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Corresponding Author	Family Name	Moore
	Particle	
	Given Name	Geoff
	Suffix	
	Division	
	Organization/University	Durham University
	Address	Durham, UK
	Email	geoff.moore@durham.ac.uk
Abstract	<p>This chapter draws on the work of the moral philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre to present a virtue ethics perspective on humanizing business. It begins by setting out the core elements of the relevant aspects of MacIntyre's work as they apply firstly to human flourishing in general. It then considers the locations in which such flourishing might occur, in particular focusing on MacIntyre's notions of 'practices', and the wider networks of giving and receiving which individuals as human beings are part of. The organizational implications of this approach, in which organizations are understood as practice-institution combinations, is then explored. Understanding organizations in this way helps to see why organizations in general, and business organizations in particular, may frustrate human flourishing through an overwhelming pursuit of what are called 'external goods'. But it also helps in seeing how the pursuit of two other kinds of goods — 'internal' and 'common' — together with the virtues required for their realization, can lead to human flourishing. A way of thinking of this in practical terms is through what is often referred to as 'meaningful work', and the chapter concludes by describing and considering the implications of such work for both individuals and business organizations.</p>	
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Chapter 3

A MacIntyrean Virtue Ethics Perspective on Humanizing Business

Geoff Moore

Introduction

Alasdair MacIntyre has been one of the most prolific and influential moral philosophers of the twentieth and early twenty first Centuries, and his work can be characterised as focusing on the promotion and application of a Neo-Aristotelian and Thomistic¹ ethic of virtue in contemporary society. His work is read and applied across a wide range of disciplines (see Beadle and Moore [forthcoming](#)) and, indeed, there is a multi-disciplinary Society² which is inspired by and seeks to promote his ideas. Perhaps surprisingly, given that he is suspicious of modernity in general and the neo-liberal capitalist system in particular, his work has also been widely cited in business ethics (Ferrero and Sison 2014), and is the subject of at least one book which, in line with MacIntyre's own concerns for philosophy to connect with those he has referred to as "everyday plain persons" (1992, 3–8), might be described as 'MacIntyre for Managers' (Moore 2017). There is, in other words, a body of both conceptual and empirical studies much of which seeks to apply MacIntyre's work positively in an attempt to 'humanize business'. It is, therefore, entirely appropriate that this volume should contain a chapter which outlines the way in which MacIntyre's work has been applied to organizations of all types including business organizations, and the way in which business might be (re)humanized as a result.

This chapter begins by setting out the core elements of the relevant aspects of MacIntyre's work as they apply firstly to human flourishing in general. It then considers the locations in which such flourishing might occur, in particular focusing on MacIntyre's notions of 'practices', and the wider networks of giving and receiving

¹ 'Thomistic' is used as a shorthand for Thomas Aquinas, a medieval theologian.

² The International Society for MacIntyrean Enquiry, <https://www.macintyreanenquiry.org/>

G. Moore (✉)

Durham University, Durham, UK

e-mail: geoff.moore@durham.ac.uk

which individuals as human beings are part of. The focus then shifts to the organizational implications of this approach in which organizations are understood as practice-institution combinations. Understanding organizations in this way helps to see why organizations in general, and business organizations in particular, may frustrate human flourishing through an overwhelming pursuit of what are called ‘external goods’. But it also helps in seeing how the pursuit of two other kinds of goods—‘internal’ and ‘common’—together with the virtues required for their realization, can lead to human flourishing. A way of thinking of this in practical terms is through what is often referred to as ‘meaningful work’, and the chapter concludes by describing and considering the implications of such work for both individuals and business organizations.

MacIntyre and Human Flourishing

As noted in the Introduction, MacIntyre is a proponent of Aristotle, and as such his understanding of human flourishing is that it has something to do with human beings as having and realising some good purpose or function in their lives. For Aristotle the term for this essential purpose or function was *eudaimonia*, which MacIntyre suggests might be translated, “blessedness, happiness, prosperity. It is the state of being well and doing well, of a man’s being well-favoured himself and in relation to the divine” (2007, 148). These ideas of having an essential nature, purpose or function, and of arriving at some kind of final state or condition as outlined in the preceding quotation, link to the concept of a ‘final end’. As MacIntyre says, “... on Aristotle’s view, human agents, as participants in the form of life that is distinctively human, have a final end ... they can only be understood, they can only understand themselves teleologically” (2016, 227). This is to say that human flourishing consists in having a purpose (*telos*) in life, which implies both a final end, and (since, as MacIntyre acknowledges, this is easier to define by what it is *not* than what it is—see 2016, 229–31) a number of more proximate ends. And these ends will be achieved through various projects and in various practices that an individual engages in through their lives. In other words, this could be expressed as follows—that an individual engages in a number of significant activities, projects and practices through their life each of which has its own *telos* and which, in combination and in the ideal, lead to the individual’s achievement of *eudaimonia*. And this way of formulating a human life and human flourishing leads to the first of a number of ‘definitions’ of virtues which MacIntyre offers:

“The virtues are precisely those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual to achieve *eudaimonia* and the lack of which will frustrate his movement toward that *telos*.” (2007, 148)

There is, moreover, within this definition, the notion of ‘movement toward’ some end, and this links to another important aspect of MacIntyre’s approach. This is that every individual could be described as being engaged in a *narrative quest*. The *quest*

element implies that individuals are always searching, trying to discover what their purpose(s) are in life, and seeking to achieve those purposes as part of achieving *eudaimonia*. MacIntyre describes this as follows:

“The good life for man is the life spent in seeking for 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.” (2007, 219)

While this might seem to be somewhat circular, it starts from the premise that individuals do have some, if only partial, understanding of what a good life for them might be. And through the significant activities, projects and practices in which they engage, they discover what more and what else the good life for them might be. Implicit in this is the idea that a human being is a “story-telling animal” (MacIntyre 2007, 216), in other words that individuals make sense of their lives through their individual and inter-locking communal narratives—and hence the *narrative* element of the narrative quest. This then leads MacIntyre to another ‘definition’ of the virtues:

“The virtues therefore are to be understood as those dispositions which will ... sustain us in the relevant kind of quest for the good, by enabling us to overcome the harms, dangers, temptations and distractions which we encounter, and which will furnish us with increasing self-knowledge and increasing knowledge of the good.” (2007, 219)

The inclusion of ‘inter-locking communal narratives’ above leads on to a further point—that these ideas are very far from an individualist conception of human beings. MacIntyre notes many obligations that individuals have to family, community, profession and nation, and argues that “these constitute the given of my life, my moral starting point” (2007, 220). Associated with this communal sense of the narrative of an individual’s life, another aspect of the virtues is that they enable individuals to ‘fit into’ the various communities of which they are a part. Indeed, it has been argued that virtue ethics, “begins with the community as the ethical base rather than individuals existing in isolation. Within a community, people occupy recognised roles, and these roles in turn include ethical obligations. To fulfil such roles well, people need to develop virtues within themselves” (Horvath 1995, 505).

What this also implies is that there is a link between an individual’s *telos* and the communal sense of *telos* of their community. One way of speaking of this is in terms of the common good or, as MacIntyre prefers, common goods. Common goods³ are goods which “are only to be enjoyed and achieved ... by individuals qua members of various groups or qua participants in various activities” (MacIntyre 2016, 168–9). Thus, taking the example of workplaces (which will be returned to in much greater detail below): “The common goods of those at work together are achieved in producing goods and services that contribute to the life of the community and in becoming excellent at producing them” (ibid., 170).

This, then, provides us with the core concepts of MacIntyre’s Neo-Aristotelian approach to human flourishing, comprising ends or purpose (*telos*), a final end

³Common goods can be contrasted with the economist’s notion of public goods which are goods generally provided by the state and enjoyed by individuals *qua* individuals.

(*eudaimonia*), a narrative quest towards this state in conjunction with others in community, and the pursuit and realisation of common goods (although there will be more to say about two other kinds of goods—internal and external—below), all enabled by the possession and exercise of the virtues. With these core concepts in place, we are now in a position to enquire about the particular locations in which such flourishing may occur.

Practices, Internal Goods and Networks of Giving and Receiving

In speaking above of activities and projects related to an individual's *telos*, the word 'practice' was also used. But within MacIntyre's conceptual framework this is both a central feature, and is given a specific meaning:

"By a 'practice' I am going to mean 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 ..." (2007, 187)

MacIntyre argues that this definition of a practice provides for a wide range of activities to fall within its scope: "arts, sciences, games, politics in the Aristotelian sense, the making and sustaining of family life, all fall under the concept" (2007, 187–8), and he gives particular examples of practices—football, chess, architecture, farming, physics, chemistry, biology, the work of historians, painting and music (ibid: 187). Indeed, while not everything is a practice (see Moore 2017, 142–6), it could be argued that individuals spend most of their lives operating within various practices.

The definition above also helps to reinforce the cooperative and communal nature of human flourishing while extending it by referring to the pursuit of excellence, and by introducing the idea of internal goods. In line with the definition above, MacIntyre later expanded on internal goods specifically in relation to what he called "productive crafts" (which might be considered to be similar to business activities), as follows:

"The aim internal to such productive crafts, when they are in good order, is never only to catch fish, or to produce beef or milk, or to build houses. It is to do so in a manner consonant with the excellences of the craft, so that there is not only a good product, but the crafts-person is perfected through and in her or his activity." (1994, 284)

Internal goods, then, consist of the excellence of the product or service which is the output of the practice, together with the 'perfection'—which might alternatively be described as the flourishing in that particular context—of the practitioners. This extends the core concepts of human flourishing described above both by introducing practices as the common location in which such flourishing can occur, and by the addition of internal goods as those which should be pursued for their own sake because of the contribution to human flourishing which they make. Internal goods,

together with common goods, might then be described as proximate goods which contribute to the achievement of an individual's *telos*. And, in line with previous instances, this leads MacIntyre to a further 'definition' of the virtues:

"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." (2007, 191)

Having said all this, and having emphasised the centrality of practices, it is necessary to extend the locations within which human flourishing occurs. Beyond the concept of practices developed in *After Virtue*, MacIntyre considered wider networks of "relationships of giving and receiving" in his book *Dependent Rational Animals* (1999, 99). Here he focused on the dependence and vulnerability that also characterise human life, not only at particular periods such as infancy and old age but also more generally. In order to flourish, individuals need support in and through such periods, and this support is provided within the broader networks of giving and receiving of which individuals are a part. As will probably be apparent, this links to the community context which has already been discussed above:

"It is then the characteristic human condition to find ourselves occupying some position, and usually a series of positions over time, within some set of ongoing institutionalized relationships, relationships of family and household, of school or apprenticeship into some practice, of local community, and of the larger society ... Insofar as they are relationships of ... giving and receiving ... they are those relationships without which I and others could not become able to achieve and be sustained in achieving our goods. They are constitutive means to the end of our flourishing." (MacIntyre 1999, 102).

Thus, in addition to practices, it is these wider networks of giving and receiving—and the individual's location within and engagement with them—which provides an important location for human flourishing. There is an obvious relationship here between these networks of giving and receiving and the achievement of particular common goods, and the common good in general. In addition, however, Bernacchio, in commenting on *Dependent Rational Animals*, has also noted that the benefits of such networks might "better enable [practitioners] to achieve the internal goods" (2018, 381) of practices. There is therefore an important inter-relationship between practices and these wider networks, and indeed Bernacchio (2018) demonstrates, by drawing on an empirical example in the apparel industry, the way in which such networks can operate in both organizational and inter-organizational contexts, although he notes that:

"... cooperation in this context has much more to do with coping with vulnerability related to unforeseen contingencies than achieving the specific excellence characteristic of the production process, illustrating the way in which reasons for action within networks of giving and receiving extend beyond the internal goods of practices, providing a further rationale for the practice of the virtues within and between organizations. Often, the basis of cooperation is expressed in terms of participants' mutual concern for the wellbeing of other members of their network." (2018, 387)

We have, therefore, established two locations in which human flourishing may occur: practices, and broader networks of giving and receiving. And in both cases,

we have begun to see the organizational implications of this. Hence, it is time now to consider the organizational context for human flourishing in more detail.

Organizations and Human Flourishing

By referring to various specific practices, productive crafts and workplaces, as above, it is clear that MacIntyre himself recognises the organizational applications of the conceptual framework he provides. It has, however, been left to others (see Moore and Beadle 2006; Moore 2017, for example) to work this out in detail. Central to this has been another key feature of MacIntyre's framework—his conceptualisation of institutions. As with practices, MacIntyre defines institutions in a particular way which is somewhat different from both its common usage, and its usage in the academic field of organization studies. In the latter, institutions are understood to be at the supra-organizational level, providing the 'rules of the game' by which organizations and individuals have to operate (see Moore and Grandy 2017 for a discussion). For MacIntyre, however, institutions (see 2007, 194) are concerned with external goods such as money, power, status and, perhaps most generically, success, in contrast with the excellence associated with practices (see Moore 2012). But MacIntyre also asserts that there is an essential relationship between practices and institutions: they form "a single causal order" (2007, 194), such that neither can survive without the other. But that leads to an in-built tension because institutions pursue (indeed, have to pursue) external goods, which are always sources of competition between institutions. And this makes the practice "vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution" (ibid., 194), and so vulnerable to corruption.

It is important to note at this point that external goods are, nonetheless, *goods*. We need them and, within limits perhaps guided by the virtues of justice and generosity, they are appropriate "objects of human desire" (MacIntyre 2007, 196). In developing this and the intimate relationship between internal and external goods, this relationship has been characterised as "the essential but complex circularity between internal goods and external goods" (Moore 2012, 380, emphasis removed), where one leads to the other and *vice-versa*, and so on. That said, it is also the case that while internal goods are, as noted, such as to be pursued for their own sake, external goods should be pursued not for their own sake but for the sake of the other goods—internal and common—to which they lead.

The key point from all of this, however, is that organizations generically can be characterised as *practice-institution combinations* (Moore and Beadle, 2006). And this way of characterising them points to two important implications. First, and positively, since organizations contain practices,⁴ there is the opportunity for practitioners, through the possession and exercise of virtues and the pursuit of excellence

⁴As noted above, many though by no means all activities can be characterised as a practice.

in achieving the internal goods of product or service, to ‘perfect’ themselves. In
 other words, work in organizations can contribute to human flourishing, as well as
 contributing to internal and common goods which further enable other individuals’
 and the community’s flourishing. And this is as true in business organizations as in
 any other kind of organization.

Furthermore, this way of characterising organizations also allows for the location
 of management as a secondary, domain-relative practice—secondary because the
 primary practice is that at the core of the practice-institution combination such as
 architecture or farming, and domain-relative because management is always the
 management of some specific domain or practice, and never just management in the
 abstract (Beabout 2012). Moreover, this implies that managers, even with their
 institutional focus, are engaged in the practice of making and sustaining the institu-
 tion while also nurturing the practice at its core (see Moore 2008), and as such
 managers *qua* managers, can also pursue internal goods including their own ‘per-
 fection’ or flourishing.

The second implication of this way of characterising organizations, however, is
 rather more problematic. The institutional part of organizations needs, as noted, to
 achieve external goods—it, and the practice at its core, cannot survive without
 these. But should this become the focus, so that the pursuit of external goods comes
 to dominate, then the organization will no longer be fostering the internal goods that
 lead to human flourishing. Indeed, MacIntyre has commented more broadly on this,
 concerned that if external goods came to dominate a society, even the *idea* of the
 virtues might disappear (2007, 196).

It is probably apparent that business organizations, particularly but by no means
 exclusively those that are shareholder-owned and subject to the constraints of the
 financial markets, potentially have a significant problem here. In pursuing, and in
 some cases being forced to pursue, external goods, potentially to the detriment of
 the practice at the core and the pursuit of its internal goods and the way in which
 these can contribute to the common good, it is quite possible that this not only
 detracts from the pursuit of human flourishing, but actually works against it. Indeed,
 in some circumstances, organizations can be locations where violence is committed
 against practitioners (Varman and Al-Amoudi 2016, for example). In other words,
 under conditions where external goods dominate, human flourishing can be signifi-
 cantly undermined.

If that is so, can we then return to the positive implication of MacIntyre’s concep-
 tual framework and formulate an answer to the question, ‘What would it mean to
 provide work for both practitioners and managers that enables rather than under-
 mines human flourishing?’ It is to this that we now turn.

268 **Meaningful Work**

269 The concept of meaningful work is entirely consistent with all that has been said to
 270 this point about human flourishing in organizations, and indeed connections between
 271 meaningful work and MacIntyre's conceptual framework have been made explicitly
 272 (see Beadle and Knight 2012). Clearly, whatever it is that individuals work at is
 273 potentially a particularly important practice in their lives, providing meaning and
 274 fitting easily with the ideas of being on a narrative quest and pursuing goods and
 275 ends. But obviously this will be realised only if the work itself is meaningful.
 276 Monotonous and dispiriting work or, as above, work in which violence is done to
 277 the practitioner, would not achieve this, and would lead to meaninglessness rather
 278 than meaningfulness.

279 Meaningful work is often thought of as having two dimensions: the objective and
 280 the subjective (see Yeoman 2014, 244–49). Objectively, the work must be recogniz-
 281 able to others as being worthwhile. This links back to the earlier ideas of the internal
 282 goods of practices (the product or service and the 'perfection' of the practitioners in
 283 the process), making a positive contribution to the common good. Subjectively, the
 284 individual who carries out the work should find it meaningful to them, and again
 285 this links to the earlier ideas of seeking the excellence of the product or service, and
 286 of the individual finding that their own 'perfection' or human flourishing is being
 287 advanced through the work they do; it is an important part of their narrative quest.

288 Of course, neither of these two dimensions of meaningful work is necessarily
 289 easy to assess. While for some occupations—traditionally the 'vocations' such as
 290 doctors or teachers—it may be relatively straightforward to attribute meaningful-
 291 ness both objectively and subjectively, for many others this will be less so. This,
 292 however, takes us back to the communal nature of individual narrative quests, and
 293 the importance of the community in determining the common goods which enable
 294 its flourishing. It will be the community which, through its deliberative structures,
 295 will help to determine the objective value of different occupations. This, of course,
 296 places a considerable responsibility on communities and society more generally, in
 297 conjunction with organizations, to seek to agree which occupations do and, just as
 298 important, which do not provide meaningful work. Similarly, as individuals possess
 299 and exercise the virtues at work, they will come to realise "what more and what
 300 else" (MacIntyre 2007, 219, as above) the good life for them consists in, so that they
 301 will understand more fully their subjective good in the context of their own narrative
 302 quest. But in this task they will be helped if they have particular people to whom
 303 they can turn. As MacIntyre puts it: "when we are making choices in which much is
 304 at stake, we need to be self-aware and, that is to say, we need to see ourselves and
 305 to understand ourselves as honest, perceptive, intelligent, and insightful others see
 306 and understand us, with the objectivity that is only possible from a third person
 307 standpoint" (2016, 161).

308 As well as imposing demands upon individuals to pursue meaningful work in
 309 their own lives as a contribution to their own flourishing, this also raises a question
 310 as to whether it is incumbent on those who provide employment—managers and

organizations, and government in establishing the employment context as well as being a significant employer in its own right—to provide such meaningful work. On this understanding, meaningful work “comprises a good whose just distribution should be an object of common concern” (Beadle and Knight 2012, 445). While space here precludes detailed consideration of this point,⁵ it is clear that there are normative arguments, based on the approach to human flourishing in organizations outlined above, as to why managers and organizations *should* provide meaningful work. But there are also instrumental reasons. There is evidence of the negative effects of not providing meaningful work in relation to practitioners’ attitude, behaviour and mental health (Chalofsky 2003), and of positive effects on job performance, organizational citizenship behaviour, customer satisfaction (Michaelson et al. 2014), and organizational commitment and engagement, retention, the effective management of organizational change, and hence in overall organizational performance (Cartwright and Holmes 2006). As such, there may not be so much of a trade-off between the provision of meaningful work and performance as might be thought. Meaningful work is, therefore, the means by which human flourishing in business and other organizations may be achieved.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered a Neo-Aristotelian conceptual framework provided by Alasdair MacIntyre which enables an understanding of human flourishing in general. Human flourishing is achieved through seeking ends or purpose (*telos*); having a final end (*eudaimonia*); engaging in a narrative quest towards this state in conjunction with others in community; the pursuit and realisation of internal and common goods particularly through engagement in practices and in wider networks of giving and receiving; and all of this is enabled by the possession and exercise of the virtues. External goods have a role to play, but if their pursuit were to become dominant this would likely frustrate the achievement of human flourishing.

The chapter then considered the application of this framework to organizations in general, as practice-institution combinations, enabling them to be viewed potentially as locations for human flourishing. This is as true of business organizations as any other, although here the potential for external goods to dominate and frustrate human flourishing may be particularly problematic.

Finally, it was argued that the realization of human flourishing in organizations in general and business organizations in particular would likely be best achieved by the pursuit of meaningful work. This imposes a demanding requirement on individuals, managers and organizations, but if realized it would lead to the (re)humanizing of business and other organizations.

⁵For a fuller discussion of meaningful work in general, see Moore (2017, 85-88, 91-94).

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Geoff Moore is Professor of Business Ethics at Durham University Business School, UK. He is the author of *Virtue at Work. Ethics for Individuals, Managers and Organizations* (OUP, 2017). His work appears in *Organization Studies*, *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *Journal of Management Inquiry*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Business Ethics: a European Review* among others. He is on the editorial boards of *Business Ethics Quarterly*, *Journal of Business Ethics*, and *Business Ethics: a European Review*.