

Virtue and Meaningful Work

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ABSTRACT: This article deploys Alasdair MacIntyre's Aristotelian virtue ethics, in which meaningfulness is understood to supervene on human functioning, to bring empirical and ethical accounts of meaningful work into dialogue. Whereas empirical accounts have presented the experience of meaningful work either in terms of agents' orientation to work or as intrinsic to certain types of work, ethical accounts have largely assumed the latter formulation and subjected it to considerations of distributive justice. This article critiques both the empirical and ethical literatures from the standpoint of MacIntyre's account of the relationship between the development of virtuous dispositions and participation in work that is productive of goods internal to practices. This reframing suggests new directions for empirical and ethical enquiries.

KEY WORDS: meaningful work, virtue, business ethics, self-determination theory, MacIntyre

INTRODUCTION

WHY SHOULD MEANINGFUL WORK CONCERN VIRTUE ETHICISTS?
This article draws on research by social psychologists into the characteristics and experience of meaningful work to develop a distinctively Aristotelian account of its features. If meaningful work is critical to the pursuit of a good life, then its frustration by both disordered desires and institutional domination becomes a vital object of ethical enquiry.

We shall proceed as follows. Part one of the article presents MacIntyre's account of meaningful work as ordered towards goods of excellence pursued within social practices. It will show how this definition encompasses work conducted in various contexts. Part two demonstrates how research into job design and the experience of "flow" provides empirical support for a practice-based understanding of meaningful work. Part three addresses empirical and ethical objections to this account. First, empirical research shows both that workers demonstrate very different relative preferences for intrinsic and extrinsic goods available from work and that workers' understandings of "meaningful work" differ widely. Second, some ethicists have argued from such findings that meaningful work is an essentially subjective notion

and that it is therefore not the kind of good whose distribution can be justly allocated. Meaningful work means different things to different people, and the value of intrinsic and extrinsic rewards also varies between agents. Against this, we will present evidence to argue that a preference for extrinsic goods of effectiveness over intrinsic goods of excellence is an example of disordered desire and that a substantive notion of intrinsically meaningful work is defensible. Part four argues that meaningful work can be regarded as an ethical claim within a wider understanding of goods, in which given preferences do not have the final word. A virtue perspective which allows us to criticize the desirability of particular types of work is necessary for answering the subjectivist objection to the just distribution of meaningful work. This conception of meaningful work has significant implications for the direction of future research.

1. MACINTYRE'S ARISTOTELIAN ACCOUNT OF THE VIRTUES AND MEANINGFUL WORK

“Work” has a range of possible meanings. For Aristotelians, it can equate to Aristotle’s *ergon*. If so, work should be inherently meaningful because it is characteristically human activity in which human beings can find fulfillment and completion. Conversely, it can mean activity involving exertion (de Grazia 1962: 39) or labour. In this sense, Aristotle would have excluded it from the range of activities that are good for human beings (Knight 2007: 5–36). Since Aristotle’s time, understandings of work have changed, in Ciulla’s memorable phrase, from being a curse, to becoming a calling, and then a vocation (Ciulla 2000: 52; Knight 2007: 66–67). And yet, as Ciulla attests, work of all three types remains with us.

As one of the principal domains in which experience is organized and self-understanding emerges (Gini 2001, Michaelson 2008), work is critical for agents’ ongoing “search for meaning” (Frankl 1959). The question of whether and how work that is also paid employment can be experienced as meaningful in itself is debated within both social psychology and ethics, but largely in isolation from each other. Enquiries in social psychology are thereby denied the resources that might be provided by ethical enquiries for the critique of its findings, whilst ethics, as Aristotelians have long argued (Anscombe 1958), is hopelessly abstract if uninformed by psychology.

To illustrate this contention, assume for a moment that we encounter Sayer’s (2009) ethical arguments to the conclusion that academics should take out their own refuse rather than leaving this to university cleaners. Sayer argues that taking out rubbish is less meaningful to someone uninvolved in its production than someone who knows its content (perhaps early drafts of an article for *Business Ethics Quarterly*) and the reasons for its allocation to the bin. Should we be convinced by this argument or should we rather pay attention to Isaksen’s (2000) finding that workplace relationships may make the experience of monotonous work meaningful? Should we retain the services of cleaners, reduce their number as a result of removing the refuse-collecting element of their role, or re-design their work so that their involvement in waste collection extends to training their academic colleagues in the principles of recycling, monitoring their sorting of refuse, and being responsible

for the development of university policy on recycling, re-use, energy consumption and associated elements of sustainability?

We cannot give an adequate answer to such questions without understanding both what is disclosed of meaningful work by the enquiries of social psychology and what is disclosed by ethical considerations that have been advanced about the design and availability of work. This article draws upon the results of both empirical and ethical enquiries in order that each may learn from and inform the other.

We begin with Alasdair MacIntyre's Aristotelian account of the development of virtues in the context of what he famously and stipulatively defines as goal-orientated social practices, and of the organizational institutions that both sustain and threaten such practices (MacIntyre 2007: 187–96; Knight 2011; Beadle and Moore 2011). In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre follows Aristotle in identifying two different kinds of good internal to productive activities. "There is first of all the excellence of the products, both the excellence in performance by [for example, portrait] painters and that of each portrait itself" (MacIntyre 2007: 189). A productive practice has standards of excellence in performance, the actualization of which by individual painters produces excellent portraits. MacIntyre contends that the actualization of these standards also actualizes something else: "the good of a certain kind of life. . . . [T]he painter's living out of a greater or lesser part of his or her life *as a painter* . . . is the second kind of good internal to painting" (MacIntyre 2007, 190; emphasis in original). MacIntyre therefore posits an intimate relationship between the work we do and what becomes available to desire, a relationship which goes some way towards explaining the wide diversity in attributions of meaning found in studies of meaningful work such as Isaksen's (2000) above.

The achievement of the goods internal to such skilled practices as portraiture requires the exercise of the virtues. According to MacIntyre, the tasks that require most from us turn out to be those that transform our desires. These tasks acquire both meaning and valence because emulating standards of excellence requires exercising, and thereby cultivating, such virtues as wisdom, justice, courage, temperance and constancy. MacIntyre here identifies the mechanism through which orientations to work are related in particular ways to the experience of various outcomes. The progressive nature of the relationship between the complexity and challenge of work tasks and our orientation towards them is illustrated by Csikszentmihályi and Csikszentmihályi:

a beginning piano player will see learning the keys corresponding to the various notes as challenging, and might feel flow simply by running the scales on the keyboard. As soon as a player feels confident with the scales, however, new challenges need to be found or he or she will get bored. (Csikszentmihályi and Csikszentmihályi 1988: 261)

From an Aristotelian perspective, identifying and learning how to meet such challenges requires the exercise of the virtues, whose cultivation is constitutive of the human good. In later work, MacIntyre calls these virtues "goods of excellence" (MacIntyre 1988: 32). MacIntyre's substantive argument, much abbreviated here, is that the virtues simply are those distinctive human excellences that constitute our good.

“Meaning” in work supervenes upon the active and intentional pursuit of goods internal to practices; our development as practitioners involves the acquisition of levels of discernment in our work and its objects that were formerly unavailable to us. Cultivation of the goods of excellence requires engagement in a rank-ordering of goods that enables us to give resources (of time, attention, effort, and so on) in just proportion to the claims made upon us. We thus become accustomed to goal-orientated, teleological reasoning. In this way, MacIntyre’s account of the goods of shared practices and personal excellence provides us with grounds for arguing for teleological understandings of work, and for understanding why such appeals will be effective only amongst those whose practice presupposes a privileging of internal goods and the cultivation of virtues. In this context an explanation for the satisfaction attested by Isaksen’s (2000) workers is that their experience of work has not extended to tasks whose products and practitioners are subject to genuine distinctions between the excellent, the good, the satisfactory and the failed. Denied the opportunity to engage in practice-based work by the monotony of routine tasks, the desire for meaning may be sublimated into a desire for relationships which, whilst occurring at work, are neither required by nor developed through the work itself. The availability and distribution of work requiring exercise of the virtues is therefore an ethical concern for a virtue-informed notion of the good. At the level of practice the conclusion that “This is not the sort of work that you should do” is intelligible in a chain of reasoning from premises about the human good and a description of work in terms of that conception, without reference to the subjective preferences of the agent to whom the argument is addressed.

At the level of theory whilst contractarian, utilitarian and deontological cases have been made for the institutional provision of meaningful work (Schwartz 1982, Bowie 1998), theorists arguing from similar premises have made the case against (Nozick 1974, Arneson 1987, Maitland 1989). They argue that no ethical problem (or at least no problem for which there is a justifiable solution) arises in the case of workers satisfied by monotonous work, whose rights have not been violated by unfair treatment or denial of choice between employers, or who value extrinsic outcomes of routine work more highly than participation in intrinsically rewarding practices. Whilst the purpose of this article is not to engage in these arguments, it is important to note that legitimate arguments in favour and against the provision of meaningful work are available in the literatures of contractarianism, deontology and utilitarianism, if only to contrast this with virtue-informed substantive accounts of meaningful work, all of which make arguments in its favour (e.g., Walsh 1994, Breen 2007, Sayer 2009). As Hsieh’s (2008) review of the literature on justice in production acknowledges, even Rawls (1999) admits that Aristotelian premises are essential to making an ethical case for the provision of meaningful work. On a virtue-informed account of meaningful work, the failure of employees to make more of their abilities provides justification for examining the opportunities for extending the range and complexity of tasks and the scope for workers to exercise judgment.

The cleaner in the university may be satisfied with her work, as might her employer, but should she be? The distinction between given and informed preferences enables us to critique first-person descriptions of the meaning of work. Indeed we

may find that these descriptions reflect adaptive and untutored preferences. But how are such preferences to be transformed so that meaningful work becomes an object of desire and a prompt for action?

MacIntyre's account of practices and virtues extends beyond social psychology into an account of institutional sociology that addresses the desire for meaningful work and the structuring of opportunities for such work. If one cause of the frustration of meaningful work is inadequate desire for such work then the other is the distribution of work by employment institutions. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre juxtaposes practices to institutions in a way that is redolent of Marx's juxtaposition of labour to capital. Where his juxtaposition exceeds that of Marx is in including not only corporate capital but also other managerial and bureaucratic structures, including those of the state, under the heading of institutions. Whereas Marx allowed the concept of alienation to be eclipsed by that of exploitation, MacIntyre maintains his critical focus on those power structures that deny workers control over their own activity (MacIntyre 1998, Nojonen 2011). Where such self-determination is lacking, workers are causally denied the possibility of cultivating goods of personal excellence. To adapt the terminology of Mikael Karlsson (2002), we may say that work ceases to be what an agent *does* and becomes what a subject *suffers*.

In MacIntyre's conceptual scheme, whereas practices pursue "internal goods," the institutions that administer these practices characteristically pursue goods that are "external" to practices, such as "money, power and status" (MacIntyre 2007: 194). So, whereas practices have standards of excellence in pursuit of which practitioners might actualize some particular kind of good life for themselves as human beings, domination of practices by institutions subjects practitioners to the position of means to the institutional accumulation of capital or power.

Within institutions that organize practices, roles typically require the pursuit of some combination of goods internal and external to those practices. To the extent that roles are directed to the pursuit of internal goods, virtues and the intrinsic orientations they foster are required. To the extent that roles are directed to external goods, the possibility of developing the virtues is diminished. MacIntyre's proposition is not that practices can do without either organizational institutions or the external goods with which institutions are characteristically concerned. To the contrary, his account of goods external to practices makes clear that such goods are necessary for the pursuit of internal goods. Rather, he proposes that there is an ineradicable tension between the pursuit of external and internal goods, so that the virtues must always be exercised in resisting "the corrupting power of institutions" (MacIntyre 2007: 194).

As in Aristotle's account of goods external to individual human beings, MacIntyre holds that money, power and status are instrumental "goods of effectiveness" (MacIntyre 1988: 32). They are good because they are necessary conditions or means for the actualization of goods internal to practices and goods of excellence. However, they can corrupt practices, and therefore individuals, insofar as they are pursued as ends in themselves.

MacIntyre's sociological rendering of Aristotelianism's traditional account of human functioning clearly opposes it to any celebration of humans' domination of

one another. On MacIntyre's account, our natural capacity for independent practical reasoning can only be fulfilled if we learn from others "as an apprentice learns" (MacIntyre 2007: 258). To learn as an apprentice learns is to subject one's untutored desires and actions to shared standards of reasoning, to subject one's untutored reasoning to those who have already learned, to internalize the goods internal to a practice as a goal and reason for one's own actions, to emulate shared standards, to master those standards in one's own reasoning and actions, and then perhaps to exceed, improve and advance those standards. In this way, one acquires the moral virtues, thereby actualizing one's own good as a practitioner and, in part, as a human being. Human beings need the virtues if they are to become independent practical reasoners themselves, to help others to become such, and to produce an inclusive version of what Aristotle called "political community."

To summarize, MacIntyre's sociological claim is that there are goods internal to those activities that he identifies as practices, and that individuals can be socialized and educated into pursuit of those goods in a way that informs their sense of meaningfulness. Not only skills, maxims and rules but also practical judgment and moral character are learned through work that actualizes the goods of a certain kind of life. This approach to virtuous dispositions and participation in practices integrates what are otherwise treated as separate empirical and ethical claims.

In this section we have shown how MacIntyre's teleological account of practices regards work as meaningful to the extent that both products and practitioners are judged by internal standards of excellence. To what extent do empirical accounts of meaningful work report such an association between agents' own understandings of meaningful work and the presence of such features of practice-based work as complexity, skill and autonomy? To answer this question requires us to review the variety of empirical projects that have investigated the relationship between job design and meaningful work.

2. JOB DESIGN AND MEANINGFUL WORK

Does MacIntyre's account of practices in which the pursuit of goods of excellence is intrinsically meaningful receive support from empirical enquiries into the relationship between work tasks and the experience of meaningfulness? This section will attempt to answer this question by drawing on research conducted by social psychologists into the dimensions and affective implications of job design. These have identified a range of job characteristics that may be experienced as intrinsically meaningful.

Herzberg's (1957) research with engineers and accountants is often taken as the starting point for work concerning features of jobs that provide intrinsic motivation. Having asked his subjects to describe incidents in their working lives that had markedly improved or diminished their job satisfaction, he identified two conceptually distinct sets of factors. First, factors intrinsic to work were shown to trigger satisfaction. These "motivators" comprised achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, and advancement. Secondly, factors extrinsic to work could not improve job satisfaction but could prompt dissatisfaction. Labeled "hygiene" factors,

these comprised company policy and administration, supervisory-technical issues, salary, interpersonal relations, and working conditions. Pratt and Ashforth's (2003) distinction between meaningfulness "in" and "at" work echoes this distinction. In follow-up studies, Herzberg, together with co-researchers and a small industry of management consultants, argued that job satisfaction and performance outcomes could only be enhanced in the longer term through enriching the content of jobs (e.g., Paul, Robertson, and Herzberg 1969) by:

- increasing the range and difficulty of tasks
- creating complete units of work
- improving feedback, encouragement and communication.

Such redesigning of jobs endows them with practice-like features. Increasing the range and difficulty of tasks causes increased practical reasoning. Creating complete units of work enables workers to learn to judge better, and improving feedback enables them to judge the degree of success they have achieved in their work. Each of these elements seems to mimic features in MacIntyre's understanding of the virtuous pursuit of goods internal to practices. Work can begin to approximate to what MacIntyre intends by "a practice" when workers' power of practical reasoning and action frees itself from managerial design to enable them to identify and pursue their own standards of excellence. For the university cleaners in our previous example, enriched work would require the creation of a clear line of sight from the discrete tasks of collecting, sorting and recycling refuse to the policies and procedures which govern their local instantiation and the principles of sustainable waste management against which to judge both the conduct of the task and its mode of institutionalization. Work would be organized in accordance with workers' own understanding of its purpose. At this point, practical reasoning begins to become political (Knight 2007: 150–51, 176–86), as workers—cleaners, as well as lecturers—are brought into decision-making and negotiation about the purpose and organization of the university.

Whilst the damaging effects of routine work on workers' mental and physical well-being had already been noted (e.g., Kornhauser 1964, Seeman 1967), systematic research characterizing intrinsically meaningful work did not spread until publication of Hackman and Oldham's paper (1975). This proposed a "Job Characteristics Inventory" itemizing characteristics against which any job could be measured for its effect on "critical psychological states" of experienced meaningfulness, experienced responsibility for work outcomes, and knowledge of how to determine work outcomes. The intrinsically rewarding characteristics of work comprised:

- skill variety: the number of skills used by workers
- task identity: the extent to which workers perform a job from start to finish
- task significance: the extent of the impact of the work
- autonomy: the degree of decision-making residing with the worker
- feedback: the extent of communicated job recognition.

Regarded as "one of the most influential theories ever presented in the field of organizational psychology" (Behson, Eddy, and Lorenzet 2000: 170), within twelve years a meta-analysis identified 200 empirical tests of its internal conceptual linkages using

a wide range of methods (Fried and Ferris 1987: 291, 295–97). Positive correlations between such enriched job characteristics and work outcomes—job satisfaction, growth satisfaction, internal work motivation, job involvement, and propensity to remain—have been consistently observed, although there is some variation in their magnitude (Fried and Ferris 1987: 298–305). Such findings have been reinforced by studies of workers whose jobs lack these very features. In particular Kohn and Schooler's (1983) widely cited twenty-year longitudinal study demonstrated both a significant negative effect on the intellectual flexibility of workers whose jobs lack substantive complexity and a significant negative effect on the psychological function of workers whose jobs lacked self-direction.

Work experienced as intrinsically rewarding has also been shown to share similar features across a variety of contexts. Those experiencing such “flow” report total absorption in tasks (Czikszentmihályi 1977, 1990, 1997, 2003; Gardner, Czikszentmihályi, and Damon 2001), enjoyment, concentration or immersion in tasks, including a distorted experience of time and levels of intrinsic motivation that eclipse considerations of external reward (Demerouti 2006: 267; Bakker 2005: 27). Demerouti (2006) has confirmed a significant association between Hackman and Oldham's job characteristics and the experience of flow but this association was strong only amongst those who exhibited conscientiousness, a finding that concurs with much work demonstrating the criticality of the worker's orientation to work to their experience of work. In MacIntyre's terms, workers experiencing flow appear to be those conscientiously directed towards the achievement of goods internal to practices. This is not the only empirical enquiry to have found an association between workers' own characteristics and the experience of meaningful work (see below). The dependence of the meaningfulness of work on agents' perceptions has featured strongly in objections to arguments for the just distribution of meaningful work and it is to these objections that we now turn.

3. SOME OBJECTIONS TO MEANINGFUL WORK

Ethical debate on meaningful work has been preoccupied with whether it is an appropriate object of distributive justice and, if so, how it should be weighed against other distributive goods. These debates began in the early 1980s with Schwartz's case for legislation, “so that all persons' jobs foster instead of stunt their autonomous development” (Schwartz 1982: 646). This was countered by Arneson's utilitarian account (1987), which argued, first, that meaningful work was conceptually indistinct in ways that rendered attempts to make it the object of just distribution unsustainable, and, secondly, that the attempt to distribute work fairly would undermine goals including productive efficiency and full employment. Arneson's first objection (the concept's subject-dependence) deploys seventeen different categories of meaningful goods that derive from work (Arneson 1987: 528–29) and includes examples of both “internal” and “external” goods. For Arneson, the experiences and evaluations of meaningful work vary so widely between agents that no distributive mechanism can find application to them. We might call this the subjectivist objection. This is an important argument for as Bowie's Kantian case for meaningful work shows,

only the discrimination of meaningful tasks can provide guidance for the design of meaningful jobs (Bowie 1998: 1083). Arneson's objection must therefore be overcome if the concept of "meaningful work" is to be of more than academic interest. But does the experience of meaningful work vary so widely?

The answer is undoubtedly that it does. Whilst the relationship between job characteristics and work outcomes has proven robust, there is no consistent relationship between the specified job characteristics and experienced meaningfulness (Fried and Ferris 1987: 306; Johns, Xie, and Fang 1992: 672). Agents' experience of work as either "meaningful" or "meaningless" is not simply a function of the characteristics of tasks (Behson, Eddy, and Lorenzet 2000). Research has continued to identify individual-level variables that moderate the impact of job characteristics on experienced meaningfulness to explain why some supposedly meaningful jobs are not experienced as such by workers (Fried and Ferris 1987: 308; Behson, Eddy, and Lorenzet 2000: 313) whereas supposedly meaningless jobs, including cleaning (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001), catering (Isaksen 2000) and dirty work (Kreiner, Ashforth, and Sluss 2006), can be experienced as meaningful.

As we have already seen however a teleological account does not regard the state of given preferences to be decisive in determining ethical claims and posits that adaptive preferences and untutored desires should not provide guidance for practical reasoning. We therefore need to consider evidence for a relationship between orientation towards extrinsic goods (the goods of effectiveness) and the experience of meaningful work.

Two research traditions are evident here. The first, Self-Determination Theory (hereafter SDT), is a development from humanist psychology (Maslow 1954, Rogers 1961, Fromm 1955). The second builds upon concepts initially developed by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton (1985), who classified three distinctive meaning-attributions for the experience of work: job, career, and calling.

SDT argues that work is meaningful insofar as it fulfills inherent psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence (Schmuck, Kasser, and Ryan 2000: 227) but that desire for work that fulfills such needs is vulnerable to external sources of approval which may come to act as surrogates (Deci and Ryan 1985).

Intrinsic and extrinsic orientations appear to begin in childhood. Kasser and Kasser (2001) and Rindfleisch, Burroughs, and Denton (1997) have found strong associations between extrinsic orientation and antecedent family disruption. If children do not experience either the connectedness they need or the autonomy they must develop, their insecurity in both domains encourages a compensatory focus on extrinsic goals. Where frequent family disruption attends childhood, a disposition towards immediate rather than deferred gratification is likely to be maintained into adulthood (Rindfleisch, Burroughs, and Denton 1997: 314). This mirrors MacIntyre's (1999: 68–98) argument that good parenting is required for children to develop into independent practical reasoners capable of distinguishing between their needs and their desires, and of putting both in question.

In establishing the behavioural and attitudinal associations of intrinsic and extrinsic goal orientations, SDT research, using the Aspiration Index (Kasser and Ryan 1993) alongside other methods, such as dream analysis (Kasser and Kasser 2001),

has generated consistent results in the United States and Russia (Ryan et al. 1999), Singapore (Kau, Kwon, Juana, and Wirtz 2000) and Germany (Schmuck, Kasser, and Ryan 2000). Studies have shown the extrinsically oriented as exhibiting damaging attitudes and behaviours, including:

- high-risk behaviour in teenagers, such as alcohol and drug use, smoking, sexual promiscuity (Williams, Cox, Hedberg, and Deci 2000)
- psychological disorders, including depression and anxiety (Kasser and Ryan 1993; Schmuck, Kasser, and Ryan 2000: 225; Cohen and Cohen 1996)
- low levels of subjective well-being (Ryan et al. 1999) and life satisfaction (Ryan and Dziurawiec 2001)
- failed personal relationships (Kasser and Kasser 2001: 696)
- stereotyping, objectifying and manipulating others (Khanna and Kasser 2001).

SDT research provides strong support for the notion that extrinsic orientation is best understood as a set of adaptive preferences which disorders desires away from inherent human goods of relationship, autonomy and competence towards such surrogates as power, attractiveness and financial success. Empirical evidence for this includes Malka and Chatman's finding that income levels have a greater impact on the well-being and job satisfaction of extrinsically oriented former MBA students than on the intrinsically motivated, for whom there was even a modest negative relation between income and subjective well-being (Malka and Chatman 2003: 742–45), a finding consistent with studies demonstrating positive relationships between materialism and extrinsic work orientation (Ryan and Dziurawiec 2001).

SDT has not been alone in exploring such antecedents of the experience of meaningful work. The “job, career, calling” research into work orientation developed since Bellah and colleagues' original statement (1985) provides a second body of evidence about the critical role of work orientation in understanding meaningful work. Those with a “job” orientation regard work as a means to an end, valuable only insofar as it enables economic needs and desires to be met (Wrzesniewski 2003), whilst career orientation values work for the promise of increased pay, promotion and prestige. By contrast, those orientated towards work as a calling value it “for the fulfillment that doing the work brings” (Wrzesniewski 2003: 303).

Empirical work into job, career and calling orientations has used a variety of methods. Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin and Schwartz (1997) found that the meaningfulness of jobs varies with the orientation of job-holders. Only those with calling orientations seek to spend more time at work and gain enjoyment and satisfaction from it, whilst also reporting higher levels of job and life satisfaction overall, a result consistent with that of SDT research. Those with “calling” orientations have also been found to engage in “job crafting” through which they attempt to improve their experience of tasks and engage in extra-role behaviour that improves their experience of work, such as cleaners attempting to improve their work through increasing interaction with clients (Wrzesniewski and Dutton 2001, Wrzesniewski 2003: 305–07).

However, both Hall and Chandler (2005) and Pratt, Pradies, and Lepisto (forthcoming) argue that distinctions should be drawn between calling and similar constructs.

Subsequent empirical work supports the need for a more nuanced account of the calling orientation. Bunderson and Thompson's survey and interview research with American zookeepers suggests a distinction between those who craft their work, whatever it happens to be, to generate meaning (whom we may term "callers"), and others whose calling is to a specific occupation ("called"). The zookeepers overwhelmingly reported the latter orientation. In twenty-one of twenty-three in-depth interviews, the zookeeper "reflected a belief that zookeeping was one's calling, one's niche, what one was meant to do, or part of what one has always been" (Bunderson and Thompson 2009: 36). For the called, individual responsibility was "not to decide but to *discover* and dutifully embrace" their role (Bunderson and Thompson 2009: 51, emphasis added).

If the bond between me and my work is mine to forge based on personal passion or perceived fulfillment, it is also mine to break. But if the bond between me and my work is forged by destiny and duty, it becomes truly binding and, if I respond with diligence and sacrifice, truly ennobling. (Bunderson and Thompson 2009: 51)

Bunderson and Thompson's results demonstrate high perceived meaningfulness of the role of zookeeper, strong occupational and moral identification, a willingness to make sacrifices, and a belief "that one's employing organization also has a moral duty related to the work" (Bunderson and Thompson 2009: 52), a finding echoed in work on circus (Beadle and Könyöt 2006). Dutton, Roberts, and Bednar (2010) argue that such workers may view employers with "vigilance and suspicion" (Bunderson and Thompson 2009: 52), echoing MacIntyre's argument for the inevitable tension between the pursuit of goods internal to practices and the pursuit of external goods by institutions.

This association of highly meaningful work with sacrifice is not unfamiliar. Frankl (1959), for example, regards suffering as one of three domains in which we have the opportunity for the experience of meaning. Recent research into the self-understandings of the leaders of non-profit organizations by Dempsey and Sanders draws notably similar conclusions about the extent of sacrifice required by those who feel called. Dempsey and Sanders (2010: 447) argue that certain occupations (e.g., social entrepreneurship) are unintelligible as a category without an animating conception of meaningful work. Though no study comparing responses to these scales has yet been conducted, it would appear that "job" and "career" orientations map on to both SDT's understanding of extrinsic orientation and MacIntyre's notion of the goods of effectiveness, whereas the "calling" orientation corresponds to SDT's intrinsic orientation and MacIntyre's goods of excellence (MacIntyre 1988). In MacIntyre's terms, the SDT and work orientation research have demonstrated a relationship between desire and adaptive preferences and the characteristics of work regarded as meaningful.

Recent empirical work by Grant provides evidence of a stronger kind for the dependence of work orientation on antecedent factors. Focusing on Hackman and Oldham's "task significance" characteristic (Grant 2007: 394), three separate studies provide evidence that the magnitude, frequency and scope of pro-social job

characteristics are positively correlated with affective commitment to beneficiaries (Grant 2008: 29). In other words we learn to value doing good for others by doing good for others (Grant 2007: 401–03). Therefore, Grant suggests that conventional questions about altruism and self-interest at work be replaced by the question:

When and under what conditions do employees care about others? (Grant 2007: 406; emphasis in original).

The relationship between work orientation and work meaningfulness is two-way, participation in practice-type occupations can change our understanding of the meanings available from work and the meanings with which we invest work contribute to our orientation towards it. Empirical research, contra Arneson, therefore provides us with grounds for identifying as intrinsically meaningful work which requires the exercise of the virtues if we are to move towards excellence in the achievement of its internal goods; and such work has the potential to transform our relationship to such goods and to our desires for their achievement.

None of this is to suggest that the production of meaningful work should take precedence over larger conceptions of the common good that have inspired Care's (1984) notion of "service to others" in the guidance of individuals' career choice and Muirhead's (2004: 151) "social contribution" of work amongst others. Indeed, MacIntyre maintains that no quality is to be accounted as a virtue unless it enables "three distinct kinds of good: those internal to practices, those which are the goods of an individual life and those which are the goods of community" (MacIntyre 1994: 284). However if meaningful work has a determinate nature, then the distribution of work should be subject to a conception of distributive justice.

Meaningful work requires both an appropriate design of work tasks within roles and that workers take the achievement of the goods of their practice to be constitutive of their own good. Virtues, as distinct from skills, require particular directedness towards goods and, once achieved, virtuous participation in practices is an essential component of leading a good, meaningful life. But, as we have seen, the experience of meaningful work is frustrated both by inappropriate ordering of the goods we desire and by the maldistribution of such work.

How then can meaningful work be identified and pursued? Contemporary Aristotelians have argued for the just distribution of meaningful work through the reform of the distribution of tasks between workers. Walsh for example accepts from Arneson that without a robust definition, "meaningful work" will be of phenomenological rather than ethical interest (Walsh 1994: 238). He therefore provides a non-subjectivist distinction that distinguishes meaningful work according to whether the worker's thoughts can impact on the way she work and the goals of her activity (Walsh 1994: 243). His aim is to "place work, and in particular meaningful work, back into the centre of political discourse" (Walsh 1994: 234) as an object of distributive justice.

Sayer (2009: 5–6) draws on other contemporary Aristotelians, in particular Gombert's (2007) discussion of "contributive justice" and Murphy's (1993) critique of the division of labour between those engaged in managerial conception and managed

execution. Sayer notes that the case against a redistribution of meaningful work is “defended on the grounds of efficiency or differences in workers’ aptitudes” (Sayer 2009: 2) but that this contravenes Murphy’s sound distinction between a division of tasks within a given process and a division of tasks allocated to different workers (Sayer 2009: 2), a conflation which job redesign can unpack. Sayer’s argument extends beyond Walsh’s analysis to include both the practical example of redistributing refuse-collecting tasks in universities and sociological and psychological studies evincing the effects of the division of labour on class, identity and cognitive capabilities. He deploys this evidence to make a case that workers should engage in a variety of tasks involving both conception and execution, requiring different levels of skill, complexity of mental processing and forming connections to intelligible larger projects (Sayer 2009: 5–6). He argues that considerations of well-being and contributive justice should override those of efficiency and feasibility, but fails to offer arguments for this or to counter Arneson’s objections (Sayer 2009: 12).

Contemporary Aristotelians need to engage with empirical research on work orientation if they are to counter Arneson’s “subjectivity” objection to the redistribution of work tasks. They have also been unable to decisively counter the antithetical distributive claims of rival moral-ethical traditions, whether liberal welfarism (Arneson 1987) or libertarianism (Nozick 1974, Maitland 1989). How then to move forward?

4. HOW SHOULD WE ENQUIRE INTO VIRTUE AND MEANINGFUL WORK?

A substantive conception of human goods in which the exercise of the virtues is understood as being essential to the realization of human excellence requires the distribution of work to be understood as a pressing ethical concern. Empirical research into meaningful work may provide guidance regarding the likely effects of different allocations of workplace tasks and decision-making authority but it provides little or no guidance as to why and how work should be redistributed. To encourage intrinsically meaningful work that involves exercising the virtues in creating excellent products or services requires tasks to be redistributed or even added (as with the university cleaners in our example). Meaningful work is not only a particular good for the individuals who possess it but, if the foregoing argument is sound, comprises a good whose just distribution should be an object of common concern. As much as meaningful work comes to be seen as essential to the common good so those whose work involves participation in practices “invite[s] deliberations concerning comprehensive questions about the good” (Muirhead 2004: 167).

Secondly, overcoming the subject-dependence objection to such reallocation requires an account of intentionality in which the exercise of the virtues itself transforms desires so that meaningfulness becomes a property of work that should be desired, as it appears to be for those currently expressing a “calling” orientation to work. Additionally, we need to understand the relation between orientation and action if we are to understand how to pursue the right types of good. Knowing that relatedness is a good that one ought to pursue is not the same as knowing how to achieve the types of relationships that one needs. Grant’s research (2007, 2008)

usefully begins to address these questions by showing that the development of relationships with clients impacts upon workers' understanding and valuation of their work, suggesting a dynamic at home within MacIntyre's conceptual scheme.

Thirdly, we need to enquire into practical examples of job redesign, such as those once achieved under the auspices of socio-technical systems theory, if we are to make good the claim that work redesign can enhance the experienced meaningfulness of work. Whilst the cleaners at Sayer's hypothetical university no longer empty academics' refuse, enhancing the meaningfulness of the cleaners' role would require it to be enriched in ways that enable workers to achieve goods internal to the practice of waste management. If Grant's findings are replicated, we might also experience the happy side-effect of cleaners and academic staff regarding one another as colleagues.

Finally, given the importance for meaningfulness of control over action, two kinds of meaning are available in contemporary organizations: those deriving from the work of the practice, the other from the work of the institution (Beadle and Moore 2011). One source of meaning is that of the control by a worker over her own productive activity; the other is that of the control by a manager over the productive actions of others. Meaning can derive from either, but empirical studies into "meaningful work" have conflated two distinct types of task in production: that of producing, and that of organizing production. Another kind of research question might therefore be asked on the bases of MacIntyre's conceptual scheme. To ask managers whether they derive a sense of fulfillment from dominating others is to invite dissimulation, but research demonstrating that meaning can be derived from the acquisition and use of money, status and power (in the job and career modes) should be extended to consider the relationship between the occupation of managerial roles and the expression of different orientations to meaningfulness.

Such a project would provide part of a wider phenomenology of meaningful work, informed by a sociological imagination. To test our contentions on the relationship between understandings of meaningful work and participation in practices, research should be undertaken contrasting managerial and practice-based institutions to investigate whether managerial structure, ownership and worker autonomy (to name just three candidates) are associated with different understandings and evaluations of meaningful work. Such research would also help us to answer practical questions, including those of what we need to do to distribute meaningful work justly, how the claim to meaningful work can become effective in workplaces, and how we develop the types of workplaces in which virtues are cultivated and people flourish.

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