exactly as it would be as if both parties believed in managerial expertise.

When we consider MacIntyre's examples of contemporary *characters*, there is a distinction to be drawn here between the *manager* and the *therapist* on one hand, and the *rich aesthete* on the other, which MacIntyre recognises<sup>18</sup>. While the *rich aesthete* is instantly recognisable in our culture, and possesses the power that wealth makes inevitable, the aesthete does not have to be appointed to his or her position as does the manager or the therapist. The emergence of the rich aesthete within a culture signals that the culture has become Emotivist, but there are not occupational constraints on the rich aesthete. It is open to anyone who happens to be that *character* to mend their ways (and perhaps donate their money to charity rather than spending it on further means of mere aesthetic consumption, entertainment, etc.). There may be some cultural pressure on the wealthy to move towards becoming the *character* of the rich aesthete ('spending a fortune on antiques is just what one does when one has money'). The lottery winner may find himself consuming more helpings of Colchester oyster, cayenne pepper and Veuve Cliquot, to use MacIntyre's own example of a pleasurable culinary experience<sup>19</sup>, but may also genuinely appreciate them, and enjoy the practice of cuisine (at least in the way that a concert-goer is engaged in the practice of music). There is no requirement that someone who is rich becomes the *rich aesthete*, and someone may become rich quite by chance, so the existence of the *rich aesthete* is more straightforwardly symptomatic of Emotivism than are the more complex roles of the manager and the therapist. This is obviously not a result of a requirement that personality and role be fused, it is rather that once someone can accurately be described as a rich aesthete they have a certain personality *by definition*.

For the *Manager* and *Therapist* the matter is quite different. They are appointed to positions of power, and those in charge of making such appointments require certain things including a commitment to various elements of the roles in question. At the very least this will include a belief that the role is legitimate. Anarchists do not usually end up being police officers, or managers for that matter, because the role demands are incompatible with the demands of being an anarchist. Note that there are external demands on police officers too, and a sliding scale between mere occupational role and demanding occupational role of the kind MacIntyre describes as *characters*. Some police can reject role demands, e.g. those police officers who joined the Wisconsin trade union rights protest or the soldiers who joined

'occupy wall street' protesters rather than attempting to disperse them. However, in low-level jobs it is neither as important nor as easy to know much about the personalities of candidates. Those who dislike challenges and working as part of a team can usually slip through the net by saying the right things and doing just enough to go unnoticed. Most companies have no motivation to root out the challenge and team-work averse — they cannot afford to have that many positions unfilled — and they trust themselves to be able to inspire their workforce sufficiently. Almost all therapists and increasingly many managers require formal training in order to take up their positions and to have forged medium term relationships with people involved in their appointments in some way (contacts, references etc.).

A particular manager might be sympathetic to some form of resistance practised by some quasi-community, of the kind described in chapter 5, which resists particularly irritating workplace directives, but it would be irrational for members of those communities to welcome the manager precisely because of the power relations involved. The conditions required for thick trust, as described in chapter 4, are absent. Ultimately the manager is responsible for ensuring that the directives are followed and so whilst a 'don't ask for fear of being told' policy can work, there may often be times when the methods of resistance must remain covert. As representatives of institutions which the quasi-community is attempting to resist, however minimally, the manager can be debarred from membership.

In the case of the manager who pays lip-service to the requirements of his or her powerful role, the strenuousness of the emotional labour is likely to be another obstacle that provides some support for MacIntyre's claim that characters are required to have certain types of personality. The least powerful and most powerful occupations are extremely demanding, albeit for different reasons, and the more conflicting the demands the harder the lip-service will be. Theoretically we can give a coherent story of how power can change relationships, how a role is thus perceived, and that this power is the essence of the additional demands of character-roles. The extent to which this really is true of managers will be addressed in the next two sections. McMylor notes that MacIntyre's argument aims to be 'culturalist' rather than empirical<sup>20</sup>, but even an argument that applies to our culture (rather than every manager) requires some empirical support, and it is to that we now turn.

## 6.2 Management

[Managers] are seen by themselves, and by those who see them with the same eyes as their own, as uncontested figures, who purport to restrict themselves to the realms in which rational agreement is possible - that is, of course from their point of view to the realm of fact, the realm of means, the realm of measurable effectiveness.<sup>21</sup>

This section will seek to address a series of related questions the answers to which will enable us to better assess MacIntyre's attack on the character of the manager: 1) What is management? 2) Is management tacitly committed to Emotivism? 3) Does the power and authority afforded to management within the large-scale institutions that dominate modernity depend upon managerial expertise? 4) Is this expertise possible? 5) Does management lead to or require compartmentalisation? 6) Is management culturally central in the way that MacIntyre's classification of the manager as one of the key characters of our era requires?

MacIntyre has argued that bureaucracies' self-understanding is characteristically Weberian, that Weber's account of bureaucratic organisations, for all its flaws<sup>22</sup>, does accurately describe how managerial authority is justified within organisations. "Bureaucratic rationality is the rationality of matching means to ends economically and efficiently"<sup>23</sup> – this characterisation of bureaucratic organisations underpins MacIntyre's critique of management. There are two prongs to the critique: *first* is the moral criticism that management leads to moral compartmentalisation in particular and more generally that management embodies Emotivism in general and *second* that of lacking the social-scientific knowledge necessary for the *manager's* claim to authority. In the previous section I outlined some reasons to accept MacIntyre's claim that social centrality can lead to certain roles having additional demands, and in answering the following questions I will defend some of MacIntyre's key contentions but also explore ways in which his account of the bureaucratic institutions dominant in modernity is outdated.

### 1) *What is Management?*

The literature on management tends to treat a diverse array of particular role types as being homogeneous. However management is not only varied, it has no substantial essence and so is impossible to neatly describe or categorise. Like the notion of 'business', there is some conceptual unity to management, but not a great deal.

Management theorist Charles Handy says, in his *Understanding Organizations*



At an opening session of a series of management seminars in one company I asked if there was any agreement on the essential part of a manager's job. With few dissentients they said that 'making decisions' was for them the vital part of the managerial function. We agreed, therefore that for our next meeting in a week's time each of them would prepare a description of the most critical decision that he, as a manager, had taken that week... The next week a group of embarrassed managers faced each other. 'It was strange, last week, somehow I didn't seem to have any decisions to take,' said one. The others looked relieved. All said they had found the same thing.<sup>24</sup>

Handy found that managers did lots of smaller tasks that took around ten minutes, attended a few one-hour meetings, and were interrupted a lot. In short, according to managers themselves management is a rather vague notion: management can be "a licence to play all the parts in an ever changing drama"<sup>25</sup>. In this sense, management is similar to 'business' in not having clear and distinctive goods as would be required by practice-status.

But there is more to management than what managers (report that they) do. One feature of management that is essential is the power of the manager over subordinates - a key part of management is managing people. As Tsoukas puts in, using a phrase that sits nicely with MacIntyre's discussion of characters, "By reducing the study of managers to the study of individual actors on the stage, the script and the setting which enables actors to perform in the first place are neglected"<sup>26</sup>. Control is part of the nature of management. That management involves this control should not be regarded as a contentious claim. It is recognised by managers themselves, even if reluctantly. In Watson's *In Search of Management* one of the interviewees says "Gut feel says to me: in a managerial job you have some aspect of controlling other people - directing things. I don't like the words I'm using here but if I'm actually honest, it's about directing other people."<sup>27</sup> Bertrand Russell in *In Praise of Idleness* said "Work is of two kinds: first altering the position of matter at or near the earth's surface relatively to other such matter; second, telling other people to do so."<sup>28</sup>

## 2) *Is Management tacitly committed to Emotivism?*

For MacIntyre, the *manager* is manipulative, incapable of entering into a genuine moral argument, and matches means to given ends without assessing those ends. He claims that Weberian rationality is dominant within the modern corporation. Within our Weberian culture, so MacIntyre's account goes, Management is represented as a form of expertise that

can be applied to a wide variety of areas in order to bring them under rational control. Governments and Corporations can and do bring in managerial experts to remedy inefficiency of any kind, so the *Manager* occupies a crucial place in the justification of the dominant institutions of modernity. In this process, the question of ends is separated from rationality, and so Emotivism is embodied within our culture.

According to MacIntyre "Weber's thought embodies just those dichotomies which Emotivism embodies, and obliterates just those distinctions to which Emotivism has to be blind"<sup>29</sup>. For MacIntyre, the Weberian view is committed to holding that "Questions of ends are questions of values, and on values reason is silent; conflict between rival values cannot be settled."<sup>30</sup> Weberian rationality is unable, thinks MacIntyre, to distinguish between manipulative and non-manipulative social relations. According to Weber, in modern societies means become "increasingly more precise in calculating the methodical attainment of given practical ends" and so practical rationality is simply the "methodical attainment of a particular given practical end through the increasingly precise calculation of adequate means"<sup>31</sup>. So from a Weberian point of view, ends are not set by rationality, only means. Therefore genuine persuasion and manipulation (which appears to be persuasion) are, provided they are equally efficient, indistinguishable. In order to better understand MacIntyre's critique of the *manager* we need to understand what he means by 'manipulation'.

Here MacIntyre's historical thesis is instructive because it better enables us to understand exactly what he means by 'manipulation'. One of the most notable and distinctive features of post-enlightenment morality according to MacIntyre is the notion of the autonomous individual. The autonomous individual becomes prized by post-enlightenment culture in a way that would have been unthinkable in the past.

Contemporary moral experience as a consequence has a paradoxical character. For each of us is taught to see himself or herself as an autonomous agent; but each of us also becomes engaged by modes of practice<sup>32</sup>, aesthetic or bureaucratic, which involves us in manipulative relationships with others. Seeking to protect the autonomy we have learned to prize, we aspire ourselves *not* to be manipulated by others; seeking to incarnate our own principles and standpoint in the world of practice, we find no way open to us to do so except by directing towards others those very manipulative modes of relationship which each of us aspires to resist in our own case.<sup>33</sup>

What this passage suggests is that manipulation is, to some degree, unavoidable within the present order<sup>34</sup>. This may be further evidence that the modern order is morally flawed but read in this way, manipulation need not be the inexcusable moral failing it initially seems to be. Manipulative relations are to be avoided and remain a threat to the virtues, but we should note that manipulation *per se* is not so much the problem as the purported inability of management to be any other way. A particular mechanic might be manipulative, but manipulation is not central to that role. Management is not always manipulative in practice, people may regard their work as worth doing and so do not need to be manipulated, but Management does tend to "smooth over or squash conflict... and the language and ideology of the workplace make it difficult to articulate problems that do arise"<sup>35</sup>. More telling however is the fact that rational persuasion about ends is inappropriate in the contemporary workplace, so the assertion of will is all that remains. Those who do not identify with their working roles become targets of manipulation.

3) *Does the power and authority afforded to Management depend on a belief in Managerial expertise?*

Given the scope of corporate power, MacIntyre argues that it could only be justified by the ability to control events. If this is so, success will be portrayed as rational and inevitable, and failure will be portrayed as an aberration. Here is an expression of the view from one of Studs Terkel's interviewees, a business consultant:

Corporations always have to be right. That's their face to the public. When things go bad, they have to protect themselves and fire somebody. 'We had nothing to do with it. We had an executive that just screwed everything up'.<sup>36</sup>

In this sense, even executives within a corporation can feel the same insecurity, the same disconnection between merit and reward, that rank and file workers feel. This quotation also suggests that corporations rely on maintaining an image that involves expertise at the top. They must be thought of as possessing this scientific competence and when they clearly do not, it is portrayed as being the result of a few rogue elements. Even when presented with evidence that suggests a lack of expertise, such as that reported by David Craig<sup>37</sup> who claims that of 170 organisations who used management consultants and were studied in the 1990s by the Cranfield School of Management only 36 per cent of clients thought they had brought any

value, the faith in managerial expertise is unwavering and the market for consultancy continued to grow.

The belief that management requires a kind of scientific expertise is tacitly accepted by the most influential business educational institutions. This is evident in Harold James' description of the history of business schools:

...as they developed in the course of the twentieth century, graduate business schools aimed at professionalising management. Especially in the United States, they were designed to give modern managers a new status that would be commensurable with a changed and enhanced role in an evolving and improving economy. The new institutions were sharply distinguished from the older commercial schools which emphasized practical and vocational training. Their founders wanted a higher prestige and a more abstract and academic education for managers who would form an elite.<sup>38</sup>

Rakesh Khurana, in *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands*, claims that the desire to professionalise management was

associated with the need to transmit a particular and specialised knowledge that would serve as a boundary to the profession and exclude amateurs. Unlike in medicine or engineering, it was never quite clear what the basis of that specialized knowledge was, since accounting, finance and marketing might just as well be taught by the older commercial schools<sup>39</sup>

So the approach adopted by business schools sought to use quantitative social scientific methods to give the veneer of academic respectability. The result is that management came to be viewed as a scientific enterprise. As Business-scholars Freeman and Newkirk put it, "Implicit in much of the management discussion is a mechanical, deterministic, positivistic view of business – a financial engine controlled by the machinery of scientific management"<sup>40</sup>. This mechanistic picture of the world has philosophical origins as far back as Hobbes (and probably further) and informs that great statement of managerial expertise, FW Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management*. But the problem is not merely that management came to be viewed by academics as mechanistic, but that these views came to be applied:

Molecules do not read chemistry books; but managers do read books on organisation theory. Such books therefore, whatever the intentions of their authors, never merely describe; they

provide models for future behaviour, and if they become sufficiently successful texts in influential business schools, some original descriptive inadequacies may gradually disappear as organisational behaviour conforms more closely to the books which managers read.<sup>41</sup>

The way management was and largely is taught, the way it is practiced and the prestige the *Manager* has acquired in contemporary society depends upon the belief that managerial expertise is real. Further evidence for this comes in the shape of the preference for quantitative methods and for new technology even though some evidence suggests it can be counter-productive<sup>42</sup>. Both Henry Mintzberg and economist Ha-Joon Chang claim that the importance of ever newer technologies has been grossly exaggerated. The notion that everything must be new and as technologically advanced as possible is consonant with the notion that management depends on expertise and the Weberian technician account of bureaucratic authority. The fact that the life-cycle of management fads has shrunk from 10 years to 1<sup>43</sup> further suggests the world of management is one that regards itself as cutting-edge. MacIntyre's claim that governmental responses to demands that government become more scientific take the form of claiming to indeed have become more scientific is borne out by the political history of the decades since *After Virtue* was first published. As Bradley et al note,

there is a current fashion for the techniques of scientific management, which is exemplified in the use of industrial and management experts as advisors to New Labour. Such advisors promote the application of scientific rationality to the control of people, to be further applied to the activity of government itself.<sup>44</sup>

Whatever one makes of Labour's policies on science funding<sup>45</sup> - a commitment to scientific rationality is not a commitment to the value judgement that research in the natural sciences is valuable - it is clear that they put a good deal of faith in expert advisors and management consultants.

At the end of chapter 8 of *After Virtue*, MacIntyre concedes that managers and bureaucrats will likely reply to his criticisms that they are as sceptical as he is about the possibility of law-like generalisations and fully scientific knowledge in the social sciences but that nevertheless they are entitled to be acknowledged as experts for the more modest competences that they do possess. MacIntyre's response is to acknowledge that this may be the case but to argue that "claims of this modest kind could never legitimate the possession or

uses of power either within or by bureaucratic corporations on anything like the scale on which that power is wielded"<sup>46</sup>. That examples of managerial control within the workplace are so common, it can be plausibly claimed that some corporations have greater power than nation states, and such is governmental faith in their ability to achieve their aims, suggests that this is so<sup>47</sup>. However, as we will see in the following section, the claim to expertise is often now eschewed by the holders of positions of great power so for now we must leave the question open.

#### 4) *Does this expertise exist?*

MacIntyre claims that the sort of knowledge that would be required to justify bureaucratic authority is impossible. Non-trivial *scientific* predictions in social science are all but impossible and any serious predictive capacity is certainly not as widely available or reliable as in the natural sciences and nor could it be. Both in the decades from which MacIntyre draws his examples and the present day the predictions issued by such apparent experts as economists are notoriously faulty and more modest, grounded, common-sense predictions tend to be more reliable because they are not couched in terms appropriate only to the natural sciences. MacIntyre's examples include the fact that economic predictions using the most advanced methods were less successful than predictions based on assuming that the next six months will resemble the last and that growth is best forecast by taking the average over the last ten years<sup>48</sup>. A more recent example is that the East Asian economic miracle depended upon policies invented by lawyers and engineers rather than economists and a yet more recent example is the failure of mainstream economists to predict the 2008 financial crisis.

Tom Peters' popular management book *In Search of Excellence* is one of the more successful books in its genre, and its author is one of the most renowned of management gurus. According to Lars Svendsen

Five years after the publication of the book, it turned out that the companies he had described as "excellent" did significantly worse than those he had described as seriously lacking in "excellence". Satisfying Peters' six "measures of excellence" was a great recipe for being a loser in the market.<sup>49</sup>

To be fair to Peters, this disastrous analysis is not best read as a rebuttal of the claim that managerial expertise exists as Peters' conception of management is not that of a science, even if it provides yet more evidence that management could not be scientific. His work pertains

more directly to the concept of leadership discussed in the following section. One business commentator, even a highly successful and respected one, making a prediction that turned out to be considerably worse than drawing names out of a hat, is hardly a decisive blow to the notion of managerial expertise. However, Graef Crystal studied the 2009 pay of 271 CEOs and found no correlation between performance and pay, and Daniel Kahneman reports that there is no year-to-year correlation in the ranking of financial advisors and concludes that the "illusion of skill is not only an individual aberration; it is deeply ingrained in the culture of the industry"<sup>50</sup>. Such data does not suggest we are dealing with a field in which expertise is possible. If there were no correlation between the pay and results of lawyers (which, when well-institutionalised, is clearly a practice), or no correlation between year-on-year comparisons between them, we should be amazed.

If the kind of expertise upon which MacIntyre takes claims of managerial authority to rest were possible, then we would expect MBA programmes to be akin to medical degrees: training for which there is no substitute. This is not the case. Indeed, according to one study managers in possession of *any other* Masters degree outperformed those who held MBAs<sup>51</sup>. If it turned out that medical degrees were not the best way of training doctors, if it turned out that Archaeology MAs yielded more capable practitioners of Medicine, we would again be amazed.

There is, nevertheless, an illusion of effectiveness and expertise. MacIntyre would respond that management is effective because people defer to the powerful, and so effectiveness is exercise of power: a display not of expertise but of control. Those in positions of authority are more able to make others do as they wish, so authority explains effectiveness not vice versa. Furthermore, much research is likely to be very much biased in favour of manager's perspective given that it is management who usually commissions research. According to Bradley et al "the agenda is increasingly set by management concerns. Interviews with managers... have become the prevalent methods of investigation, while studies that involve interviews with workers are becoming few and far between"<sup>52</sup>.

As we saw above MacIntyre does not need to deny a limited competence. It is undeniable that some people in charge of managing institutions do possess some skill and ability, to negotiate or communicate (or to charm or manipulate, or perhaps all of these) for instance. What MacIntyre is denying is that this is the sort of expertise that can justify the power and authority afforded to the *manager*.

MacIntyre essentially accepts Quine's claim that if a social-science were to be genuinely scientific it would have to eliminate all reference to reasons, beliefs, desires etc.<sup>53</sup>

and claims that such a social-science would be worthless because such phenomena are ineliminable in any serious account of human behaviour. However, although we saw above that the possession of management authority is often accounted for in terms of possession of expertise, in the following section we will consider leadership as a new form of management that does not invoke scientific expertise.

5) *Does Management lead to or require compartmentalisation?*

There are elements of managerial work, as it is carried out within modernity, that increase the risk of compartmentalisation. Let us consider the difference between the fisherman and the *Manager*. Fishing is hardly freely creative, and those engaged in fishing in Europe today often bemoan what they take to be the excessive intrusion of EU regulation, rightly or wrongly. A squeeze on fish prices may mean that fishing crews must think very carefully about how to ensure they make sufficient profit. The difference between fishing and management is not that the former is always creative and richly rewarding and free from pressure to increase profits, and the latter always tedious and alienating. The difference is the potential fishing possesses *qua* practice to be an education in the virtues. Fishing, where it can be a genuine practice, involves a relatively permanent community and a whole way of life, rather than a temporary identification with a role. The whole way of life is crucial as it affords the fisherman a perspective from which to evaluate any particular demand that is made of him. It is therefore compatible with rejecting atomistically role-structured behaviour, even though it is clearly a structured role. The lives of fishermen and managers can be good or bad, but fishing as a practice tends to be good unless thwarted (by, say, inadequate institutionalisation) because at its core it possesses internal goods. Management has no such core, it is essentially amoral. The person who manages the affairs of a fishing crew in order to protect the practice serves the pursuit of internal goods, but management *qua* pursuit of efficient means can just as easily serve any end.

This does not imply that *all* managers are compartmentalised, but it does suggest that *management* is inherently compatible with compartmentalisation. The demands of management depend almost entirely on the ends of the organization in which it is employed, and so unlike the life of a fisherman, there is not a distinctive kind of life lived by a manager.<sup>54</sup> Of course, in an era of flexible specialisation the ends of an organization can change quickly, and therefore so can the ends of a manager. In this sense management is merely a role, it is not perfective of those who play it and it is structurally cut off from the other roles that partially make up a person's life. MacIntyre says:



What happens too often is that the precepts of the virtues come to be understood as prescriptions for habit-formation in the interests of achieving effectiveness in this or that particular role. And in so being heard and understood the crucial distinction between a virtue and a skill is obscured, if not obliterated... virtues, unlike skills, direct us only to good ends. But in social structures informed by role compartmentalization the ends of each role have already been to a remarkable degree socially and institutionally predetermined, so that virtues come to be understood only as more or less effective means to the achievement of those pre-determined ends, that is, as socially relevant and effective skills.<sup>55</sup>

What this quotation suggests is the role of the manager is more liable to be a role in which the distinction between virtues and skills, as these traits are conceived of by MacIntyre, is obscured. The ends of any particular practice are always open to development and extension by those engaged in that practice, but the ends of management are not so available for scrutiny. However, this criticism would not apply to, for instance, the chess club treasurer who is, in fact, a manager of sorts. Institutionally safeguarding a practice is a form of management, so the thrust of MacIntyre's critique clearly focuses on the most culturally central (even if not the most common) forms of management — those within large-scale bureaucratic institutions — and their particular characteristics. Such institutions do not focus on safe-guarding the goods of practices, but instead put pressure on those within them to cut corners to 'get ahead'.

Whereas there is no point in cheating at a practice where the engagement is genuine, there is every reason to do so within such institutions. Indeed, there is much evidence to suggest that the pressures to succeed qua-manager are corrupting. These pressures encourage otherwise good people to separate managerial demands from their other commitments. According to a 1997 survey of over 1300 American employees 48% complained that management pressured them to engage in "unethical and illegal activity" in order to boost the bottom line<sup>56</sup>. In the late 1980s a survey of 671 executives found that around 25% believed ethics can impede a successful career<sup>57</sup>. MBA students cheat more than other graduate students<sup>58</sup>. I could go on, but I think it is clear that, at the very least, modernity's dominant institutions create a pressure to compartmentalise. Success in the roles common in such institutions requires that the concerns central to other roles be temporarily silenced. As Al Gini puts it, in his philosophical account of work *My Job, Myself*, "we often lead schizophrenic lives because we either choose or are forced to abandon our personal beliefs at

the door when we enter the workplace"<sup>59</sup>. This view has also been endorsed by renowned lawyer and jurist Alan Dershowitz: "I would never do many of the things in my personal life that I have to do as a lawyer"<sup>60</sup>. So the answer to our question is not that all management leads to or requires compartmentalisation as a matter of necessity, but that there is nevertheless both a greater possibility of such compartmentalisation in non-practice-based roles and that contemporary bureaucratic institutions either attract or produce compartmentalised agents.

6) *Is Management as culturally central / powerful as MacIntyre's account requires?*

It is not ultimately important whether individual managers think they have this expertise – they used to, some still do, but many do not – but that their powerful position depends upon something very much like this belief being enshrined in our culture as a justification of managerial power. According to MacIntyre the political legitimacy of capitalism depends upon management, or more specifically, on the existence of managerial expertise. The exclusion of the mass of the population in political decision making is either a testimony to a lack of democracy, or it is justified by the existence of bureaucratic experts<sup>61</sup>. Corporations wield a great deal of power, that much is certain, and so the justification of this authority is a pressing question. However, to answer this question adequately, and indeed to complete our answers to the earlier questions in this section we need now to turn to more recent developments in management.

On the basis of the account developed in the current chapter so far, there remain three outstanding problems: 1) the claim made in 6.1 that the payment of mere lip-service to the ends of management is possible has not been entirely rebutted by either the points about power later in 6.1 nor in the account of management offered here, 2) many people who are managers work in SMEs, with people they've known for some time, and do not possess and are not drawn to acquire an MBA, and 3) management even of large bureaucratic organisations has diversified in the period since *After Virtue* was published in 1981. The first of these problems suggests the kinds of modifications to MacIntyre's account of *characters* put forward in 6.1, but is not of critical importance to MacIntyre's overall account of work once we realise that it is the power and legitimacy of management that is most central. The second problem is similar in this regard, and we will turn our attention to how workplaces should be governed in the next chapter. The upshot of the third outstanding problem is that a MacIntyrean account of work must say more about management. In the following section we

turn our attention to leadership - a distinctly non-scientific strand of management which has risen to prominence since the publication of *After Virtue*.

### 6.3 Leadership

What is killing us is the illusion of control: that things can be predictable, consistent and forever under control. What is also killing us is that followers require their leaders to be in control, on top of things, and to take the blame when things go wrong. Nearly all the new management programmes on TQM, re-engineering, right-sizing, just-in-time, this or that, are really old wine in new bottles - more efforts to design control systems that ask the workers to try harder; do better and be even more productive.<sup>62</sup>

If the conception of the manager-as-bureaucratic expert was dominant in the middle of the 20th century, in the past few decades the paradigm has shifted somewhat, although as the above quotation suggests not entirely. According to numerous commentators, including influential management theorist Henry Mintzberg, who will be the central focus of this section, in the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the concept of 'Leadership' overtook the concept of 'Management'<sup>63</sup>. John Arnold notes that early management research focused on the leader-as-tactician whereas more recent studies focus on the leader-as-inspirational figure<sup>64</sup>, Charles Handy notes that "recent years have seen a renewed interest in leadership as opposed to management"<sup>65</sup>, and Wendy Hollway notes that in recent literature "the ghost of managerial leadership has come back to haunt the field" and that according to this literature "managers are not needed in organizations, only leaders"<sup>66</sup>. In this section, I will consider whether 'Leadership' can take the place of 'Management' and can justify the power and authority of those in charge of modernity's dominant institutions. I will argue that Leadership is, like Management, an embodiment of emotivism and as such lacks legitimacy.

The main distinction between the two concepts, as I will use them following Mintzberg, is that leaders 'deal with change' and 'managers cope with complexity'. Leadership is thus not a scientific concept, as MacIntyre takes managerial expertise to be. In this sense good Leaders require a certain ability but this does not count as expertise. The knowledge and charisma required to be an effective leader is not the same as the impersonal knowledge of law-like generalisations that was once thought to be required for bureaucratic expertise, but this does not mean that modern forms of corporate leadership avoid embodying Emotivism nor that they justify the authority afforded to the *Manager*.

The most basic ways in which Leadership differs from management is that it does not involve slow and careful analysis or rational scientific method, but gut instinct, intuition, charismatic means of presentation and so on. As such it lacks the fallibilism characteristic of disciplines that aspire to the level of science. According to Tourish and Pinnington, many business leaders “develop a monomaniacal conviction that there is one right way of doing things, and believe they possess an almost divine insight into reality”<sup>67</sup>. Since the 1980s it is often thought that businesses do not have time for 5 year plans and so leaders, who are thought to instigate and cope with tumultuous change, are now called for. This picture is not entirely accurate however, and it would be an exaggeration to claim the emergence of leadership has involved a total shift away from old-fashioned management. The (*business*) *leader*, if not quite a *character* in MacIntyre’s sense because of the shift of emphasis away from rational authority, is certainly an important role and a cultural archetype that still expresses a distinctly Emotivist mode of thinking. Emotivism is so deeply ingrained in our culture that it emerges one way or another. If rational persuasion is impossible and instead arbitrary will and manipulative persuasion is all, it makes sense to select the most charismatic person, or the person with the best ‘gut’, for the job. Scientific Management was manipulative in that it saw workers as tools to be expertly controlled, Leadership is manipulative in that it attempts to use inspiration in place of persuasion.

More traditional forms of management – the sort that ostensibly requires a unique expertise – are still with us, but the move towards emphasising leadership is a result of a partial recognition of the difficulties involved in achieving bureaucratic control. An article in *Fast Company* magazine captures this recognition well: “there’s this one big rub about management books... the world they seek to describe is so complex, so tumultuous, often so random as to defy predictability and even rationality”<sup>68</sup>. That ‘scientific management’ has now to compete with ‘charismatic’ CEOs and in some cases their near mystical approach suggests that the *manager* never possessed expertise in the first place. Weber’s claim that capitalism is justified by its rationality – where rationality pertains to means and not ends – is obviously untrue of versions of capitalism that depend on modern Leadership.

Gimpl and Dakin draw parallels between Leaders’ forecasting techniques and ancient superstitious fortune-telling rites used to determine the best hunting grounds and which gave random answers<sup>69</sup>. These rites were useful in that they enabled people to resist the temptation to return to the same hunting grounds time and again, thus preventing over-hunting in those areas, and management forecasting is useful in that it provides confidence in times of uncertainty. As Edwards and Wajcman put it, such management ‘rituals’

encourage some sort of action rather than leaving people feeling helpless... in a random world the best action may be random, and magic may give meaning to randomness... Magic gives justification for actions that would otherwise not fit a discourse of rational decision-making.<sup>70</sup>

Such methods invite challenges to the legitimacy of the dominant institutions of modernity even more than do illusory scientific methods.

It would be foolish to imagine that there exist two distinct poles of management theory with Frederick Taylor at one end and Tom Peters, who suggests a company's president should be its "main disorganiser"<sup>71</sup>, at the other, with nothing in between. The new leadership meets the old management in the growing trend of organisations to regard employees coming to emotionally commit to their employers and to their products as being important in addition to the traditional goals of increasing organisational efficiency and control. Many of the companies we saw that Dobson listed as being new forms of communities, such as Google, Apple and Microsoft, in the previous chapter were the companies most active and most skilled in creating a fervid commitment amongst employees.

As we saw in chapter 5, business cannot be a practice, in part because of its heterogeneity. Management similarly lacks a distinctive internal good. Mintzberg recognises this and his acceptance that management is neither a science nor an art makes his account of managing significantly less vulnerable to the MacIntyrean attack outlined above. MacIntyre's account as it appears in *After Virtue* focuses exclusively on traditional bureaucracies whereas Mintzberg's account is far more diverse. In effect MacIntyre and Mintzberg are talking about different things. Mintzberg's focus on day-to-day actions suggests his focus is on ordinary middle-managers, who possess modest competences rather than expertise (and certainly do not possess the power and prestige that would make them dominant cultural figures). MacIntyre's critique of the *Manager* is squarely focused on the powerful elites in charge of large organisations. However, if we apply Mintzberg's common-sense approach to the 'power elites' the question of their legitimacy remains pressing.

Mintzberg's account focuses on what is learned 'on the job', on common-sense, and on the unpretentious claim that to be a good manager someone should be an intelligent, rounded person rather than a person who possesses a unique expertise and ability to lead. Also, though he never puts it this way, implicit in Mintzberg's account is a somewhat MacIntyrean emphasis on the local as well as on long-term face-to-face relationships. Mintzberg claims that the selection and promotion of managers should partly depend on the

opinion of those who have been managed by them<sup>72</sup>; that managers are not in themselves effective but only matches between managers, particular institutions, and particular working groups are effective<sup>73</sup>; and because executive impact should only be measured in the long run, bonuses should be eliminated. Above all, Mintzberg claims that managers should not be obsessed with measurement but should make room for 'judgement'. This judgement should be balanced, varied, and heterogeneous. This means it is incompatible with managerial expertise and therefore the privileged cultural position of the manager, but it might enable those in charge of organizations to run them more effectively and more humanely.

One problem with Mintzberg's account is that it ignores the structural features of management which MacIntyre is particularly concerned with. For instance, Mintzberg's method of both interviewing and observing managers which, while preferable to doing one or the other, leaves him blind to the significance of the role-structured ends of management that set strict limits to the room available for judgement and discretion. He says that management is more about lateral relationships than hierarchy<sup>74</sup> and that managers have to balance the interests of the owners and/or higher managers with those of their subordinates. The MacIntyrean would disagree because the imbalance of power, and thus the lack of democracy within large scale corporations, means that the interests of the subordinates are liable to be ignored or moulded such that conflict is made to disappear instead of being resolved. If it is Marxism's mistake to focus only on the hierarchical relations, Mintzberg makes the opposite mistake and pays no attention to the imbalance of power between the two groups which, as we saw in section 6.1, is crucial to understanding relationships and how roles can encourage compartmentalisation.

We can agree with much of what Mintzberg says because at the level of the SME or within a small team, intelligent, thoughtful, friendly managers can be a considerable boost to subjective satisfaction, to group cohesion, and even to a sense of community. Such an approach, coupled with Mintzberg's suggestion that the selection and promotion of managers be influenced by the opinions of those who have been managed by them is likely to prevent that most frustrating of working experiences: being over-managed. Research shows that autonomy at work is one of the most important factors in job-satisfaction<sup>75</sup>. However, management as it is currently practised is far from Mintzberg's level-headed ideal and many new initiatives come not from what is learned on the job, but from faddish management books. Furthermore, the life span of each fad has decreased in recent years so that any new good ideas are likely to be overturned and ignored before they have a chance to prove themselves (or otherwise). According to Joanne Ciulla,

The problem with management fads is that they are often uncritical and ahistorical. As a result management theorists discover the same things about work over and over and are equally excited every time they do so... [one] insight about work that management theorists keep discovering is that if you give people information and a say in how to improve their work, they can produce impressive results. The fact that managers are constantly amazed by this tells us something about the respect they had for their employees.<sup>76</sup>

This might not justify MacIntyre's claim that the bureaucratic manager sees subordinates as a chemist sees the substances used in his experiments<sup>77</sup>, managers would never discover that autonomy works if that were so, but it does suggest that ordinary employees lack the capacity to decide what works best, a capacity managers thus seem to arrogate to themselves almost exclusively. Freeman and Rogers found workers want more participation than they currently enjoy and they report that the typical objection to this is that the experts know best<sup>78</sup>. As Charles Handy says "Most managers feel more comfortable when... they can control the methods and therefore the results, the means and not the ends. To let go... to trust people to use their own methods... can be uncomfortable"<sup>79</sup>.

It remains the case that management within modernity's most powerful institutions is widely expected to possess knowledge that goes beyond know-how and clear-headedness. During a visit to the LSE in November 2008, the Queen asked Professor Luis Garicano why it was that no-one had foreseen the financial crisis. The response, when it came in the form of a letter dated July 22<sup>nd</sup> 2009 from the British Academy, was that there had been a "failure of collective imagination"<sup>80</sup> with the implication being that if only the relevant experts had not been complacent they would have foreseen the crisis because they do in fact possess scientific expertise. Clearly, practitioners of the 'dismal science' consider themselves to be in possession of expertise and consider control to be possible, even if it requires more than simple data-modelling. We do not expect medical doctors to make correct diagnoses on every occasion because in addition to knowledge doctors need imagination to apply it in unusual cases. What would surprise us, however, is hundreds or thousands of doctors making an identical mistake.

Mintzberg's picture of management might well deserve recommendation, but again, it is incompatible with the self-understanding of many bureaucratic corporations. For instance, here is a quotation from the Business Roundtable's 'Statement of Corporate Governance':

The notion that the board must somehow balance the interests of stockholders against the interests of other stakeholders fundamentally misconstrues the role of directors. It is, moreover, an unworkable notion because it would leave the board with no criteria for resolving the conflicts between the interests of stockholders and other stakeholders or among different groups of stakeholders.<sup>81</sup>

Mintzberg laments the fact that such a statement makes no room for 'judgement' but here we see that the intangible 'judgement' is regarded by the authors of the Business Roundtable statement, a group of CEOs from major US corporations, as being too vague, too imprecise to make the sorts of definite decisions that management is taken to consist in. There is a danger that judgement will hinder profit maximisation. The pre-given ends set by the stakeholders must remain sovereign, for if they are not there is "no criteria for resolving the conflicts" that may arise. Joel Bakan reports that *Dodge v. Ford* "still stands for the legal principle that managers and directors have a legal responsibility to put shareholders' interests above all others and no legal authority to serve any other interest"<sup>82</sup>. In this case the Ford Motor Company was successfully sued by its minority shareholders for attempting to end special dividends and instead investing so as to employ more staff and lower the cost of cars produced (Ford had privately stated that his aims were philanthropic rather than strategic). This is not to say that short-term profit maximisation is enshrined in law, even if it is standard practice, because shareholders' interests might be better served by long-term planning. However, it does neatly capture the compartmentalised decision-making characteristic of large corporations, a compartmentalisation that ensures the will of the shareholders trumps all else.

So contemporary leaders and managers exist in an Emotivistic world, and often wrongly consider themselves to possess expertise. Contemporary firms require

managers with charismatic personalities, displaying flexibility, dynamism, and interpersonal skills. As a result, the criteria for advancement across a broad range of management jobs become more intangible and implicit, more a matter of personal compatibility and perceptions.<sup>83</sup>

According to several studies, the traits required by high-powered corporate roles are those associated with psychopaths<sup>84</sup>. There are two points to make about this. 1) The requirement for certain personality types is explicit here but such personalities must make decisions in a compartmentalised way so that apparent virtues effectively become manipulative skills. 2)



'Gut'-based decision making does not justify the authority of management because success still seems to be haphazard, and because such decisions still merely assume the legitimacy, rather than providing evidence for, the ends they are made to serve. For every Geoffrey Robinson there is a BBC reorganisation.<sup>85</sup>

Alimo-Metcalfe and Alban-Metcalfe<sup>86</sup> report that studies which have attempted to find a correlation between leadership style and outcome (e.g. productivity, stress, absenteeism) actually found no such correlation. They also found that such studies also generally fail to take subordinate behaviour into account. Such outcomes are unsurprising to the MacIntyrean. As we saw in our discussion of emotional labour in chapter 4, particular contextualising detail is of the utmost importance, so a single leadership style is unlikely to have the same outcomes in differing contexts. Nor is it any surprise to find that this is frequently overlooked given that it resists qualitative description and that any findings that take it into account cannot be formulated as universal law-like generalisations. Thus, this oversight in the literature is symptomatic of the belief in the possibility of just the kind of expertise MacIntyre takes to be impossible.

It is difficult to imagine that the role of the *Manager* in contemporary life would be deemed acceptable by most people if management simply consisted in clear-headed people doing their best. This would do no more to justify the 400:1 discrepancy between US CEOs and ordinary workers (in the Fortune 500) than there is at present. We saw earlier that the results of market traders are almost purely determined by chance (incidentally, such highly prized workers are hardly rare: in 2007 more than 4200 financial sector workers received bonuses of over £1 million in the City of London alone<sup>87</sup>). With CEOs the situation seems to be little different. Take the example of Stan O'Neal. He received over \$300 million from his time as the head of Merrill Lynch despite the company losing billions of dollars in that time. Whatever rare skills he possessed did not prevent the company's failure nor his being voted as one of the worst CEOs of all time in Portfolio magazine<sup>88</sup>. As business-scholar Phil Rosenzweig puts it

When a company is doing well, with rising profits and a soaring share price, most people infer that it has a brilliant strategy, a visionary leader, a motivated workforce, strong execution skills and more... But when the company falters, observers are quick to make the opposite attributions: they say the strategy was misguided, the leader became arrogant, the people were complacent, execution was sloppy, and more. In fact, little may have changed.<sup>89</sup>

Again, luck tends to be rewarded as if it is skill. The bureaucratic experts who govern modern life do not succeed on their own terms. At the very least the rare skills and 'excellent' individual performance that supposedly justify such high pay are un-testable.

However, deferral to the powerful is more pressing an issue than wildly inflated pay. The lack of moral legitimacy is more pressing than the lack of technical legitimacy. The deferral to the opinions of the 'experts' and their level of authority and wealth would seem to have no justification if they are not experts able to exert some level of genuine control over what happens or able to accurately predict the outcomes of policies. The government, the Bank of England, and the private corporations that play important roles in public life do seem to claim their legitimacy on the basis of becoming ever more scientific. Democracy, such as it is, invites people to periodically give some indication of their values but governments, along with their appointed bureaucratic experts, decide what is possible, how to most efficiently implement those values, and participation in the devising of most effective means is no more invited than it is in medicine. In the workplace, where even such periodic indication of preferences is often lacking, management imposes upon the workforce what it takes to be the most efficient means.

## 6.4 Conclusion

We have seen that MacIntyre's account of *characters* requires more empirical support, and that the key difference between character-roles and ordinary roles is one of power, both cultural and in immediate relationships. I have disagreed with MacIntyre's claim that character-roles require certain kinds of personality because of the possibility of paying mere lip-service to the role demands and because our culture is sufficiently fragmented for particular 'moral ideals' to lack normative force. In the following sections I have attempted to provide MacIntyre's case with some of the empirical support it needs. Management developments since the publication of *After Virtue* have seen a greater weight given to non-scientific notions of Leadership. This however seems to be another manipulative mask, and co-exists with a continuing tendency for those in positions of power to attribute to themselves an ability to expertly control the institutions that dominate modernity.

Although I have disagreed with some of MacIntyre's claims about the *character* of the manager, in particular his claim that it necessarily influences the personalities of those who play the role, these claims nevertheless possess a certain plausibility that results from

MacIntyre's acute claim that our culture is emotivist. The passing of the character of the *manager*, and the emergence of the (putative character of the) *leader* is rendered intelligible partly because MacIntyre's critique of managerial expertise holds true. The leader is a replacement that is no less Emotivistic. Indeed its justification is more openly arbitrary than that of the manager because although the leader does not pretend to moral neutrality, it openly admits the lack of rationality supporting its value commitments. The *Leader* fits the description of 'mask worn by a moral philosophy' even more neatly than does the *manager*. This chapter has focused first on the abstraction of MacIntyre's concept of characters, then on the cultural history of management, and then on contemporary corporate culture. In the chapter that follows, we will turn our attention to how workplaces can best be governed and regulated within this culture.

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<sup>1</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.194.

<sup>2</sup> As has been argued by Brewer, 1997, and Warren, 1996, I omit discussion of these papers from the present chapter due to lack of space and because I regard the arguments they contain to have been successfully rebutted by Beadle 2002.

<sup>3</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.30.

<sup>4</sup> See Knight 2007, p.115, cf After Virtue ch.3.

<sup>5</sup> Soloman, 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Borden, 2007, pp.34-6. I have no doubt that Borden is correct to note that most journalists would recognise the muck-raker, the investigative journalist, the hoaxer and so on, just as football fans recognise the classic British centre-half, the South American No.10, etc. Nor do I doubt that an understanding of such figures is crucial for a deep understanding of contemporary journalism or football. However, MacIntyre's conception of *characters* is inescapably less local than such examples.

<sup>7</sup> D'Andrea, 2006, p.232.

<sup>8</sup> E.g. Bhaskar, to give just one example. In his *Dialectic* he expands MacIntyre's list of characters of the present age to include "the expert, the bureaucrat, the fixer, the media star, the soap persona, Vietnam or Essex man" (Bhaskar, 1993, p.360). These examples might have some resonance as stock characters in some of the dramas of the present age, and indeed the expert and the bureaucrat are subsumed by MacIntyre's *manager*, but they do not possess the cultural power of MacIntyre's more restricted definition of characters. Indeed, some of them are simply kinds of rich aesthete. The "Moral ideals" of a culture, as MacIntyre intends the term, does not quite match 'most commonly aspired to'. It's probable that in the 1950s more children wanted to grow up to be Mickey Mantle than an 'organization man', but that doesn't mean 'baseball star' better enables us to understand 50s culture than the organization man.

<sup>9</sup> Beadle, 2002, p.46.

<sup>10</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.27.

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p.27.

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, p.31.

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*, p.31.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*, p.27.

<sup>15</sup> Weber, 2001, p.19.

<sup>16</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.29.

<sup>17</sup> *ibid*, p.27.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*, p.30.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid*, p.198.

<sup>20</sup> McMylor, 1994, p.135.

<sup>21</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.30.

<sup>22</sup> For instance Weber's failure to note that while authority within an organization is centralised, ability is often decentralised, a point noted by V. Thompson (*Modern Organization*, 1961). We discussed this claim as made by Sennett in chapter 3. In fairness to Weber we should note that this phenomenon is more obvious today than in his time.

<sup>23</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.25

<sup>24</sup> Handy, 1993, p.320.

<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p.321.

<sup>26</sup> Tsoukas, 1994, p.294.

<sup>27</sup> Watson, 1994, p.49.

<sup>28</sup> Russell, 2005, p.3.

<sup>29</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.26.

<sup>30</sup> *ibid*, p.26.

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- <sup>31</sup> Weber, 1967, p.293.
- <sup>32</sup> Note: here MacIntyre is using the word in its ordinary sense, his special definition is not given for several chapters.
- <sup>33</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.68.
- <sup>34</sup> And it is alarming just how easily manipulated most of us are. See by Robert Cialdini, 2007, for a popular account.
- <sup>35</sup> Ciulla, 2001, p.104.
- <sup>36</sup> Terkel, *Working*, 1974, p.405.
- <sup>37</sup> Craig, 2005.
- <sup>38</sup> James, 2009, p.16.
- <sup>39</sup> Cited by James, *ibid* p.17.
- <sup>40</sup> Freeman and Newkirk, 2009, p.117.
- <sup>41</sup> MacIntyre, 1998b, p.64.
- <sup>42</sup> Bradley et al, 2000, p.106.
- <sup>43</sup> Ciulla, 2000, p.137.
- <sup>44</sup> Bradley et al, 2000, p.109.
- <sup>45</sup> i.e. an increase in spending compared to the previous Tory administration but also a large increase in centralised control over budgets - it seems Labour trusted governmental expertise over that of scientists when it came to deciding what to research!
- <sup>46</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.108.
- <sup>47</sup> For examples of the claim that corporations have greater powers than nation states see Bakan, 2004, p.25 – “Corporations now *govern* society, perhaps more than governments themselves do” and Beck, 2000, p.32, who claims that corporations now control society. If MacIntyre’s rebuttal of managerial expertise is correct, there can be no such *control*. This is not to deny that corporations greatly influence government policy.
- <sup>48</sup> See MacIntyre, 2007, p.89.
- <sup>49</sup> Svendsen, p.84.
- <sup>50</sup> Kahneman, 2011, p.216.
- <sup>51</sup> Stewart, 2009.
- <sup>52</sup> Bradley et al, 2000, p.6.
- <sup>53</sup> See Quine, 1960, Chapter 6.
- <sup>54</sup> This point is made by Ron Beadle, 2001.
- <sup>55</sup> MacIntyre, 2006f, p.117.
- <sup>56</sup> *Sources and Consequences of Workplace Pressure: Increasing the Risk of Unethical and Illegal Business Practices*, American Society of CLU and ChFC, 1997, p.6. Cited by Gini.
- <sup>57</sup> Attributed by Gini to a study cited in Maynard M. Dolecheck and Carolyn C. Dolecheck, "Ethics: Take It From the Top," *Business* (March 1989).
- <sup>58</sup> McCabe et al, 2006.
- <sup>59</sup> Gini, 2001, p.157.
- <sup>60</sup> Cited by Gini, *ibid*, p.157. I have been unable to locate the original source, which Gini does not provide.
- <sup>61</sup> See MacIntyre, 2008b.
- <sup>62</sup> K. April, R. MacDonald, and S. Vriesendorp, 2000, p.1.
- <sup>63</sup> Mintzberg, 2009, ch.1.
- <sup>64</sup> Arnold, 2005, p.487.
- <sup>65</sup> Handy, 1993, p.115.
- <sup>66</sup> Hollway, 1991, p.142.
- <sup>67</sup> Tourish and Pinnington, 2002, p.147.
- <sup>68</sup> Fast Company, Nov 2004: “Was *Built to Last* Built to Last?” by Reingold and Underwood.
- <sup>69</sup> Gimpl and Dakin, 1984, pp.125-137.
- <sup>70</sup> Edwards and Wajcman, 2005, p.99.
- <sup>71</sup> T. Peters, 1993, p.57.
- <sup>72</sup> Mintzberg, 2009, p.220.
- <sup>73</sup> *ibid*, p.222.
- <sup>74</sup> *ibid*, p.29.
- <sup>75</sup> See Warr, 2007, p.143 for a summary of the literature that supports a correlation between autonomy at work and job-satisfaction.
- <sup>76</sup> Ciulla pp.139-141.
- <sup>77</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.84.
- <sup>78</sup> Freeman and Rogers, 1999.
- <sup>79</sup> Handy, 1991, p.104.
- <sup>80</sup> Cited by Chang, 2011. This phrase also used by the 9/11 commission to describe the conditions that allowed the terrorist attacks to happen, as if global politics could ever be brought under control.
- <sup>81</sup> [www.businessroundtable.org](http://www.businessroundtable.org)
- <sup>82</sup> Bakan, 2004, p.36.
- <sup>83</sup> Edwards and Wajcman, 2005, p.84.
- <sup>84</sup> See Paul Babiak and Robert Hare, 2007.
- <sup>85</sup> See Born, *Uncertain Vision: Birt, Dyke and the Reinvention of the BBC*, 2004 for a damning study of the BBC’s use of management consultants.
- <sup>86</sup> Alimo-Metcalfe, B. and Alban-Metcalfe, R., 2002, p.304.

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<sup>87</sup> City of London bonuses, Reuters, 7th October 2007.

<sup>88</sup> [www.portfolio.com](http://www.portfolio.com), April 2009.

<sup>89</sup> Rosenzweig, 'An obstacle to evidence-based management: the halo effect', [www.evidence-basedmanagement.com](http://www.evidence-basedmanagement.com), 2007.

## **Chapter 7: Governance, Regulation and the MacIntyrean Workplace**

Having explored management in terms of expert knowledge and leadership in chapter 6, in this chapter we shall explore the governance of virtue in the workplace. We will begin in 7.1 by examining Geoff Moore's extremely useful but ultimately flawed attempt to codify MacIntyrean workplace initiatives. While governance is an especially important issue for MacIntyrean ethics, I will argue that Moore's account is defective because, as they stand, his recommendations are incompatible with MacIntyre's account of moral education and in particular because he misinterprets MacIntyrean ethics in such a way that it becomes too close to the mere regulation of behaviour. In section 7.2, we will focus on the nature of regulation and the role it plays in working life and how regulation relates to MacIntyrean ethics. I will argue that we ought to recognise the importance of regulation, even if we accept MacIntyre's claim that regulation is primarily required when a society lacks the moral resources required to avert disaster. Clearly regulation cannot itself provide the moral education that MacIntyre claims is provided by practices. In 7.3, we will focus on whether a regulative approach can count as a genuine 'governance of virtue', that is, whether policy measures can transform workplaces into centres of flourishing. I will argue that neither the 'right' MacIntyrean position of Moore nor the 'left' MacIntyrean position of Knight can allow us to formulate means by which work can be an education in the virtues and that outside of practices governance is most effective and appropriate as a means of crowding *out* vice. I will conclude by reformulating Moore's workplace initiatives in line with the arguments of the previous chapters.

### **7.1 Moore and Governance**

MacIntyrean ethics is characterised by an emphasis on the importance of the social sciences, specifically on the empirical knowledge of societies required to understand how moralities are socially embodied. One important element of this embodiment is moral education. Virtue ethics generally tends to place more emphasis on moral education than rival positions and because of its conception of practices as schools of the virtues, MacIntyrean philosophy is yet more concerned with the means by which virtues are acquired than most virtue theories.

Because practices, and therefore institutions, are central to MacIntyre's ethics, the question of governance naturally has a prominence in MacIntyrean philosophy. Indeed, the question of governance is especially important given that practices must be partially opaque to the uninitiated. Where work is practice-based, good governance might therefore aim to ensure that practices and practitioners operate without impediment. We can describe the internal goods of chess and the virtues that engagement in that particular practice might develop because we have all played chess, but it is harder, for me at least, to elaborate on the internal goods of Tae-Kwondo because I have never engaged in it.

While there will inevitably be differences in systems of governance across different workplaces, any putative MacIntyrean system of governance will aim to prevent the pursuit of external goods dominating institutions. Regulation differs from governance in that it is typically imposed from without. As such regulation is unencumbered by specificities and its focus tends to be on ensuring a minimal acceptable standard. The advantage of governance is that it can be designed within an institution with the practice that institution houses in mind, and thus can be sensitive to contextual requirements. The advantage of regulation is that its externality means it can be designed solely with public welfare in mind. In this sense regulation can be seen as an attempt to minimise the testimony problem discussed in chapter 1. We are more likely to trust an officially certified dentist than a dentist who assures us that he or she is committed to the relevant internal goods.

Governance cannot transform non-practice-based institutions so that they house practices, but it is of vital importance to prevent the corruption of practices within the relevant institutions and the corruption more generally which undermines working communities. This is the very least governance can aim at. Moore claims that governance can do a good deal more and argues that certain measures can incentivise virtue<sup>1</sup>.

Moore suggests that MacIntyrean theory can provide both a better diagnosis of phenomena like the recent economic crisis and of the question of legitimation than can views which either suggest that capitalism is inherently corrupting or that it is inherently virtuous. According to the former view, capitalism will self-destruct because it tends to destroy the very values that sustain it. According to the latter view, termed *doux-commerce*<sup>2</sup>, the market is ethically self-sustaining because it calls for trustworthiness; dishonesty is held in check by the need to cultivate a reputation for trustworthiness, prudence is rewarded in the long term, and so on. For Moore, MacIntyrean philosophy allows us to see the truth in both theories and provides a better prescription than either alone is able to. Instead of merely suggesting greater regulation<sup>3</sup> or recommending an ethical code without outlining how it might be brought into

existence<sup>4</sup>, MacIntyrean philosophy (as Moore understands it) provides an empirically engaged philosophical framework that can help us to assess and transform real institutions.

Using MacIntyre's account of virtues and practices, Moore suggests eight desiderata through which virtue might be 'crowded in' in the workplace. These are:

1) A focus on the purpose of the organisation rather than the bottom line, though this policy can only apply where these differ. Moore says, "At the most senior level of governance discussions there will be a need to address the goodness of purpose of the organization which is the extent to which the internal goods of the practice are at the core of the organization"<sup>5</sup>. It is however hard to imagine the board of a cigarette company having this discussion and concluding that they ought to close down. Moore seems to optimistically assume that all work is practice-based. We will address the issue of attempting to persuade non-MacIntyreans below, in section 7.2.

2) That governance systems require people with pro-social intrinsic preferences. Character assessment and development is crucial, and virtuous candidates should be given jobs. After appointment, character should continue to be nurtured.

3) Job design. "[A]ttention needs to be given to job design, so that intrinsic motivation is built in to the greatest extent possible"<sup>6</sup>. Here again we can see that Moore takes it as read that employees are practitioners, he says that work should be designed so that "employees (practitioners) ought to find the greatest opportunity to engage in the practice, exercise virtue, pursue excellence and so produce good products and perfect themselves in the process"<sup>7</sup>.

4) *Fixed and fair salaries*, a policy that helps the rank and file avoid the conclusion that the senior figures within an organisation are concerned solely to achieve large bonuses.<sup>8</sup>

5) *Use of decision making procedures that strengthen both participation and self-governance*. We will consider self-governance in section 7.3 when we turn our attention to moral education at work.

6) *Low levels of legal contractual enforcement*. The purpose of this is to allow trust to flourish, the importance of which was discussed in chapter 4. We should note that this cannot be an explicit governance aim because we cannot draw up a code of conduct that obliges us to avoid having to implement that code of conduct (or at least we cannot do so sensibly), but it might be a good way of measuring the success of an institution.

7) *Encouraging group identity*. This is a fairly natural result of implementing the previous six measures according to Moore. We saw in chapter 5 that communities can exist even without such measures, although as Moore rightly notes, an organization which has the features he



lists "will find encouraging group identity easier than one which tends not to have these features."<sup>9</sup>

8) *Transparency*. This again is something that flows from the other measures, according to Moore.

Moore is right to note that MacIntyrean philosophy provides resources that enable us to formulate a better response than to either implore people to act more virtuously or to merely attempt to offer incentives to behave well. But there are five notable problems with his account. Three of them are relatively minor problems which pertain to details of his account that could be altered without significant loss, and two are more serious problems which throw his whole approach to the governance of virtue into question.

The minor problems are: 1) Moore's apparently uncritical assumption that all work is a practice (or might be if institutionalised correctly), he says "the failure to possess and exercise the virtues ultimately led to the inability of practices to retain their integrity – and hence, in a number of cases to the demise of the institution as it no longer fostered the practice on which it was founded (Northern Rock, Lehman Brothers, AIG and others)"<sup>10</sup>, and thus that a focus on internal goods is always possible even in institutions *solely* geared towards the pursuit of external goods, 2) his failure to address the problem of scale, and 3) the fact that most companies do already pay lip-service to focusing on the purpose rather than profit, select people with pro-social attitudes, etc. Were the situation otherwise it would be extremely difficult to persuade employees to adopt corporate identities. Role-structured activity might be corrupting, but no one seeks out corrupting roles. We saw in chapter 1 that although practices admit of degree, it is simply impossible to regard the concept as applying to every activity or even to every enjoyable activity, and we saw in both chapters 4 and 5 that day-to-day interaction and a relatively small-scale are essential to MacIntyrean communities, and so will not discuss these issues here. In any case, it is clear that Moore's account could be modified so that disparities in pay are less extreme than a 75:1 ratio, that genuine practices are preferred, and that the focus on organisational purpose is more challenging than he seems to allow and certainly not something that can be simply stipulated.

These points only require a slight alteration to be brought closer to the spirit of MacIntyre's works. For instance, we could restrict some of the more substantial requirements to practice-based work. Where work is practice-based a focus on the purpose of the organisation means a focus on goods internal to that activity, and a preference for virtuous candidates can have a deeper and more genuine application. Bravery is called for in a fire-fighter but would be irrelevant as a selection criterion for a data-entry role, so in reality the

selection of the virtuous would be highly particular. Similarly, democratic participation would benefit budding farmers and the farms on which they work, but it is not something that can have application in *mere* turnip planting.<sup>11</sup> Such alterations do nevertheless give us reason to be less optimistic than Moore himself about the prospects of MacIntyrean institutions becoming widespread within the present order.

The two larger problems are that Moore's account seems to underplay the distinction between virtue and acting in accordance with virtue (and between acting in accordance with virtue because one wants to be virtuous and acting in such a way because one wants to deceive others and be regarded as virtuous without actually being so), and, similarly, reading MacIntyre as being too socially deterministic. Let us consider these problems in more detail:

a) the notion of 'crowding in' virtues by providing external goods as incentives certainly seems to be consonant with MacIntyre's treatment of both the relation between internal and external goods, and thus the development of virtues in *After Virtue*, and the notion that reward be related to merit. However, Moore frames his discussion in a way that suggests he accepts, in principle, methods of governance that effectively promote acting in accordance with virtue, or even merely appearing to act in accordance with virtue. The mere fact of co-operation does not necessarily indicate fellowship because such co-operation may be a result of coercion or mere appeals to narrow self-interest (though MacIntyre realises that enlightened self-interest entails a concern for others). Furthermore, the 2<sup>nd</sup> of Moore's desiderata, the selection of virtuous employees suggests again that the appearance of virtue, the ability to charm counts for too much. Decisions about whether someone is virtuous tends to require more time and experience than is typically available to those in charge of appointments, and as we saw in the previous chapter, positions of power involve a greater risk of compartmentalisation. Where compartmentalisation exists the decisions about which candidates are virtuous is likely to be governed by the role demands. This requirement also sits uneasily with the notion that practices themselves are schools for the virtues and the notion that excessively acquisitive institutions can be alienating.

Within a practice there is already good reason to develop the virtues, but outside of such contexts the point and purpose of the virtues is less clearly apparent. Moore also seems too ready to accept evidence from research into game-theory as providing genuine insights into human behaviour, and cites research that divides the population into 'strong reciprocators' – 15%, 'conditional reciprocators' – 50%, and 'free-riders' which make up the rest<sup>12</sup>. This is something MacIntyre would be sceptical about given that such research methodologically rules out any substantial contextualising detail. The most exploitative and

lazy of free-riders in a hypothetical, abstract situation may behave quite differently within a real, practice-based community. Outside of practices, and within contexts in which there are pressures to compartmentalise - for instance where there exists a pressure to exaggerate the focus on the purpose of the organisation for PR purposes - people will likely be more cynical about strong reciprocation than would be the case were they to be genuinely engaged in a practice. This failure to address context is in essence is what makes Moore guilty of:

b) Making MacIntyre's position appear to be more deterministic than it is. Now, because Moore is attempting to formulate concrete workplace governance policies from MacIntyre's theory, it is clear that he is not interpreting MacIntyre as a communist revolutionary. However, there is something paradoxically Marxist about Moore's take on MacIntyre. This is indicated by his failure to address the problem of scale. Moore notes that large scale reforms at the macro-economic level are necessary for a good society and says that it is also important to consider how best to organise individual firms, he never considers that large scale firms might be intrinsically problematic. MacIntyre's awareness of this problem is one of the key differences between his position and Marx's, as we saw in chapter 3. Moore's account also seems unable to adequately distinguish between virtuous behaviour and suppression of vice. According to at least one strand of Marxist thought (and in line with MacIntyre's interpretation of Marx in his 'Theses on Feuerbach: A Road Not Taken'), it is better to have a well-structured society of knaves than an ill-structured society full of virtuous individuals, for in the former avarice might be desired but is impossible, and in the latter well-intentioned people cannot help exploiting (in Marx's sense) and otherwise harming others. MacIntyre does not accept this dichotomy between ethics and politics. It follows from MacIntyre's Eudaimonism that the notion of a 'good' society populated by bad people is simply incoherent, and that exploitation, for instance, is worth being rid of precisely because it would better enable people to become good and so flourish.

Moore does not explicitly interpret MacIntyre in this way and would probably defend himself by pointing out that he frequently refers to practices, virtues, and how the institutional reforms he recommends are designed to facilitate practices through which the practitioners perfect both their 'products' and themselves. If he makes this move, then one of Moore's minor problems becomes a major one. The reason this defence must fail is that Moore treats the term 'practice' too casually and writes as if almost every job is a practice. This is needed if Moore's account is to have MacIntyrean ethical content, but it would render his account implausible.

As we saw in chapter 1, and again with specific reference to Moore in chapter 5, the concept of a practice does not cover every activity. No amount of institutional reform is going to transform a work that is not characterised by complex internal goods into a practice, but it might be possible to transform an organisation such that it prevents vice. This is the question of regulation. We have seen in this section that Moore's account has severe limitations, chiefly because, in attempting to show how workplaces can be made MacIntyrean, Moore is attempting to get too much out of an account of mere governance. As an account of regulative governance that, instead of aiming to ensure that work is conducive to virtuous flourishing, aims at preventing the more serious threats to flourishing at work there might be more room for optimism. In the following section, we will consider the topic of regulation.

## **7.2 Managing Virtue and Regulation**

It is obvious that it is better for managers to be morally sensitive, morally upright individuals than the converse. It is better too for vice to be prevented and in some cases punished than the converse, and it is better for both virtuous behaviour to be encouraged and virtues to be inculcated than the converse. But habituation is not enough for MacIntyre, hence his invocation of practices, narrative unity and traditions when defining the virtues.

Given his emphasis on goods internal to practices we might expect a MacIntyrean account of work to have a hostile attitude to regulation. However, the fact that practices are no longer central to social life means that it is prudent for the MacIntyrean to accept the crucial utility value of regulation. I put it this way to emphasise the alien nature of regulation from the point of view of practices, but that does not, so I shall argue, undermine the basic point.

It seems then that where work is not practice-based, good management will for the most part be negative in character and be concerned with removing obstacles to the formation of practice-like elements in the hope of fostering the trust and local friendliness required by communities. These elements will often be extrinsic to the actual tasks the work itself involves. Given the fact that practices are always liable to emerge (i.e. given that people are naturally interested in internal goods and communities of practice) protecting work from the domination of external goods is more important than trying to reconfigure institutions to bring out possible internal goods. This is because where there may be such goods it is more likely they will spontaneously become apparent than it is that threats will spontaneously

wither away and because threats to practices and communities can be understood by external perspectives more readily than can the relevant internal goods. While people can engage in practices when there are obstacles, it is likely to be more effective to remove these obstacles than to encourage people to see beyond them.

Any attempt to 'crowd in' virtues that does not focus on practices risks appearing to be empty, moralistic rhetoric but within a tightly-bound practice-based community it may be possible for members to simply ignore obstacles and accept injunctions to act virtuously. Where such communities are looser, more help is required to ensure a focus on internal goods is maintained. 'Law', in the form of governance or regulation, may be the only way to ensure serious ills are averted but, according to MacIntyre, law works best when it is least needed, when it is least invoked.<sup>13</sup> When fear or narrow self-interest is the motivation, the law tends to be morally discredited.<sup>14</sup> But when there are no genuine moral resources, regulation is necessary:

What then are we to say of regulation? When we are concerned with those regulations that deal with the quality and safety of goods and services, we ought to be clear that we need regulation only because human nature is gravely defective when embodied in the modern corporation—regulation, remember, applies primarily to the activities of corporations and only secondarily to the activities of individuals<sup>15</sup>

MacIntyre goes on to provide an example:

Think of the thalidomide case. The recent book on thalidomide, *Suffer the Children*, provides the evidence. What Grünenthal Chemie in Germany and what the Distillers Corporation in Britain were willing to do, as the developers and the licensees for thalidomide, shows very clearly that large corporations are collectively quite willing to undertake courses of action that individuals in the corporation would be deeply shocked by if it was proposed that they as individuals should do what the corporation does. The individuals who staff Grünenthal or Distillers are generally no worse than the rest of us. It is simply the case that in a corporate society one of the ways in which moral relationships have been eroded is by the substitution of corporate for individual responsibility.<sup>16</sup>

The correction of the preconditions of such cases is a long way off. Indeed, if MacIntyre's interpretation of modernity is correct, agreement on the premises through which a rational solution to the problems of modernity is possible is itself a long way off (which again shows

us how challenging an attempt to substantially ‘crowd in’ virtue is likely to be). What then are we to do about the practical impossibility of persuading everyone to accept a MacIntyrean perspective, or somewhat more neutrally, about the effects of a morally fragmented culture? Regulation might be a substitute for morality, though it is sometimes simply the enforcement of common-sense, but where rational argument and persuasion, and thus communal agreement are impossible our response ought to be: three cheers for regulation! MacIntyre admits it is the best we can do given the moral culture we inhabit<sup>17</sup>. The grave defects of corporate responsibility force us into a struggle of manipulation. Even waiting for the next St. Benedict, MacIntyre's bleak recommendation at the end of *After Virtue*, has pre-requisites and the only way these might be achieved and protected is through mainstream politics. Because mainstream politics is, from MacIntyre's perspective, characterised by a deep moral incoherence, the MacIntyrean is forced to use the same tools of manipulation and leverage that are widely used within modernity as we noted in chapter 6. To admit this is to admit that two ‘intolerable’ alternatives<sup>18</sup> are rarely equally intolerable, and within the bounds of the tolerable, evils admit of degree.

Individualism is, from MacIntyre's perspective, irremediably flawed, but this does not undermine its social power. Evidently, the truth is not quite enough to set one free: even though of us who reject individualism must co-exist with an order deeply influenced by it. What we need therefore, is to protect communities which sustain the virtues from a hostile culture given that there is little hope of us reaching agreement. These considerations suggest that unless the work engaged in is genuinely practice-based, it seems that governance will be akin to regulation. This is a problem for Moore, who considers a merely regulatory approach to be "too shallow for the prescription to be effective in the long term. It is, in other words, governance without ethics."<sup>19</sup> We can agree with Moore in this judgement about a merely regulative approach, but unfortunately, because his account fails to address the wider context and fails to distinguish between measures appropriate to institutions that house practice-based work and measures appropriate to those which do not, we are compelled to make a similar judgement about his prescription, as it currently stands.

Governance in this sense will be unable to sufficiently 'crowd in' virtue so that work provides a moral education, and so will be compatible with agents becoming corrupted by the absence of a focus on substantive internal goods. Governance is necessary for the MacIntyrean, which means something like Moore's account is important even if it cannot have the effects Moore desires. Moore's optimism is not justified, but his account is not

without merit and his list of desiderata can provide the foundation of a MacIntyrean account of workplace governance and of the good, negative elements of management.

MacIntyre's own writings on regulation are concerned with the macro-level because of the lack of corporate culpability for serious problems, such as the thalidomide case. Those in positions of power at Grünenthal Chemie were incapable of putting public well-being ahead of profit and so the decision should have been taken out of their hands. We saw above that Moore's account is inadequate as an account of how to foster MacIntyrean institutions, but regulation has an important part to play in weakening threats to existing MacIntyrean institutions. In this sense, variants of Moore's suggested measures might be used to minimise workplace grievances.

Imagine that a government were elected that had quasi-MacIntyrean leanings in that it acknowledged a commitment to a certain conception of the good life for its citizenry, without being inclined to abandon most of the basic free-market policies typical of western liberal democracies. If this government decided that it wanted to take some steps towards restoring philosophy to its once central place in public life and made it compulsory for business executives to attend a public lecture given by MacIntyre about rationality and the good life, few would expect them to be persuaded, much less to voluntarily change their behaviour so that it were consistent with MacIntyre's moral philosophy. Sadly, this would probably be the case even if the executives were forced to attend two such lectures by MacIntyre. Even where such a change might be desired, the present situation, in many ways akin to the prisoner's dilemma, means that regulation is required in order to provide an adequate impetus for morally acceptable behaviour. In the case of really existing regulation the goal is neither so grand, nor the implementation so straight forward. Because there is no shared comprehensive moral framework in our culture, regulation, if it is to be effective, must ensure that the punishments for infringements are sufficiently unattractive that compliance is attractive, and that the means of detection are sufficiently effective that breach constitutes a genuine risk. Even if human nature is such that people tend to prefer engagement in practices and related focus on internal goods, the structure of capitalist competition means that it is often difficult or impossible to choose what one knows one really wants (for fear of being driven out of business because competitors refuse to implement such measures, for instance).

However, because regulation often involves external regulators on the grounds that it most applies to those, in some sense, incapable of exercising restraint either individually or collectively, the relatively MacIntyrean workplaces need not worry as such workplaces will tend to exceed the minimal demands that regulation makes of them. So it might be argued

that from the point of view of workplace studies, it is not a problem. Is this correct? Not quite, for the political cannot be so neatly divorced from working life. Precisely because there is no natural allegiance to the ends regulation is designed to achieve, organisations primarily concerned with the pursuit of external goods will always have reason to discover loopholes, exceptions, and the like that allow the letter of the law to be followed, but the spirit to be disregarded. This is one of the ways in which pressure to compartmentalise is present within the large scale firm. As an employee loopholes are to be sought, but as a private citizen regulation is a force for good.

Our discussion of regulation allows us to see why MacIntyre has been *both* claimed and rejected as *both* a conservative and a socialist by representatives of both of those positions. On the one hand, the socialist-statist answer of intrusive government is appealing because a great deal of regulation is required to curb the questionable behaviour of some corporations on the grounds that they lack legitimacy and inevitably are frequently tempted to use immoral means to pursue their ends. But this 'solution' is also repugnant to MacIntyre because he regards the modern, regulatory state itself as illegitimate. However, within the workplace regulation can be part of the solution to the problem of creating MacIntyrean institutions, but we must now turn our attention to moral education, and what might be achieved through good governance and good regulation. We have seen in section 7.1 that Moore's account of the governance is unable to crowd in virtue in such a way as to ensure workplaces are MacIntyrean, but against a purely pessimistic interpretation of MacIntyre's philosophy, the importance of regulation - explored in the present section - suggests that the outline of Moore's account might be salvageable. In the following section, we will explore the extent to which governance and regulation can play anything other than a negative role.

### **7.3 Moral Education and Workers' Control**

In this section we will explore the possibility of transforming workplaces into centres of virtuous flourishing. On this topic governance and regulation cannot be adequate partly because of the inherent richness of the notion of flourishing, and also partly because of MacIntyre's emphasis on whole lives. Workplace governance is in this sense rather narrow, and so even where it appears to be broadly MacIntyrean it might not achieve its intended effects.



Many MacIntyrean and quasi-MacIntyrean measures are no doubt already in place in some workplaces. Where work contains internal goods, it is better for both the workers themselves and for the managers if people are committed to those goods<sup>20</sup>. There are likely to be ‘bottom line’ advantages to dividing a workforce into teams, as increases in organisational identity and commitment lead to improved performance overall and lower staff turnover<sup>21</sup>, even if the often made claim that job satisfaction leads to better performance is spurious<sup>22</sup>. The improved overall performance is not necessarily a matter of individuals working harder or even more effectively, but may be a result of reducing the cost of supervision<sup>23</sup>. However, if the arguments of chapter 5 are correct, we should be unsurprised to find that efforts to introduce measures that foster self-surveillance and socialisation that produces role-identity can fail because of employee resistance or suspicion<sup>24</sup>. Ever since the advent of modern organisational study there have been calls for a reduction in bureaucracy and for a greater degree of worker autonomy<sup>25</sup> and insofar as it is a result of the flattening of organisational bureaucracy, such a reduction has come to pass. But there are various ways in which apparently good or well meaning measures can go wrong.

James R. Barker, in his paper ‘Tightening the Iron Cage’, describes how allowing teams to be self-managed can result in “a form of control more powerful, less apparent, and more difficult to resist”<sup>26</sup> than traditional forms of bureaucracy. Barker’s longitudinal study of a small manufacturing company shows how what he calls ‘concertive control’ can lead to stronger norms. This is because the teams develop policies by reasoning from the company’s value-laden premises and the edicts which follow naturally from those premises are then regarded as having been self-chosen, so the possibility of dissent and disengagement disappears. Here the decision takes place within one particular compartmentalised role rather than being available for deeper reflection and deliberation. In one case described by Barker, members of the group began pressurizing each other to conform to the organisation’s rules in a way that they had not and would not have before the new team structure was introduced. According to Barker, on one occasion the members of the group made a team member, Sharon, cry because she had a poor absence and lateness record. This is hardly overwhelming empirical evidence, but Barker’s study captures something of the petty tyranny all too possible in such situations.

What this means is that one of the preconditions of a workplace being MacIntyrean can be a threat to flourishing. This should not be surprising. Being relatively small-scale is a precondition of a political community counting as MacIntyrean but clearly not every small-scale community will be conducive to flourishing. The MacIntyrean perspective, which

emphasises the importance of narrative unity of a whole life, was never in danger of supposing that freedom from *direct* bureaucratic control would automatically yield practice-based work. Only in a perfect world could there be perfect workplaces, but this impossibility should not discourage us. It would be an unnecessarily bleak conclusion to say that only in a perfectly harmonious, small-scale MacIntyrean polis can we create work-places conducive to flourishing because there is still a great deal that can be achieved outside of such a context.

Modern workplaces often cannot be the sites of local community in which shared deliberation and pursuit of the good can take place, and so in terms of general recommendations, a regulative approach might be the best that can be hoped for. The deeper moral of Barker's story, from a MacIntyrean perspective, is that for any workplace to be conducive to flourishing what is needed above all is that those who work there possess the virtues.

Virtues enable us to flourish, and our desire to flourish is one key reason to seek to cultivate the virtues. This does not mean that happiness is always to be sought and unhappiness always to be avoided. From the MacIntyrean point of view, to say that a measure might decrease employee satisfaction is not a decisive criticism of it. Where satisfaction depends solely upon pursuit of external goods then anything like Moore's notion of crowding-in virtue may come as a blow to morale, and anything that resembles a genuine focus on goods internal to a practice, such as implementing fair and fixed salaries, will obviously be unpopular. In MacIntyre's brief discussion of the virtue of patience, he raises the question of what is to be done when the end that justifies the patience simply is not forthcoming<sup>27</sup>. Someone who is not sufficiently adept at a practice – the clumsy would-be surgeon, the sea-sick would-be fisherman, as well as the lazy and intemperate in all practices – may justly receive criticism, and may find that master-practitioners justly lose patience with him or her. But practice-status and conduciveness to flourishing are not easily measured, or even adequately discerned by someone outside the putative practice, certainly not as easily as subjective satisfaction.

So a MacIntyrean theory of work does not need to regard the apparently unpleasant aspects of concertive control as being necessarily bad. What makes them so is the ends they serve. When MPs in the UK were forced to declare their outside earnings in July 2009 many elected to give up their positions rather than have their extra-parliamentary incomes publically known, despite the fact that the sums were significant - many of those who did not give up their outside positions were revealed to earn tens of thousands of pounds for just a few hours advisory work a year. This move is unlikely to have made those MPs happy, but is necessary if the Houses of Parliament are one day to host practitioners. Where work is not a

practice, concertive control, official 'group identity' that leads to compartmentalisation, and so on, must be resisted and quasi-communities of disengagement are the best hope for employees to avoid the corrupting effects of such work. Where work is practice-based, or possesses significant practice-like elements, and the institution is practice-focused, then commitment to the workplace, the passing of honest and sometimes harsh judgements, and subordination to the relevant canons of excellence, are all good even when they are difficult. The reason Barker's tale of an upset worker is worrying is precisely because most workers have not signed up to subordinate themselves to the good of a practice, which is inevitable given that most modern work is not practice-based.

In attempting to bring about regulatory and governance measures that can best protect and perhaps even bring about flourishing in the real world, we must recognise that "Moral education will be ineffective if it sets too high a standard too quickly"<sup>28</sup>. Legislation should therefore concern vices that undermine social life and harm others. This importance afforded to social life is not quite the same as Moore's 2nd requirement, that governance systems require people with pro-social preferences (one suspects that the extremely unsociable would apply to work alone in any case). In fact, its spirit is complementary to the defence of long-term day to day relationships recommended in chapter 4 and the account of workplace communities put forward in chapter 5. We can rely on the fact that most people have pro-social preferences and ought to implement governance policies that minimise factors that undermine such relationships such as cultures of excessive competitiveness and job insecurity.

Aquinas, whom MacIntyre approvingly quotes, gives the examples of murder and theft as the sorts of crimes that most seriously undermine social life. Although hardly rivals to stress and absenteeism as workplace problems, it is instructive to consider Aquinas' reasoning. Aquinas disagrees with both puritans and liberals: "Like those puritans and unlike those liberals, he understands the law as an instrument for our moral education. But, like those liberals and unlike those puritans, he is against making law by itself an attempt to suppress all vice"<sup>29</sup>. Note that the focus here is not on the vicious, who may or may not avoid murder and theft for fear of reprisals, it is on the security of the knowledge that one is very unlikely to be murdered and that one's property is relatively protected by the law. The intended result is that people need not worry excessively about crime. Regulation does not always have this effect; fear of crime can rise as crime falls. Similarly, fear of unemployment can be disproportionately high, and a sense of uneasy competition can exist in workplaces where the focus *really is* on the goods internal to a practice (which itself can lead to those

lacking the relevant skills being laid off). This gives us some reason to believe that even ensuring that work takes the form of a genuine engagement in a practice, organisational culture requires careful consideration. So, as regulation is more restricted in scope than law, and is concerned primarily with the suppression of unacceptable behaviour, what are the characteristics of a good regulator or governor?

MacIntyre says “Insofar as human beings have the capacity to become good, they also have the capacity to exercise the prudence of a ruler.”<sup>30</sup> So those who do become rulers have no special capacity. Therefore, “those who arrogate to themselves an exclusive, professionalised authority of a certain kind by that very act of arrogation discredit their own claims to legitimate authority”<sup>31</sup>. This is because such an attitude is liable to prevent the governed from learning from one another and from effectively deliberating. In essence, it is to underestimate the abilities of ordinary people to such a degree as to make the claimants incompetent as governors of those ordinary people. We saw in the previous chapter that the culture of management relies on just these kinds of claims to justify its own prestige and power.

At first sight, however, this is a puzzling set of claims and seems to overstate MacIntyre’s arguments against managerial expertise. MacIntyre’s notion of practices and the related authority of master practitioners mean that, ostensibly, this claim does not sit well with the rest of his theory. Even if management is not a practice, politics is and it would be natural to assume that like other practices there is room for ‘master practitioners’. Politics is however an unusual practice. Institutionally sustaining a practice-based community is the practice of politics, and it seems intuitively plausible that MacIntyre would allow that there can be distinctly excellent rulers, even if this excellence does not take the form of ‘expertise’.

There are two obvious possible responses to this: a) the practice of ruling is not identical to institutionally sustaining a practice-based community, which would lead to a bivalent account of politics, which would suggest that mainstream politics consists more in managerial manipulation than genuine politics, or b) the practices of ruling and communal sustenance are the same, and happen to be a practice that all humans (insofar as they can become good) are capable of. This part of MacIntyre’s theory poses a challenge perhaps greater than that of the denial of the *manager’s* authority because instead of simply being mistaken in their judgements, managers who claim such expertise are disqualified from ‘governing’ on the basis of this ‘anti-social preference’. It appears that the MacIntyrean must accept the latter of these alternatives and hold that unlike practices that require a distinctive technical skill, such as painting, or intellectual prowess, such as physics, ruling requires only

those skills of thought, communication and recognition of the virtues that all potentially good human beings can possess. Man is by nature a political animal, and this means more than the claim that humans naturally form political communities.

There is a difference between ‘exclusive, professionalised authority’ and rational authority. All rational, adult human beings are capable of sustaining communities and almost all have in fact done so to varying degrees through participation in family life. The best cabinet maker has authority within the workshop, but politics is not like the practice of furniture making because the latter is only actually engaged in by a small set of people, whereas politics, in MacIntyre’s sense, is universal. Politics in this sense requires virtues such as prudence, diligence, justice and without those virtues participation in any practice will be threatened and insofar as human beings are capable of thinking rationally, engaging in practices, and developing virtues they are capable of becoming good at politics. We should note that those who publically claim a professional authority may well be merely lip-service to the role and unthinkingly employing a manner of speech that is standard for their profession, without really believing they possess unique expertise and even without really acting in such a way that such a belief would entail, just as all interviewees claim to work well on their own and as part of a team. Nevertheless, the existence of exclusive professionalised authority is a common assumption that will always be an obstacle to the establishment of MacIntyrean workplaces.

However, while everyone has had some experience of sustaining practice-based communities, and while everyone has the potential to do so well insofar as they are able to become good, not everyone realises this potential. Not every parent is a good one. Sometimes people may be reluctant to develop the skills needed to rule, this means that those who do happen to rule (i.e. possess power within institutions, especially those that serve practices) must exercise a special degree of moral sensitivity and a respectful concern for those they work with. All people might have the potential to rule, and one characteristic of good institutions will be that they attempt to develop this potential in people, but if we are to take alienation seriously we must realise that not all people are concerned to develop that potential. As we saw in the previous chapter this requirement may be a difficult challenge to meet given the cultural pressure on managers to attribute to themselves an exclusive professional authority to rule.

We must be wary of diluting the radical nature of MacIntyre’s critique of modernity. However, the recognition that the pursuit of flourishing might entail some unhappiness is not the same as disregarding job dissatisfaction. Nor are means justified simply because they

have good ends. We must also be wary of supporting distinctly ‘business’ interests and managerialism. Finally, we must be wary of putting these two concerns together and drawing unduly pessimistic conclusions. In chapter 3 we examined some reasons to resist amalgamating MacIntyre and Marx, and we should note that seemingly small improvements in conditions can be enormously dignifying, and being able to avoid the alienating effects of drudgery better enables workers to form the tacit workplace communities discussed in chapter 5. So what does this imply for a MacIntyrean account of work?

Knight claims, in his account of ‘Goods’, that the problem with modern work is that workers lack control over their work. Control implies autonomy and democracy, and so is no doubt conducive to practices functioning well. Freedom from arbitrary control or unjust power is no doubt a good, but against Knight I suggest that worker control cannot be necessary for work to be good. Knight says,

Work cannot provide an education in the virtues because it is not something over which workers have control or responsibility. As Marxists, guild socialists, distributivists and others have argued, when workers do not own the instruments or products of their labour, and when they have to sell their labour, then they are alienated from their own activity<sup>32</sup>

From this perspective, governance cannot help us to avoid alienation, and any governance/regulatory account of how workplaces might be made MacIntyrean is misconceived. However, workers lacking control is not necessarily the problem. The lack of practice-status typical of modern work, role-demands that lead to compartmentalisation, radical re-organisation or excessive managerial control that undermines the existence of workplace communities, these are the problems with contemporary working life. A student has little control of a university, indeed allowing students too much say in the running of a course (not the same as carefully considering feedback) would be a mistake, a new member might have little say over how a chess club or orchestra is run, but this does not make those forms of activity alienating. Other examples might include journalists and lawyers. Such professions are clearly practices, and can therefore provide an education in the virtues even outside optimal working conditions, though there are limits to the conditions a practice can survive. It is this kind of work that would most obviously benefit from the application of Moore's proposals. A journalist owns neither the means or products of his or her labour in most instances, but the life of a journalist is likely to be richer than that of a self-employed turnip-planter, and this is despite the possible pressure to churn out piece after piece, or to toe

the editorial line, or even to procure information illegally (though such pressures may corrupt the practice).

Too little a degree of control over one's work will ensure that it remains an imposed burden, but control and responsibility are not the panaceas Knight seems to take them to be: Zimbardo's students had control, and Bach, working at a frenetic pace set by his paymasters, lacked it. The students who played prison guards in Zimbardo's famous Stanford prison experiment, sadly now taught only as a guide to unethical methodology, had control over their work but a compartmentalised identification with their role prevented them from exercising moral agency<sup>33</sup>. Clearly, they were not engaged in a practice. On the other hand, when he moved to Leipzig, leaving behind a relatively comfortable position at Köthen, Bach certainly lacked control over the pace of his work: he had to produce cantatas on a weekly basis as well as teaching students and fulfilling a variety of administrative duties. By all accounts, Bach's life was, to put it in contemporary terms, rather stressful at this time, but because he was engaged in a practice his work was still an education into the virtues.

It is the case that all workers are capable of ruling and institutionalising a practice, but it does not follow from this that the inexpert can and should control a practice. What does follow is that ordinary workers can control practices only once they have a rich and detailed appreciation of the practice itself. In some cases expertise is required, the expertise of a master-practitioner. If Moore interprets MacIntyre in a way that is incompatible with MacIntyre's own rejection of Marxism, then Knight reads MacIntyre as being too Marxist in substance and so adopts the Marxist concept of alienation in such a way that is at odds with a MacIntyrean account of work. Moore is right to focus on participation and democracy as they are more intrinsically connected to flourishing than ownership or outright control. As we saw in chapter 3, much of Marx's own account of alienation, (in particular his accounts of alienation from product and process, which seem to fit best with Knight's remarks about worker control) do not apply to modern forms of work and underplay the extent to which we can engage in practices even within capitalism. Moore is mistaken in thinking that the task of creating virtuous institutions is essentially managerial, and Knight is mistaken in thinking that it is solely political.

So having seen that regulation is a critically important topic for the MacIntyrean in section 7.2 and some problems with applying any form of regulation or governance in an ethically significant positive way in the present section, let us re-assess and reformulate Moore's list of desiderata:

1) *A focus on the purpose of the organisation.* As I have repeatedly argued above, this makes sense only within practices. It would be better if all work was such an engagement. In the offices of a newspaper a focus on the purpose of journalism would be ideal, but in more humdrum occupations, which might have socially useful purposes but lack rich, stimulating goods or the standards of excellence characteristic of practices, it will be more important to foster friendly, trusting communities. Profit maximisation is more widespread as an overarching purpose of organisations than Moore allows. Practically this might suggest that flourishing is more likely to be available outside of plcs and instead inside small companies, which the argument presented in chapter 4 also supports. This requirement does not add anything to MacIntyre's claim that all practices require institutions<sup>34</sup>, and my argument in chapter 1 that practice-like jobs are especially dependent on being well-institutionalised. I argued there that certain virtues – for instance justice, courage, humility and honesty – enable practitioners to well-institutionalise their practices. Good institutions will help to produce these qualities and will require them.

2) *Governance systems require people with pro-social intrinsic preferences.* The status of this requirement depends on exactly what is meant by 'pro-social preferences'. In one sense, it does seem that this is already the case in almost all workplaces. Moore uses this requirement to recommend that virtuous candidates be appointed and character be assessed and developed. As a governance measure, this seems rather too intrusive. Within an already existing local community, character assessments are well-grounded and have a clear function; within an organisation that houses a practice, a preference for the virtuous and agreement about what counts as a virtue also makes sense, but again outside of practices and within a morally fragmented society to attempt to prefer virtuous candidates in anything other than a minimal sense would be arbitrary and possibly worse. However, even within practices it is a governance measure that can hope to have only limited application. In discussing contemporary academic philosophy MacIntyre claims that

enquiry into the moral character of candidates for academic appointments would be thought at best irrelevant, at worst persecutory. And, because the office holder of an academic philosopher in our society is what it now is, such an enquiry would in fact be irrelevant and perhaps persecutory.<sup>35</sup>

To discourage and even punish those who threaten social relations on the other hand can make sense as a method of regulatory governance, as does allowing working teams to



stay together in the long term in order to facilitate the develop of thick-trust. As MacIntyre points out<sup>36</sup>, someone might join a fishing crew for the money and stay because of the internal goods even when greater financial rewards are available elsewhere. It would be unreasonable to expect someone to be precisely constituted to appreciate the goods of a practice in advance of engaging in that practice: typically it is engagement that enables us to develop the virtues required to appreciate those goods. If we dilute this requirement so that it avoids this error then there is a danger of it merely describing current practice. Existing evidence of anti-social attitudes does already debar people from many jobs. Moore's point would be stronger if he were more explicit about MacIntyrean conceptions of sociability differing from ordinary conceptions. The pro-social preferences exhibited in genuine friendships, in practice-based communities, in friendly and courteous workplaces, in quasi-communities of tacit resistance, and in damagingly competitive but not entirely hostile environments differ vastly.

3) *Attention be given to job design.* This is another measure that is already widely employed. It makes most sense outside of practices, which cannot be managed as easily as practice-based work. Practices develop and in some sense have a life of their own as long as they are institutionally safe-guarded, so there will often be no need to design jobs. Other things being equal, the architect has enough autonomy and enough intrinsic motivation that further design is unnecessary. Furthermore any attempt to impose further variety on practitioners would be to run the risk of hindering the development of mastery of the practice and so of related excellences. Outside of practices, attention to job design is an important way of making work more interesting and enjoyable. In the many cases where work is practice-like, then, a balance should be struck between subjective satisfaction and the prioritisation of the internal goods, and here worker control will be vitally important.

4) *Fixed and fair salaries.* About this, we can happily agree with Moore, although what counts as fair is an open question. The level of inequality that produces deference and threatens friendship is the level which should not be reached. This is not an easy thing to measure and calls for great sensitivity and contextual knowledge.

5) *Use of decision making procedures that strengthen participation and self-governance.* Outside of practices, this is a measure that will help to prevent certain ills. Within a practice, this will be more powerful a tool for good as people can reason from more substantial shared premises. In either case, the excessive power possessed by the kinds of managers who fit MacIntyre's description of the *character* of the manager is to be avoided. Highly concentrated but non-centralized power will tend to rule out such procedures, which

again counts against corporate monoliths and in favour of the local, small-scale work environment. One corollary of our discussions of compartmentalization is that participation will be a force for good principally where working roles are not distinct and cut-off from the rest of someone's life. In this sense, work-life harmonisation must be a goal. Once again, outside of practices self-governance can be dangerous, as we saw above in the case of Barker's study of concertive control, and as we saw in the 2008 financial crisis.

6) *Low levels of contractual enforcement.* This may be a useful way of assessing how healthy a workplace community is. We saw in chapter 4 that low levels of contractual enforcement enables thick trust, which in turn will be characteristic of good workplaces. However, this again depends upon the kind of work an organisation houses. Those engaged in dirty and/or dangerous work would probably benefit from a higher level of contractual enforcement. Anyone who has ever worked in a warehouse will know that after watching several hours worth of health and safety training videos the sort of precautions advised, and indeed required, are ignored in order to complete the day's tasks in a sufficiently timely fashion.

7) *Encouraging group identity.* Here again we see the need for a dualistic account of work. Within practices, some form of group identity will be a good thing, and will itself be a likely natural development given that workers will have shared aims and shared commitments. Here the scene of conflict can be the scene of resolution, and thus bolster community, as we saw in chapter 3. Outside of practices, it is liable to lead to a damaging pressure to compartmentalise. Because there is a gradation between practices and non-practices to know whether encouraging group identity is a good or an ill will require a detailed knowledge of the particular context in question, and so should not be a uniform measure in such places where governance is largely regulative.

8) *Transparency.* It would be hard to find someone willing to advocate more opacity in organisations. Transparency, for the most part, is clearly a good. In one sense, Moore is right to think that it follows from the rest of the list, but once again there is a difference between transparency within practices and without. Transparency about basic corporate policies is no doubt to be encouraged, but within practices the matter is not so straight forward. Within a practice, "Those who lack the relevant experience are incompetent thereby as judges of internal goods"<sup>37</sup>, so while transparency is a good there is a limit to how explicable the decisions of master-practitioners will be to the uninitiated. Furthermore, transparency seems to be an unrealistic goal for the large-scale institutions that dominate modernity. If we publish the minutes of cabinet, we guarantee that cabinet is not where the

real discussions take place. One conclusion to be drawn from this chapter and from the preceding chapters is that MacIntyrean workplaces are possible within modernity, but we should not be optimistic about them becoming the norm.

#### 7.4 Conclusion

We have seen that governance is of special importance for MacIntyrean ethics, but that governance outside of practices and in a political order that is blind to the importance of practices is insufficient. This is not a criticism of governance *per se*, but where governance is bound to be ineffective, regulation is very much needed. In a context hostile to practices, regulation can protect workers, would-be practitioners, and indeed full practitioners from threatening external forces. But regulation cannot and should not hope to replace morality or provide a moral education to workers. In the present chapter, we have seen that the importance of practices cannot be overlooked, and that one corollary of this is that a fully persuasive account of how workers might coexist with modernity is too big a task for workplace studies alone, and indeed for philosophy alone. Workers' control might, like reducing the size of work organizations, on balance tend to help us avoid compartmentalisation, alienation, pressure to pursue external goods at the expense of internal goods, etc. but it can have the opposite effect. Even when we can explain what is wrong with corporate monoliths or Zimbardo's guards in theory, we can hardly hope to account for what is good about Bach's practice to a sufficient degree to inform the behaviour of real agents, especially given the particularity of each person's narrative. Good governance and sensible regulation are required to ensure that as many workplaces are as good as is possible in the suboptimum context of the present, but any such list is inevitably insufficient: what is needed above all is the virtues to decide what work to do, to do good work, and to ensure that good work can be done.

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<sup>1</sup> Moore, 2010, cited with author's permission.

<sup>2</sup> Hirschman, 1982. The term 'doux' is French for 'soft'.

<sup>3</sup> As Mervyn King, Governor of the Bank of England, suggests. King claimed in a speech given in 2009 that bankers were fundamentally good men and women but the problem was with "the incentives they faced", i.e. they were fundamentally good people who acted like bad people when the opportunity presented itself.

<sup>4</sup> As the UN's 'global economic ethic' suggests in its peculiar, Kantian fashion.

<sup>5</sup> Moore, 2010, p.15.

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*, p.15.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, p.15.

<sup>8</sup> Moore stops short of endorsing a 75:1 ratio, but does mention this as a possible figure on the basis of recent studies, though this surely contradicts MacIntyre's requirement that large degrees of inequality be avoided.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p.17.

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*, p.12.

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- <sup>11</sup> That is to say repetitive turnip planting alone, not farming where the only crop happens to be turnips.
- <sup>12</sup> Moore cites Gurerk et al. 2006. Moore also reports that Fehr & Falk's study (2002: 709-10) found that children collected less money for charity when they were told they could keep a portion of it than they did when all proceeds went to the charity, which is supposed to suggest that extrinsic incentives 'crowd out' the children's natural desire to co-operate.
- <sup>13</sup> MacIntyre, 1980, p.32.
- <sup>14</sup> *ibid.*, p.33.
- <sup>15</sup> *ibid.*, p.33.
- <sup>16</sup> *ibid.*, p.33.
- <sup>17</sup> *ibid.*, p.33.
- <sup>18</sup> I allude to MacIntyre's claim in his, 2004b, that people should vote for neither Bush nor Kerry in the 2004 presidential election.
- <sup>19</sup> Moore, 2010, p.9.
- <sup>20</sup> As Keat notes in his 2008.
- <sup>21</sup> Wall et al , 1986.
- <sup>22</sup> As is suggested by N.A. Bowling, 2007, who claims that individual personality is more important.
- <sup>23</sup> Something else that suggests the absence of a distinctly managerial expertise.
- <sup>24</sup> One study which supports this is McKinley and Taylor 'Power, Surveillance and Resistance: Inside the Factory of the Future' in Ackers, Smith, and Smith, 1996.
- <sup>25</sup> For instance Lewin, 1948.
- <sup>26</sup> Barker, 2005, p.210.
- <sup>27</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.202.
- <sup>28</sup> MacIntyre, 2006j, p.47.
- <sup>29</sup> *ibid.*, p.47.
- <sup>30</sup> *ibid.*, p.49.
- <sup>31</sup> *ibid.*, p.51.
- <sup>32</sup> Knight, 2008a.
- <sup>33</sup> Even if the compartmentalised role they identified with was 'obedient student' rather than 'brutal guard'.
- <sup>34</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.194.
- <sup>35</sup> MacIntyre, 2006h, p.37.
- <sup>36</sup> MacIntyre, 1994a, p.285.
- <sup>37</sup> MacIntyre, 2007, p.189.

## **Conclusion**

In a sense some of the key conclusions of this study are to be found in the closing pages of the final chapter, where I outlined a list of MacIntyrean governance measures inspired by and in response to Moore. That list drew on the arguments of the previous chapters and revealed that good but non-practice-based work has very different requirements than practice-based work. But the final conclusions this MacIntyrean philosophy of work is able to draw are necessarily incomplete, not just because 'workplace studies' names a vast array of disciplines and sub-disciplines, though that is an important reason, but also because of the arguments advanced in, most notably, chapters 2 and 4 about the importance of whole life and about detailed context. Also, as I argued in chapter 4, there are no 'business virtues' (etc) and so we must recognise that a MacIntyrean account of work is simply MacIntyrean ethics as it pertains to our lives within corporate modernity. It cannot be a distinctively 'business' or workplace ethics, nor can it allow the standards by which we judge our whole lives to be ignored in favour of some distinctively workplace-based judgement.

What we have seen, however, is the basic shape of a MacIntyrean philosophy of work, that such an account survives numerous criticisms, and that MacIntyrean work and MacIntyrean workplace-communities are available within modernity.

## **Summary**

I began, in the first two chapters, and to a lesser extent the third, by providing a theoretical defence of MacIntyre's ethics. In chapter 1 I was concerned to give a clear account of practices and show that practices can be productive, and to assuage the worry that the epistemological closure of practices deprived the notion of normative force. In chapter 2 I continued my defence of MacIntyre's ethical theory, and argued that his conception of narrative unity is workable.

In the third chapter I contrasted MacIntyre and Marx and began to explore the nature of contemporary work. Sennett's account shows that dominant forms of modern work are characteristically hostile to MacIntyrean work. In the fourth chapter I began to explore some of the details of a MacIntyrean account of work. There I argued that in order for healthy emotion work to take place, workplaces must be small and allow for regular face to face

interactions, in which thick trust is possible. One of MacIntyre's most fundamental criticisms of the modern order is that its scale is simply incompatible with the good life, and I have tried to further support this criticism. I also argued that compartmentalised role-ethics is deeply flawed.

In chapter 5 I argued that MacIntyre's remarks on work ignore the possibility of quasi-communities united through their tacit rejection of the goal of 'careerist' success. This does not mean that modern firms are new forms of MacIntyrean community, but it does suggest that moral agency is better able to co-exist with modernity than MacIntyre himself sometimes thinks. In the sixth chapter I probed MacIntyre's definition of characters. Although lip-service to role-governed ends means that management roles do not *require* certain personalities, I argued that MacIntyre's central claims about the Manager, that it is committed to emotivism and depends on a false belief in managerial expertise, is correct and largely applies to leadership too.

In chapter 7 I outlined why the MacIntyrean should be glad of regulation, as well as exploring possible MacIntyrean workplace measures. We saw that what is to be recommended within practices is not what is to be recommended outside practices. That some work may be described as practice-like further complicates matters: the variety in work means there must be a variety of strategies. Ultimately I hope to have largely defended MacIntyre, to have contributed to MacIntyrean enquiry by deepening our understanding of what a MacIntyrean philosophy of work must be, and in so doing to have also contributed to our understanding of how we might flourish at work, even within modernity.

### **Post-Script: Which Job? Whose Research Project?**

The simplest answer to the question of what a MacIntyrean philosophy of work recommends we do is: 'find practice-based work'. Unfortunately it is not as simple as that. At the time of writing, 'find work' is a piece of advice that increasingly many are finding it hard to follow. Practice-based work is scarce, often difficult, and at threat from acquisitive institutions for whom cost-effectiveness must always trump internal goods. Within healthy and well-institutionalised practices there is evidently a "close connection between being a good human being and doing good work"<sup>1</sup> that is absent from most productive work carried out under the present order. Ultimately, politically, our aims must include promoting a social and political order in which this connection is recognised, i.e. in which practices are central. But this is of no use to someone who (impatiently, perhaps) seeks flourishing *today!* For such a person

even the injunction to find a workplace that is small, friendly and trustworthy in which one is safe from the elitist ideology of managerial expertise, allowed a measure of autonomy, and can enjoy the practice-like, enjoyable elements is not necessarily compelling. As I suggested in chapter 5, disengagement from work is widespread. Given that working for SMEs often involves harder work, for less money, and probably less security, the actor who waits tables so that he can act, may have a good reason to leave his local, independent cafe for a faceless corporate monolith. In which case he will be glad of regulatory and governance measures recommended in chapter 7.

The field of MacIntyrean enquiry is in a healthier state. The number of publications and conferences devoted to MacIntyrean enquiry is growing and attempts to answer the two principal questions raised by this thesis (in addition to the obvious task of dealing with the further objections that might be made to the arguments contained herein), the empirical question of how to recognise and account for practice-based institutions, and the theoretical and practical question of how to develop a convincing MacIntyrean politics which, among other things, might render our actor/waiter's choice more palatable, are already underway. I direct the interested reader to Beadle and Coe's 'Could We Know a Practice-Embodying Institution if We Saw One?' (2008), and Blackledge and Knight's *Virtue and Politics* respectively.

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<sup>1</sup> MacIntyre, 2011, p.323

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