Practice, Reason, and the Good: Human Nature and MacIntyrean Business Ethics

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MacIntyrean business ethics research has focused on the concept of a practice, drawn primarily from *After Virtue*. MacIntyre later emphasized the need to adopt an account of human nature to provide a better grounding for his earlier social teleology. We consider three implications of incorporating the neo-Aristotelian and Thomistic account of human nature outlined in MacIntyre's later works for MacIntyrean business ethics research: First, this account enables the MacIntyrean perspective to better ground its focus on practices as a key moral requirement for the organization of work. Second, it provides a better basis for distinguishing productive practices in good order from other business activities lacking the characteristics of a practice. Third, a theory incorporating an account of human nature, particularly MacIntyre's notion of natural law, is better able to address broader questions in business ethics that are not directly concerned with the structure of work.

Key Words: nature, practical rationality, virtue, MacIntyre, natural law, practice

> It is only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature, that practices, traditions, and the like are able to function as they do.
> MacIntyre (2007a: x–xi)

MacIntyre's (2007a) practice-institution framework (Beadle, 2017; Beadle & Moore, 2006; Moore, 2005; 2017; Sinnicks, 2019; Sison & Fontrodona, 2012) has made a significant impact on the field of business ethics. Scholars have argued that a range of activities conducted within business contexts are MacIntyrean practices, including, but not limited to, accounting (West, 2018), finance (Rocchi, Ferrero, & Beadle, 2021), human resource management (Wilcox 2012), banking (Robson, 2015), pharmaceutical manufacturing (Fernando & Moore, 2015; Moore, 2012), as well as management itself (Beabout, 2012; Tsoukas, 2018).

This stream of research has largely built upon the account of practices outlined in *After Virtue* (*AV*) (MacIntyre, 2007a: 163, 187, originally published in 1981), where MacIntyre also rejected Aristotle's "metaphysical biology," that is, his account of

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human nature, offering in its place a "socially teleological account," focused on practices, narratives, and traditions. Yet, in his later work, MacIntyre (1999; 2007a; 2016) has repeatedly emphasized the need to go beyond this earlier focus on social teleology. As he says in the "Prologue" to the third edition of *AV* (published in 2007), "[M]y attempt to provide an account of the human good purely in social terms, in terms of practices, traditions, and the narrative unity of human lives, was bound to be inadequate until I had provided it with a metaphysical grounding" (2007a: xi). Accordingly, in his later work, MacIntyre (e.g., 1999: 63–65; 2016: 24–31; see Voorhoeve, 2009: 119) often presents his approach as a form of neo-Aristotelian naturalism, where ethical norms and virtues are viewed as appropriate to and/or perfecting human nature (see Toner, 2008).

In this article, we take these claims of the "later" MacIntyre seriously, considering the implications for the practice-institution framework of incorporating an account of human beings' "specific nature" (2007a: xi; see also 1994b; 1999; 2000; 2002a; 2002b; 2007b; 2016). Though other research has noted the importance of notions of human nature (e.g., Sison & Fontrodona, 2012: 240–41; Moore, 2017: 84, 78) for MacIntyrean business ethics, we offer an extended reflection on this topic. For MacIntyre, human nature involves a "range of human powers," including "powers made possible by the possession of language," especially the "powers of practically and theoretically rational agents," as well as "those distinctively human abilities … that enable us to associate cooperatively with others in ways not open to nonhuman animals" (2016: 28). These powers are directed toward species-specific goods under the guidance of practical rationality as a fundamental human power (see MacIntyre, 2000: 107; 2002b: 628). MacIntyre never provides a complete mapping of human nature, nor do we aim to do this. Instead, we argue that the integration of aspects of MacIntyre's account of human nature into the practice-institution framework has three important implications for MacIntyrean business ethics.

First, it provides a basis for responding to critics who question or reject the MacIntyrean focus on productive practices within organizations. Edwin Hartman (2013: 168), for example, states, "It is odd that MacIntyre focuses so much on practices in organizations and so little on other areas in which virtue matters," suggesting that there is no reason to make practices the central focus within business ethics research. Other critics have argued that there are no moral grounds for demanding that work be meaningful—for example, that it be structured as a MacIntyrean practice, since workers have widely varying preferences concerning the nature and purpose of work (Beadle & Knight, 2012: 440–45; see also Arneson, 1987). Drawing upon the developmental account of human nature outlined in *Dependent Rational Animals* (*DRA*) (MacIntyre, 1999: 68–98; see Beadle & Knight, 2012: 441), we outline a response to these objections, arguing that there is a moral basis for demanding that work be structured as a practice because productive practices play a central role in actualizing and sustaining the capacity for practical rationality, the ability to step back from existing desires, consider various options, and act for valid reasons (see MacIntyre, 1999: ch. 6). In this sense, they are especially suitable for actualizing human nature. This provides a further grounding (see MacIntyre, 2007a: xi) for the focus on practices within MacIntyrean business ethics.

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Second, we argue that a consideration of the role of productive practices in actualizing and sustaining participants' capacity for practical rationality also provides an additional basis for identifying practices "in good order" (MacIntyre, 1994a: 284). In this regard, Beadle (2017: 62), emphasizing the importance of properly distinguishing productive practices from other business activities that lack the characteristics of a practice, notes the need to focus on the "histories of conflicts, frustrations, and innovation through which … standards of achievement" emerge and develop within practices. In the light of the account of human development outlined in *DRA* (MacIntyre, 1999: 68–98; see Beadle & Knight, 2012: 441; see also Bernacchio, 2018), participation in practices should also promote the ongoing realization of practitioners' abilities as practical reasoners, increasing their capacity to imagine alternative futures, separate themselves from their occurrent desires, and evaluate their reasons for action in light of their own flourishing and the common good. Accordingly, we argue that these distinct dimensions are also important to consider when seeking to determine whether some business activity is a productive practice in good order.

Third, explicitly incorporating MacIntyre's account of human nature into the practice-institution framework, especially his account of the natural law (e.g., 1994b; 1999: 111; 2000; 2006a; 2006b; 2007b; 2013; 2016: 89), provides a basis for addressing a broader range of problems, especially large-scale, "grand challenges" (see George, Howard-Grenville, & Tihanyi, 2016), involving issues including, but extending beyond, conflicts between practices and institutions (see MacIntyre, 2007a: 194; Moore, 2017: 65). Focusing on the problem of climate change (see Moore, 2022), we argue that the fundamental norms of the natural law, norms that are necessary to facilitate shared deliberation, constructive debate, and mutual learning (MacIntyre, 1994b: 184; 2000: 107), provide grounds for practitioners to listen to criticisms from outside stakeholders who are not involved with their practice, even radical critics demanding that the practice be shunned and rejected (see Beadle, 2013: 683). Similarly, we argue that the species-specific goods that form the basis of MacIntyre's (2000: 107) account of the natural law and commitment to a neo-Aristotelian conception of natural goodness (2016: 25) offer a broader context for understanding the significance of work, as well as a basis for criticizing precarious work (Han, 2018) and addressing climate change.

Thus, the incorporation of an account of human nature into the MacIntyrean perspective in business ethics, far from undermining, or even fundamentally altering the practice-institution framework (Moore, 2017), in fact vindicates it, enriching our understanding of why a focus on practices is important, while providing more insights into the characteristics of productive practices in good order. It also expands the scope of MacIntyrean business ethics research, offering a broader basis for addressing pressing ethical issues in contemporary business contexts. Accordingly, we first explain MacIntyre's social teleology and his subsequent introduction of an account of human nature. Next, we show how this account provides a further rationale for focusing on practices within business ethics research and additional criteria for identifying practices in good order. Finally, we argue that MacIntyre's

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account of natural law provides a way of addressing ethical challenges in business beyond the conflict between practices and institutions.

MACINTYRE'S SOCIAL TEOLOGY

MacIntyre's (2007a: 53) far-reaching critique of modern moral theories in *AV* hinges on his claims about the structure of premodern moral theories, which, he says, involves "a threefold scheme in which human-nature-as-it-happens-to-be (human nature in its untutored state) is initially discrepant and discordant with the precepts of ethics and needs to be transformed by the instruction of practical reason and experience into human-nature-as-it-could-be-if-it-realized-its-*telos*." MacIntyre argues that modern moral philosophy, as a result of its rejection of the notion of a *telos* or final end, is an effort to develop an ethical theory using only two aspects of the threefold scheme, that is, untutored human nature and a set of moral norms. Yet, without the notion of a *telos*, there is no rationale for the introduction of moral norms "[s]ince the whole point of ethics … is to enable man to pass from his present state to his true end" (MacIntyre, 2007a: 55). These claims provide the basis for MacIntyre's return to Aristotelianism, a return that is quite revisionary.

In *AV*, MacIntyre (2007a: 48) rejects Aristotle's metaphysical account of human beings' "specific nature," leading him to adopt an alternative, social teleology, providing a different conception of a *telos* capable of grounding an account of virtues. As he says, "In *After Virtue* I had attempted to give an account of the place of the virtues, understood as Aristotle had understood them, within social practices, the lives of individuals and the lives of communities, while making that account independent of what I called Aristotle's 'metaphysical biology'" (MacIntyre, 1999: x). Accordingly, MacIntyre (2007a: 197) argues that a "socially teleological account can support Aristotle's general account of the virtues as well as does his own biologically teleological account." This social teleology is comprised of a threefold scheme of practices, narratives, and traditions (see MacIntyre, 2007a: xi). Beadle and Knight (2012: 437) describe this as "MacIntyre's sociological rendering of Aristotelianism's traditional account of human function." As such, this social teleology involves an effort to understand the human *telos* in social rather than metaphysical terms. We now highlight the influence of this account of social teleology in business ethics.

Social Teleology in Business Ethics

Following upon the early work of Geoff Moore (2002; 2005; Moore & Beadle, 2006) and Ron Beadle (2008; Beadle & Moore, 2006), a number of business ethicists have drawn upon MacIntyre's (2007a) account of social teleology in an effort to defend a virtue-based approach to business ethics (see Beadle, 2017). The vast majority of this work has focused on MacIntyre's notion of a practice, which he defines as "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

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to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended" (2007a: 187). MacIntyre illustrates his definition with examples like chess, architecture, and farming. Within business ethics, the focus has been on "productive practices," that is, practices that produce goods and services for consumers (MacIntyre, 1994a: 284–85; Sinnicks, 2019). Accordingly, a rich body of research has sought to identify a range of productive practices, in some cases arguing that familiar professions, roles, or activities are, in fact, MacIntyrean practices (e.g., Armstrong 2006; Banks, 2012; Richardson, 2012; Rocchi, Ferrero, & Beadle, 2021; Salter, 2008; West, 2018; 2025).

This research, involving a substantial empirical element, cannot be easily summarized (see Moore, 2017 for an overview). However, it typically follows MacIntyre (2007a: 191) in arguing that because some activity is a practice, there is an intrinsic role for the virtues in facilitating and sustaining the activity in question. For example, Robson (2015: S124) argues that "old banking" was traditionally conducted as a type of practice sustained by "the cardinal Aristotelian virtues." But, as a result of "external pressures created by institutional targets and market competition," banking gradually lost its focus on the virtues and internal goods that had traditionally defined the practice (Robson, 2015: S125; see also Moore, 2017: 145). Yet, this example also raises an important question concerning the adequacy of MacIntyre's (2007a) social teleology. Why should we favor the internal goods of practices over external goods such as profitability (see Moore, 2017: 59; see also Whelan, 2025)? From the point of view of someone participating in a traditional form of banking practice, the answer may seem obvious, but considered from an external perspective, it may be equally plausible that the benefits of enhanced efficiency and resulting economic growth demand that banking give up its traditional focus on internal goods (see Miller, 1994: 259).

More broadly, there is no way to justify a commitment to a practice from the perspective of the practice in question against external critics who claim that other goals are more important. Instead, it is necessary to ground the practice by showing its importance to a broader range of values within human life. It is this issue that stands behind MacIntyre's claim that his social teleology needs a "metaphysical grounding" (2007a: xi). This is not to say that MacIntyreans have failed to recognize the importance of human nature as a basis for claims about productive practices. Sison and Fontrodona (2012: 240–41), for example, argue that as a result of the "social nature of human beings, there is also a need for participatory work" in firms. Likewise, Moore (2017: 84, 78) argues that "in the ideal, we should find that our involvement in our work practice develops us as people, enabling us to realize our true *telos*," which he identifies as "human flourishing" and the realization of human nature (see also Hall, 2011: 124). However, this research does not explain how and why participation in productive practices—as opposed to other modes of working—contributes directly to the realization of human nature. Similarly, research in MacIntyrean business ethics does not explain how an appeal to human nature provides a further grounding for the moral requirement to structure work as a practice (see Beadle & Knight, 2012: 440–41). That is, it does not explain why participation in practices is particularly conducive to the realization of human nature. MacIntyre

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addresses these issues in his later work, especially DRA (1999), to which we now turn.

MACINTYRE ON HUMAN NATURE

In a new prologue added to the third edition of *AV*, MacIntyre (2007a: xi) argues that "practices, traditions, and the like" have an important role to play in human life "only because human beings have an end towards which they are directed by reason of their specific nature," indicating that he had not employed the concept of human nature in the text's account of social teleology. He states further that he had "presupposed" something like Aquinas's (see 2017: *ST* I, Art. 5) account of "the concept of good" when developing his social teleology (MacIntyre, 2007a: xi), suggesting that his argument was incomplete without such an account of the human good. Moreover, MacIntyre states that without providing his social teleology with an additional "metaphysical grounding," it was "bound to be inadequate," indicating both that this grounding was absent from *AV* (MacIntyre, 2007a: xi) and that his social teleology must be supplemented with an account of human nature. As such, our question concerns the implications for MacIntyrean business ethics of the addition of an account of human nature as found in MacIntyre's later work (e.g., 1994b; 1999; 2000; 2004; 2016).

Accordingly, MacIntyre (2016: 25; see also 1999: 64; 2002b: 624) comes to endorse a notion of "natural goodness" somewhat similar to that of neo-Aristotelians such as Hursthouse (1999) and Foot (2001) saying:

> Just as wolves, dolphins, gorillas, foxes, and rabbits flourish or fail to flourish, so, on this rival account of "good" … it is too with human animals. About human individuals and groups we may say, just as we do of members of other species, that it is or would be good or bad if they are, do, or have such and such, meaning by this that such and such conduces to their flourishing or failing to flourish qua human beings.

From this perspective, "good," is used primarily as an attributive adjective (Geach, 1956) that qualifies individuals in terms of the extent to which they realize their species-specific potential as human beings. Thus, being a good thief does not make one a good human being. MacIntyre (2002b: 628) also emphasizes the central place of "practical rationality" in his account of human nature, saying "Since human beings are by their specific nature reason-givers, then to act against reason or without considering adequately what reasons there are for acting, when one is capable of acting rationally, will be to suffer from a natural defect."

Accordingly, in *DRA*, MacIntyre (1999: 53–54, 81) introduces an account of practical rationality as a distinctive human capacity, which explains why practices have such an important role to play within human life, thereby giving his social teleology a metaphysical grounding (see MacIntyre, 2007a: xi). While rational capacities are intimately related to our animal nature, practical rationality is nevertheless distinct from the cognitive abilities of mere animals because it involves "the power to pass judgment on our judgments" (1999: 54), that is, an ability for reflexive evaluation of one's reasons for action. The development and exercise of this

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capacity, therefore, involves an "ability to stand back from one's initial judgments about how one should act and to evaluate them by a variety of standards" and to move from "wanting my desire for x to be satisfied, just because it is my desire, to desiring x qua good and wanting my desire for x to be satisfied, just because and insofar as it is a desire for what it is good and best for me to desire" (MacIntyre, 1999: 54, 86–87).

Practices play a crucial role in human development by providing inter-subjectively valid conceptions of goals and standards of excellence (MacIntyre, 2007a: 187) that are sufficiently distinct from individuals' occurrent desires and preferences, providing a context wherein participants can evaluate their reasons for action in the light of the standards of the practice. Thus, an aspiring basketball player, confronted by videos of Steph Curry, may learn that their preferred shooting technique is inadequate. Likewise, a wrestler may learn that their desires for fast food need to change if they are to make weight. These judgments are intelligible in the context of the relevant practices but are also reflective of facts about what practical rationality requires given reasons that are salient in a particular situation (see MacIntyre, 1999: 93). But without participation in practices, where one subordinates one's desires to socially instituted standards of excellence, it is impossible to sufficiently separate oneself from one's desires in order to evaluate one's reasons for action.

It might be thought that participation in practices is unnecessary since human beings typically possess second-order desires, desires whose objects are first-order desires to do or possess something, a view famously elaborated by Frankfurt (1971). Yet, the distinction between first and second-order desires does not capture the crucial distinction MacIntyre (1999: 86–87) makes between wanting one's desire to be satisfied because it is one's desire and wanting one's desire to be satisfied because it is a desire for a genuine good. According to Frankfurt (1971: 16) when a person identifies *decisively* with one of her first-order desires, she does so without appealing to an evaluation or judgment concerning the goodness of the first-order desire. As MacIntyre (2014: 813) says, "What Frankfurt's account has no place for is the possibility of my having good reasons, and my recognizing that I have good reasons, for caring about what I do not as yet care about and for no longer caring about what I now care about, and this quite independently of my as yet being motivated to transform my caring." Thus, MacIntyre (1999: 86–87) argues that it is primarily through participation in practices that individuals gain the capacity to make the distinction between occurrent desires and goods that underwrite valid reasons for action.

A number of features of practices make them conducive to this aim. First, practices involve goods that are publicly acknowledged, requiring participants to disregard their incompatible desires—as well as self-serving fantasies (see MacIntyre, 2004: 16)—in order to embrace the ends of the practice, as these are commonly understood by participants. Thus, MacIntyre (1988: 141), speaking of a hockey player with an opportunity to pass to a teammate better positioned to score a crucial goal, says, "[W]ere such a player not to pass he or she must have … falsely denied that passing was for their good *qua* hockey player." Similarly, professionals learn what it means to master a craft (see Moore, 2005), by first changing their habits and ideals in accordance with publicly acknowledged purpose of the profession,

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enabling "novices" to separate themselves from their occurrent desires, in pursuit of this ideal.

Second, practices involve rules or standards of excellence that are also socially acknowledged. Thus, when one is playing a sport like baseball, engaging in a craft like carpentry, or participating in an academic debate about biology, there are definite answers to the question of what one ought to do, or what would be wrong to say, which invoke those standards. Failing to tag up, for example, when a shallow fly ball is hit with less than two outs would ordinarily be a bad play, just as denying that human beings evolved from other primates would be simply mistaken. As such, in the context of practices, norms cannot be seen as mere expressions of desire (see MacIntyre, 1999: 87–92; 2016: 74). Instead, novices must adapt their desires to existing norms, further enabling participants to distinguish between what they happen to want and what they have good reason to pursue (see MacIntyre, 1990: 127).

Finally, because the internal goods of practices are relatively abstract and not fully operationalized (MacIntyre, 2007a: 189), they provide a context in which participants are able to overcome slavish desires for affirmation from persons in authority (see MacIntyre, 1999: 84). Novices of all sorts, doctors-in-training for example, may have to challenge existing rules, ideals, and authority figures to better attain the ends of their practice, that is, the health of their patient. For this reason, obedience to authority, although important, is never enough to ensure that one is sufficiently practically rational. Instead, practitioners must consider the extent to which norms and conceptions of goals within their practice sufficiently realize its internal goods, challenging existing standards when they do not.

It should also be noted that it is not the case that individuals merely need practices initially to become "independent practical reasoners" (MacIntyre, 1999: 107)—that is, in childhood—and then subsequently can disregard them when they have become fully rational. MacIntyre (1999: 91) notes that children need to engage in a variety of practices if they are to develop as they must. However, adults also need their claims and assumptions to be put into question by others in order to avoid rationalizations and escape "distorting biases" that are "obstacles to practical rationality" (MacIntyre, 2016: 191; see also 1999: 136–38; 2004: 31). As such, practices play a crucial role not only in developing but also in sustaining practical rationality since none of us are perfectly virtuous, and to that extent, "we continue to the end of our lives to need others to sustain us in our practical reasoning," relying on "expert coworkers … to make us aware both of our particular mistakes in this or that practical activity and of the sources of those mistakes in our failures in respect of virtues and skills" (MacIntyre, 1999: 96–97; see also 2016: 237).

Likewise, it is important to acknowledge that the virtues play an essential role in realizing the capacity for practical rationality within practices. As MacIntyre (1999: 97) argues "without developing some range of intellectual and moral virtues we cannot first achieve and then continue in the exercise of practical reasoning." Accordingly, the virtues enable individuals to both recognize salient factors within specific contexts (MacIntyre, 1999: 92–93)—involving, for example, an ability to distinguish between instances where harsh criticism of an apprentice is likely to lead to discouragement from other instances where it will lead to more resolve and

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attention to detail—and to reason well about the implications of relevant goods. A kind person, for example, recognizes when a coworker's need calls for a caring word or an offer to help, and reasons well about how she should deliver pointed criticism of poor performance without being unkind. In this way, the virtues perfect the capacity for practical rationality, contributing to the realization of human nature. We now explain the implications of this account of human nature for MacIntyrean business ethics research.

Human Nature and MacIntyrean Business Ethics

How does the incorporation of an account of human nature augment MacIntyrean business ethics? In short, it offers a means of addressing a fundamental challenge to the MacIntyrean approach—namely, the challenge of relativism—thereby providing a better grounding for a focus on practices in business ethics.

Beadle and Knight (2012) explain this challenge, noting Arneson's (1987: 528–29) criticisms of claims regarding a right to meaningful work. However, this point also relates to the conflict concerning the proper ends of banking discussed by Robson (2015). Arneson argues that workers typically pursue a wide variety of different aims through work. As such, the demand for meaningful work, where this involves a concern for experienced meaningfulness, a sense of purpose, or personal development, is nothing more than a subjective preference that is not universally shared. Beadle and Knight (2012: 433) argue that Arneson's (1987) claims represent a significant challenge to the MacIntyrean approach with its focus on practices. Reframed in these terms, this objection appeals to a form of relativism, stating that the demand for work to be structured as a MacIntyrean practice is merely one possible subjective preference among many. As such, it represents a good for individuals with this preference, but not for individuals who prefer to seek other goals from work, such as financial gain or risk-taking. Criticisms of meaningful work, and by implication a focus on practices, by Arneson and others (e.g., Miller, 1999: 9; see Roessler, 2012) are supported by more recent empirical research (e.g., Ward, 2024) that confirms the heterogeneous preferences of workers concerning meaningful work.

The response of Beadle and Knight (2012) to this challenge strongly supports the need to supplement the MacIntyrean approach with an account of human nature. Accordingly, they argue that self-determination theory (SDT), an influential psychological theory of motivation, indicates that "extrinsic orientation"—for example, preferences for external goods rather than the internal goods of practices—"is best understood as a set of adaptive preferences which disorders desires away from inherent human goods of relationship, autonomy and competence" (Beadle & Knight, 2012: 442). Here Beadle and Knight (2012: 441) appeal to SDT's triad of basic human psychological needs, including needs for autonomy, competence, and relationships (see Ryan, 1995) to argue that desires for external goods are atypical or not normal, resulting from "frequent family disruption" and other negative social influences, leading to distorted desires for objects that are not genuine human goods. However, the appeal to normal development, human goods, and distorted desires presupposes an account of human nature. Accordingly, MacIntyre (1998b: 869)

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argues that "the distinction between human beings functioning well and their functioning badly" must "be learned and understood prior to" scientific inquiry into human capacities and aims.

More broadly, a consideration of the role of practices in actualizing and sustaining the capacity for practical rationality undermines the relativistic objection, since the ability to formulate and act upon reasoned preferences presupposes the capacity for practical rationality. As such, there are grounds to disregard preferences for modes of work that undermine practices, since such modes of work are destructive of the very capacity for practical rationality that is needed to formulate reasoned preferences. It might be objected that it is possible to sustain practical rationality by participation in practices outside of work. While such a possibility cannot be dismissed, given the large amounts of time spent at work and the central place that work has in the lives of most people, it seems unlikely that the negative impact of dehumanizing work can be sufficiently counteracted in this way. Thus, an explicit consideration of the role of practices in actualizing human nature provides a more adequate grounding for the MacIntyrean approach to business ethics, enabling it to better address objections appealing to relativism. We next explain how MacIntyre's account of human nature provides further criteria for distinguishing practices in good order from other activities.

Human Nature and Productive Practices

Incorporating MacIntyre's (1999) account of human nature and moral development not only provides further grounding for the focus on practices within MacIntyrean business ethics, as we have argued above, but also offers a better means of understanding whether specific activities are practices in good order. Speaking of business contexts, where the "literature is replete with … claims" about certain activities being practices, Beadle notes that "[m]uch rests on which activities comprise practices in MacIntyre's sense" (2017: 62), emphasizing the importance of properly distinguishing practices from other activities lacking the requisite characteristics. Moore (2012: 366–67) highlights two dimensions when considering whether an organization houses a practice, namely, goodness of purpose and the prioritization of internal goods over external goods. Beadle (2017: 62) identifies four criteria for distinguishing practices from other activities, including a focus on internal goods, institutional embodiment, historical development of the practice, and its contribution to a unified life. According to Beadle, these elements must be present for a business activity to be considered a practice. Moore (2017: 63) also notes that "practices have histories." Similarly, a dynamic or diachronic perspective is already present in the final portion of MacIntyre's (2007a: 187) original definition of a practice, which states that, as a result of participation in practices "human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended."

In this section, we argue that MacIntyre's (1999: 68–98) developmental account of practical rationality in *DRA* provides a further basis for understanding the

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historical criterion for identifying practices, as noted by Beadle (2017: 62) and, thus, offers an additional basis for understanding whether some business activity is a practice "in good order" (see MacIntyre, 1994a: 284). A point of clarification should be noted. By focusing on practices that are "in good order," we are referring to practices that possess all of the necessary characteristics to ensure that they perform their function of fostering the development of practical rationality, including the inculcation of virtues. Accordingly, we treat the concept of a practice as a "functional concept." Speaking of functional concepts, MacIntyre (2007a: 58) says:

> It follows that the concept of a watch cannot be defined independently of the concept of a good watch nor the concept of a farmer independently of that of a good farmer; and that the criterion of something's being a watch and the criterion of something's being a good watch—and so also for "farmer" and for all other functional concepts—are not independent of each other.

Thus, the additional criteria that we introduce in this section, we take to be implicit within the criteria for identifying practices highlighted previously (see, e.g., Beadle, 2017; Moore, 2012: 366–67; West, 2025). These conditions also relate to, and further develop, what Rocchi and Thunder (2019: 99) call "*agential* conditions," when considering whether financial trading can be conducted virtuously (see also Rocchi, Ferrero, & Beadle, 2021) and explain what is required to ensure that the internal goods of practices are not subordinated to the external goods of institutions (see MacIntyre, 2007a: 194–95). More specifically, insofar as participation in productive practices ought to contribute to the development of practical rationality, several distinct dimensions of an activity should be considered diachronically to determine whether the activity is actually fostering participants' capacity for practical rationality over time, including: 1) the ability to separate oneself from present desires, 2) the ability to evaluate one's reasons for action, 3) the ability to imagine alternative possibilities.

We also note two integrative considerations involving the individual and communal levels, namely the ability to contextualize internal goods in terms of their impact on human flourishing and the common good.

The first diachronic dimension concerns "the ability to stand back from our desires, so as to be able to enquire rationally what the pursuit of our good here and now requires and how our desires must be directed and, if necessary, reeducated, if we are to attain it" (MacIntyre, 1999: 83). Such re-education occurs within practices, including productive practices (Sinnicks, 2019), when participants set aside "felt wants" learning that they "may have good reason to act other than" their "most urgently felt wants dictate" (MacIntyre, 1999: 69–70). An accountant, for example, may find the painstaking analysis needed to prepare an accurate financial statement or management account tedious. She may not desire to expend the extra time and effort needed to get the numbers right but her appreciation of the internal goods of accounting (see West, 2018: 28) may lead her to set aside her felt wants or present desires, such as to kill time on social media or turn to a more exciting task, to

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pursue those internal goods. Beyond cases such as this, an ability to set aside present desires is likely to be important to preserve the continuing vitality of practices over time. Especially in productive practices housed within organizations, participation typically involves the performance of various routines (Becker, 2004) that may become habitual (Kump & Scholz, 2022). When this is the case, practitioners may need to resist desires for the familiar, quotidian activities normally performed in the practice to better attain its internal goods (see Feldman, 2000; MacIntyre, 2016: 132; Tsoukas, 2018: 338).

In other cases, it may be necessary to resist biases that fuel disordered desires. Cognitive biases, such as confirmation or anchoring biases, clearly unfortunate elements of our natural endowments, may lead one to prefer one's own opinions over those of others. About this MacIntyre (2016: 192) notes, given the work of "Kahneman and Tversky, we need to be more emphatic still about our need for awareness of vulnerability to error in just those milieus in which most is at stake for the achievement of both individual and common goods, home, workplace, and family." The practical rationality that is fostered by the shared deliberation characteristic of practice-based communities is thus perfective of our nature as creatures prone to these kinds of error.

Similarly, other biases such as racism, sexism and so on, often operate unconsciously, leading to desires to irrationally exclude persons from particular practices. For a pertinent example, Elizabeth Blackwell, the first female doctor in the United States (Morantz-Sanchez, 1992: 55), faced opposition when she applied to medical school. The students at Geneva Medical College in western New York, who were asked to vote on her admission, assumed that the proposal was a joke (Markel, 2014). After attaining her degree, Blackwell not only made significant theoretical and practical contributions to medicine but also explicitly challenged the unjust, male-dominant authority structure of the practice of medicine. Accordingly, Blackwell (1902: 10, 20) says, "It is not blind imitation of men, nor thoughtless acceptance of whatever may be taught by them that is required, for this would be to endorse the widespread error that the race is men," warning her students of the "special danger" of the "blind acceptance of what is called 'authority' in medicine." As this brief example illustrates, the history of the practice of medicine demonstrates a process whereby arbitrary biases and injustices were overcome—at least to some extent—and, in doing this, it also shows how the capacity for practical rationality is progressively realized in such a process. Thus, it is not sufficient to understand whether some activity is a practice in good order merely by focusing synchronically on its features such as commitment to excellence and a good purpose (see Moore, 2012: 366), as important as these elements are, but it is also necessary to consider the activity diachronically, to understand whether the activity contributes to the development and realization of the capacity for practical rationality, by increasingly enabling participants to distance themselves from irrational desires, including those shaped by unconscious biases.

This first point relates directly to a second dimension, involving the "movement from merely having reasons to being able to evaluate our reasons as good or bad reasons and by so doing to change our reasons for acting and in consequence our

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actions" (MacIntyre, 1999: 71–72). In the context of practices, the ability to evaluate one's reasons for action is initially likely to develop through disagreement with more experienced practitioners. A resident physician, still in training, may have to correct her senior attending physician's judgment when he has misdiagnosed a patient. About this MacIntyre says:

> What each of us has to do, in order to develop our powers as independent reasoners, and so to flourish qua members of our species, is to make the transition from accepting what we are taught by those earliest teachers to making our own independent judgments about goods, judgments that we are able to justify rationally to ourselves and to others as furnishing us with good reasons for acting in this way rather than that (1999: 71).

Over time, this ability to distinguish good reasons for action from reasons that are favored by authorities remains important to ensure that the standards of excellence of a given practice continue to evolve and improve. Barring this, the practice of medicine, for example, as it is housed within specific organizations, would lose its vitality, with obedience to managers taking precedence over commitment to the internal goods of excellent medicine, just as academic practices would lose their integrity if academics acquiesced in their administrators' performance metrics (see Cox, Boaks, & Levine, 2024). Thus, an important criterion for distinguishing productive practices in good order from other activities is its potential to foster participants' abilities to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and authorities when there is reason to do so.

A third relevant aspect of the transition to becoming an independent practical reasoner, linked closely to the previous dimensions, involves the ability to imagine "alternative future possibilities" (MacIntyre, 1999: 76). MacIntyre (1999: 7) emphasizes the need to understand which "range of goods are presented by alternative futures," in order to detach ourselves from present desires. In the context of productive practices, this point relates especially to the development of new products and services, a key internal good of these practices (see MacIntyre, 2007a: 189; Moore, 2017: 57). As a number of entrepreneurship scholars have argued (Thompson & Byrne, 2022; Berglund & Dimov, 2023), the ability to imagine alternative futures plays an important role in the development of new products and services. To the extent that such products and services represent genuine benefits for customers (see MacIntyre, 2016: 170; Hirschfield, 2018: 154), they manifest the "extensions of human powers" (MacIntyre, 2007a: 193) and, thus, the realization of the capacity for practical rationality. Consider, for example, the Cummins Engine Company, where MacIntyre says "technological innovation" enabled it to better respond to customer needs (2016: 172). As such, a diachronic perspective is needed to fully understand the extent to which a specific activity is a practice in good order. This involves more than the pursuit of internal goods at a specific time—that is, the production of a beneficial product—but rather involves an ongoing process enabling participants to become independent practical reasoners by overcoming limited conceptions of the internal goods of their practice, over time, by developing new products and services that better meet

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customers' needs. However, it is also important to note that customer preferences may fail to track or even conflict with human flourishing and the common good. As such, the imagination of alternative futures is not merely about creating new products that successfully satisfy demand but rather about identifying new ways to provide goods and services that genuinely benefit customers and society more generally. Similarly, the ability to imagine an alternative future within productive practices may be limited insofar as genuine "needs … are not embodied in demand" (MacIntyre, 1977: 103, italics removed), which occurs when customers want products harmful to themselves or to society.

It should also be noted that a second type of internal good—concerning the "perfection of the practitioners engaged in the craft or practice" (Moore, 2017: 57; see also MacIntyre, 2007a: 189)—points directly to the role of practices in shaping and improving participants. The account that we have developed here, drawing upon MacIntyre's (1999) discussion of human nature in *DRA*, allows for greater clarity concerning the manner in which productive practices perfect participants: They do so by actualizing the capacity for practical rationality, a key component of human beings' species-specific good (see MacIntyre, 2002b: 628; 2016: 40).

In addition to these three diachronic dimensions of the development of practical rationality—separation from desires, evaluating reasons, and the imagination of alternative futures—an integrative perspective is also needed to understand the extent to which particular activities are productive practices in good order. Insofar as participation in practices contributes to the development and actualization of practical rationality, participants should exhibit the capacity to act for good reasons, as such, not merely as they are defined within a specific practice. Thus, participation in practices, by enabling practitioners to become independent practical reasoners, should orient participants beyond the practice to more general concerns, specifically, human flourishing and the common good.

About human flourishing, MacIntyre (1999: 66) notes, "[F]or each individual there is the question of whether it is good for her or him that the goods of this or that particular practice should have this or that place in her or his life." Thus, participation in practices should enable members to better understand how their work impacts other important practices that they participate in. For example, work as an aeronautical engineer may enable an individual to design and construct innovative new airplanes that are safer and more sustainable but a high-pressure work environment and long hours may also make it difficult to actively engage in family life and the education of children, while also preventing her from participating in community organizing (see Hayes-Mota, 2024). There may be no simple way to evaluate such tradeoffs but what is especially important is that participation in a productive practice should empower rather than stifle participants' abilities to reflect on the reasons they have to continue engaging in the practice, ultimately contributing to their narrative unity of life (MacIntyre, 2007a: 174; Pinto-Garay, Scalzo, & Lluesma, 2022). Moreover, this ability should increase over time as practitioners gain a better sense of the

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practice's impact on their flourishing, an issue that can only be fully understood from a practice-transcendent perspective,[1] namely that of a good life.

This challenge for individuals is mirrored by similar challenges at the broader societal level. MacIntyre (1999: 66) says, "[F]or every society there is the question of whether it is good for that society that the goods of this or that particular practice should have this or that place in its common life." The relationship between the common good and productive practices has been noted in previous research in terms of the notion of a "good purpose" (Moore, 2017: 70). Similarly, Sison and Fontrodona (2012: 220) emphasize the need to "explain how the common good of the firm can be integrated into the common good of the political community." Yet the focus in much research drawing upon a MacIntyrean framework has been on the role of senior managers in determining the purpose of the firm and ensuring that it aligns with the common good. As Moore (2017: 110) says "It is the role of senior managers in particular to engage in that deliberation, and to put in place appropriate structures to facilitate it" (see also Tsoukas, 2018: 336).

Without denying a role for managers in this regard, this focus on management's role in orientating productive practices toward the common good risks overlooking the extent to which a practice in good order—by actualizing the practitioner's capacity for practical rationality—should enable participants to self-consciously direct their practice to the common good. MacIntyre (2016: 131), for example, speaking about the decline of the quality of work at the BBC says, "Where previously administrators and managers had provided space and resources for those who shared in producing the programs to pursue the common ends that they had made their own and to devise the means for achieving those ends, administrators and managers were now imposing their ends and dictating the means taken by them to be appropriate," emphasizing that practitioners should not be passive recipients of management's goals. Indeed, the question of the proper place of management has been a central facet of MacIntyre's critical view of contemporary society (MacIntyre, 2007a: ch. 3; Sinnicks, 2018; West, 2025).

What should also be noted is that deliberation among practitioners concerning the goodness of purpose should move beyond generalities, such as providing "healthcare to the nation" (see Moore, 2012: 376), to consider the specific way a practice may contribute to the common good. MacIntyre (2016: 191) notes the "failure in reasoning" that occurs "when someone argues that only by doing such and such will he achieve some good … without having asked what other goods are at stake in this particular situation." As such, it is important to consider tradeoffs in the specific choices that are made by members of a practice-bearing institution to promote the common good in one particular manner rather than another. For example, car companies have recently been faced with the choice of continuing to focus on gasoline-powered cars or switching to fully electric or hybrid models. Thus, while the production of safe, reliable, and highly fuel-efficient gasoline-powered cars

[1] One may appeal to "a virtue to criticize a practice" (MacIntyre 2007a: 2000) but the virtues can only be fully understood in relation to broader consideration involving human flourishing and the common good.

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could be considered a good purpose (Moore, 2012: 376), it is necessary to consider whether the focus on more fuel-efficient automobiles delays or otherwise makes it impossible to pursue other important goods, such as fully electric vehicles. Likewise, a focus on electric vehicles, while certainly a good purpose, could be too idealistic, and, thus, not as good as the "lesser" but much more attainable goal of introducing a wide range of hybrid vehicles. MacIntyre (2016: 191) argues further that "Sound reasoning requires," an individual "to think or have thought more widely about the range of individual and common goods that it is open to him to achieve." Thus, over time participants in productive practices should gain the ability to make relevant distinctions, understand tradeoffs, and appreciate how the internal goods they provide to consumers relate to a broader "rank ordering of goods" (MacIntyre, 2016: 61).

Thus, a diachronic and integrative perspective is needed to understand whether some activity is a productive practice in good order, where participation contributes, over time, to members' growing abilities to evaluate their reasons for action, by imagining alternative futures and separating themselves from their occurrent desires; in so doing, coming to better understand the relationships between the internal goods of their practice and both the common good and their own flourishing. Table 1 provides an overview of this section; in the next section, we turn to MacIntyre's account of the natural law.

Practical Reason, Natural Law, and Grand Challenges

In addition to providing further grounding for a focus on practices and offering further clarification of the historical criterion needed to identify productive practices in good order (Beadle, 2017: 62), incorporating an account of human nature into the MacIntyrean perspective also expands its scope, enabling it to better address large-scale ethical issues, or "grand challenges" (see George et al., 2016), such as precarious work and climate change (see Moore, 2022). More specifically, MacIntyre's (1994b; 1999: 111; 2000; 2007b; 2013; 2016: 89) account of the natural law

Table 1: Additional Criteria for Identifying Productive Practices in Good Order Concerning Their Role in Actualizing the Capacity for Practical Rationality

Criteria for Identifying Productive Practices		Examples
Diachronic Dimensions of Productive Practices	Separation from Desires	Identifying and overcoming systemic biases
	Imagine Alternative Futures	Developing new products that better meet customer needs
	Evaluating Reasons for Action	Correcting a superior who issues a misguided order
Integrative Dimensions of Productive Practices	Relating Internal Goods to Human Flourishing	Evaluating trade-offs between participation in a productive practice and lost opportunities to participate more fully in other activities
	Relating Internal Goods to the Common Good	Evaluating trade-offs between internal goods of productive practice and lost opportunities to produce other goods and/or services

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provides a means of addressing these large-scale ethical issues and, more broadly, a final point concerning the role of practices and other social relationships in contributing to the realization of the capacity for practical rationality.

Theories of natural law have made some impact on business ethics (see Velasquez & Brady, 1997). However, MacIntyre's account of this notion is distinct from other prominent perspectives in that it is focused on identifying a set of fundamental norms that facilitate mutual learning and must be adhered to by individuals insofar as debate, deliberation, and rational inquiry are to be possible. Moreover, because social relationships involving rational inquiry are essential to fully realize one's capacity for practical rationality, these norms give expression to our shared human nature as dependent rational animals. As MacIntyre says, "The life that expresses our shared human nature is a life of practical inquiry and practical reasoning, and we cannot but presuppose the precepts of the natural law in asking and answering those fundamental questions through our everyday activities and practices" (2000: 109). At this point, an important clarification is needed. While theories of natural law are widely varying (see Angier, 2021), this notion is often linked to Catholic theological perspectives (e.g., Porter, 1999). However, MacIntyre's theory of natural law, like his philosophy more generally, while inevitably influenced by his theological commitments (see 1994b; 2006c), is secular[2] (see 1998a: 266). Rather than appealing to theological premises, that is, authoritative claims deriving from specific religions, MacIntyre's theory of natural law is a further elaboration of his neo-Aristotelian naturalism (see 1999: 64; 2002b: 624; 2016: 25), in conjunction with insights drawn from Aquinas.

Accordingly, for MacIntyre, the natural law involves a set of norms that serve a dual function. On one hand, the precepts of the natural law direct individuals toward the achievement of goods that realize human nature, goods of three types: "the good of our physical nature …; the goods that belong to our animal nature …; and the goods that belong to our nature as rational animals" (MacIntyre, 2000: 107). More specifically, the set of basic goods includes aims such as "health," intimate relationships, and "educating and caring for our children," as well as "the goods of knowledge… and the goods of a social life informed by the precepts of reason" (MacIntyre, 2000: 107). As such these norms give expression to human nature's fundamental capacities, involving a range of "essential and ordered inclinations," the fulfillment of which would be the "achievement of that to which human nature is inclined" since the fundamental capacities are specified by the goods that realize them (MacIntyre, 2000: 107). And though conceptualizations of the basic goods vary between cultures, MacIntyre argues that "the norms and rules of all cultures are to be understood as variously imperfect apprehensions of the natural law," that is, of the fundamental components of human nature (2007b: 152).

[2] MacIntyre (1998a: 266) describes his work as "secular" but "theistic," meaning that it involves philosophical rather than theological claims about theism, noting also that many of his claims are independent of his commitment to theism. Arguably, this is the case concerning most of his claims regarding the natural law (see MacIntyre, 2016: 231).

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On the other hand, the natural law represents a set of deontic constraints, obedience to which ensures that deliberation, debate, and shared rational inquiry do not devolve into a power struggle, where stronger parties whose threats of violence or abilities to withhold needed resources from weaker parties prevent the latter from having a genuine voice in the discussion. As such, the precepts of the natural law "are the preconditions of a kind of rational conversation in which no one need fear being victimized," involving a range of "universal and invariant requirements [that] specify the preconditions for the kind of responsiveness by one human being to others which makes it possible for each to learn from the others' questioning" (MacIntyre, 1994b: 184). These constraints are exceptionless and universal in scope, since "[t]here is no one with whom I may not find myself in the future a partner in deliberation concerned with some good or goods that we have in common" (MacIntyre, 2006b: 79), or from whom it is impossible to learn, including persons who are severely disabled (MacIntyre, 1999: 136). Accordingly, individuals learn about the precepts of the natural law by engaging in deliberation with others insofar as acceptance of their "binding authority" is a necessary condition for constructive debate about "individual and common goods" (MacIntyre, 2006a: 48). Specifically, individuals learn norms against the breaking of promises, lying, and "malicious gossip," as well as injunctions prohibiting murder, theft, and, more generally, offenses against human dignity (MacIntyre, 1999: 110; 1994b: 177; see Paár, 2020: 70), among other considerations that interfere with deliberation, practical reasoning, and mutual learning.

At this point, we should briefly consider an objection to neo-Aristotelian naturalism that is also applicable to MacIntyre's account of the natural law. John McDowell (1998: 172) argues that given "the onset of reason … the nature of the species abdicates from a previously unquestionable authority over the behavior of the individual animal." In other words, because human beings possess practical rationality, they can always question the authority of human nature. As such, we may ask: Why are the precepts of the natural law binding? For MacIntyre, the answer to this challenge is twofold, following the dual role of the natural law. First, human beings must acknowledge the authority of the natural law in practice, particularly its deontic constraints prohibiting harm, in order to engage in rational conversations with others in a way that facilitates learning (MacIntyre, 1994b: 184). Failure to do this would, thus, lead to frustration and an inability to exercise practical rationality. As such, the natural law is binding because practical inquiry and mutual learning are essential in any context of life wherein one interacts with others. Second, the natural law, according to MacIntyre, orients human beings toward species-specific goods (2000: 107) directly, in such a manner that these goods are known primarily as being good or worthy of pursuit by the agent in question. This occurs by reflection upon one's natural inclinations toward certain ends (see MacIntyre, 2000: 107). Thus, while cultural influences may distort knowledge of species-specific goods (see MacIntyre, 2007b: 152), the question of why one should pursue such species-specific goods does not arise since these ends, insofar as they are known, are known primarily as being good. As MacIntyre (2000: 108) says, speaking of the natural law, "When we are functioning normally, we find ourselves inclined in certain directions

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and toward certain ends." Thus, it is not a matter of convincing someone, through argument, why health or harmonious social relationships, for example, are goods, so much as providing them with a good education that enables them to properly appreciate these ends (see MacIntyre, 2000: 109).

Consider, in light of this account of the natural law, MacIntyre's (2016: 171–72) recent discussion of the Cummins Engine Company. MacIntyre (2016: 172) says that Cummins was a "research enterprise, responsive to its customers' future as well as present needs, with a remarkable record in technological innovation" that "subordinated the need to achieve higher levels of profitability to the good of making excellent products, and individuals who worked for the company were expected to serve that common good." This provides an example of a productive practice that is largely in good order. Yet, it also raises an important question about how the MacIntyrean practice-institution framework can address the problem of climate change (see Moore, 2022) since participants in this firm's core practice would seemingly have reason to resist efforts to radically reform production insofar as their practice—from the point of view of its participants (see MacIntyre, 2007a: 189)—realizes distinct internal goods involving combustion engines. In this context, practitioners risk falling into "self-referentiality," where participants fail "to relate the outcomes of their core practice to the changing needs of outside stakeholders" (Tsoukas, 2018: 333–34), namely, the need to be sustainable.

MacIntyreans have rightly emphasized that practices must have a "good purpose" (Moore, 2012: 366) and support the common good (Sison & Fontrodona, 2012). However, the question is how practitioners—whose characters are shaped especially by participation in particular practices—are able to accurately determine both what the common good consists of and what demands it places on practitioners. Similarly, Moore (2022: 8) emphasizes the role of "MacIntyrean practices," as activities "in and through which desires could be (re)educated and potentially transformed in pursuit of the good." Yet, how can participants in particular practices such as that housed by Cummins Engine Company, whose characters are shaped by its internal goods and standards of excellence, avoid self-referentiality and in-group biases, in order to come to a more accurate determination of the value of the internal goods of their practice, such that their desires can be properly reeducated, given that their practice-shaped desires are directed toward producing combustion engines that contribute to climate change? This issue is compounded because MacIntyre's (2007a: 192) primary argument concerning the need for virtues within practices emphasizes their importance in shaping relationships between practitioners but does not explain their role in relationships with outsiders, making it difficult to understand why practitioners should be willing to listen to challenges from climate change activists. In this regard, Beadle (2013: 684) notes the potential for a "breach" between the "evaluative standards" of external stakeholders and those practitioners. However, an account of the natural law provides a more adequate basis for addressing this issue.

The natural law orients practitioners beyond their particular practices in two relevant ways. First, practices—like other contexts of practical inquiry—only function properly and contribute to mutual learning, insofar as participants adhere to the

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exceptionless precepts of the natural law, especially the negative precepts prohibiting lying, coercion, manipulation, and threats of violence (MacIntyre, 1994b: 184; 2016: 89, 108). Otherwise, they are likely to devolve into fruitless forms of conflict. Accordingly, by participating in practices, participants learn not only about internal goods and standards of excellence but also about "precepts that bind just because to flout them is to violate one's nature as a rational being" (MacIntyre, 2007b: 151). As such, practitioners learn that it is always wrong to use threats of violence or manipulation to win arguments, just as it is wrong to ignore or willfully misrepresent an interlocutor. Likewise, practitioners, by engaging in discussions and debates with fellow practitioners, learn the norms that must be followed—any time they interact with other rational agents—insofar as they are to properly realize their own capacity for rationality. In this way, the natural law supplements—without abrogating[3]—the requirements of the virtues within practices (see MacIntyre, 2007a: 192), providing a fundamental set of deontic constraints that are universally binding, beyond the boundaries of particular practices, insofar as it is always possible to learn from outsiders with very different cultural backgrounds (MacIntyre, 1994b: 184).

Thus, when outside stakeholders raise questions about the practice of making combustion engines, questioning whether its internal goods are genuine goods (see MacIntyre, 2016: 53), practitioners have reason to observe the deontic constraints of the natural law because outside stakeholders may have unique insights from which practitioners can learn. And, insofar as practitioners use coercion, threats, calumny, or manipulation to shield themselves from criticisms from outsider stakeholders, they will undermine their own capacity to evaluate their reasons for action (see MacIntyre, 1999: 54). As such, the natural law provides a basis for understanding the moral obligations of practitioners in relationships with outsiders affected by their actions. It should also be noted that MacIntyre (1994a: 284; 2007a: 264) has emphasized that the requirements of genuine virtues necessarily extend beyond the context of particular practices. Accordingly, the natural law's deontic constraints serve to specify the requirements of justice when practitioners interact with stakeholders who are not participants in their practices.

Second, the natural law directs individuals towards a range of human goods that are not merely the goods internal to practices but rather goods specific to human beings, as such (see MacIntyre, 1999: 67), including goods such as life, health, relationships, and rationality (MacIntyre, 2000: 107). Thus, the orientation towards basic human goods provided by the natural law enables practitioners to appreciate how goods of particular practices, that is, goods for "agents engaged in this or that form of activity" (MacIntyre, 1999: 67), give expression to or distort fundamental human goods. The human goods promoted by the core practice at Cummins, for example, include aims such as the preservation of human life and health that are facilitated by increased commerce and agriculture resulting from more powerful and efficient engines. In this way, the teleological orientation provided by the natural law

[3] As MacIntyre (1999) argues, following Aquinas (see 2017: *ST* I–II, Q. 94, Art. 3), "[A]mong the precepts of the natural law are precepts which enjoin us to do whatever the virtues require of us."

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directs practitioners beyond the internal goods of specific practices, providing a standard whereby specific types of internal goods may be evaluated in terms of their adequacy in satisfying the fundamental inclinations toward basic human goods that are constitutive of human nature (MacIntyre, 2000: 107).

Thus, when outside stakeholders challenge the core practice at Cummins, they must do so by appealing to a similar range of fundamental human goods, arguing that its core practice fails to promote or respect those basic goods in specific ways. For example, they may claim that regardless of the positive impact of combustion engines on basic human goods such as life and health, their negative impact on the health of others, especially the least well-off, and the long-term risks to human life that they exacerbate far outweigh their benefits. As such, the natural law provides a basic "grammar," enabling practitioners and others to frame their disputes, articulating the importance of a practice's internal goods in terms of its impact on human flourishing. Of course, the orientation toward "shared human goods" will not eliminate disputes or intractable disagreements (MacIntyre, 2013: 5), but it does provide a basis for understanding how practitioners can avoid self-referentiality (Tsoukas, 2018: 333–34), namely by linking the internal goods of the practice with the basic goods toward which we are directed by the natural law. This account of the natural law also shows how reasoning within productive practices may lead to political reasoning with outside stakeholders in a manner consonant with MacIntyre's (2007a: 227; see also 1999: 141) account of the practice of politics.

Another grand challenge that illustrates the importance of incorporating an account of human nature into the MacIntyrean practice-institution framework (Moore, 2017) is the problem of precarious work, involving "employment that is uncertain, unpredictable, and risky from the point of view of the worker" (Kalleberg, 2009: 2). Precarity has become a prominent feature of public debates relating to work and employment over the past decade (Han, 2018) and has received some attention within business ethics and political philosophy (e.g., Alacovska & Bissonnette, 2021; Bieber & Moggia, 2021; Wang & Seifert, 2022). While there have always been precarious forms of work, its modern incarnation, which includes the "gig economy" and so-called platform work, has increased significantly in recent times (Moisander, Groß, & Eräranta, 2018; Allan, Autin, & Wilkins-Yel, 2021), so much so that it is now possible to conceive of the precariat as a distinct social class (Standing, 2014).

However, the ethical questions raised by precarious work are not only or even primarily a matter of this type of work lacking the structure of a practice (see Moore, 2017: 145). Instead, precarious work is especially problematic because of the uncertainty that it imposes on workers. Consider, for instance, the growing precarity of much academic work (Bone, 2021). Adjunct lecturers, like other academics, engage in forms of work that have the structure of a practice (see MacIntyre, 2007a: 187). A chemist, for example, contracted to teach courses to graduate students is likely to draw upon her knowledge of the practice of chemistry, considering both the latest developments that may be relevant to students as well as foundational principles that are widely endorsed by members of the practice. Similar considerations apply in cases of precarious creative work (Phillipov, 2022). In these manifestations of

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precarity, the problem is not specifically a lack of meaningful work (Beadle & Knight, 2012) or a corruption of the practice (Robson, 2015; Moore, 2017: 145). Instead, adjunct faculty and other precarious workers are plagued by pervasive financial insecurity stemming from lower wages compared with full-time faculty or permanent employees, frequent fluctuations in the demand for work coupled with contracts offered on short notice that make it difficult to formulate long-term plans, and a lack of adequate healthcare.

Since the most urgent issue facing adjunct faculty or precarious creative workers is not an inadequate provision of practice-based work, the practice-institution framework (Moore, 2005), on its own, does not speak directly to this issue. Augmenting it with an account of the natural law provides a better basis for critiquing precarious work. Considered in light of the natural law, productive practices, and work more broadly (see MacIntyre, 2011: 107), should not only contribute to the realization of workers' rational nature—actualizing the capacity for practical rationality (see MacIntyre, 1999: ch. 8)—but should also enable workers to satisfy their inclinations towards goods of their "physical nature" and "animal nature" (MacIntyre, 2000: 107), namely, the species-specific goods involving the preservation of life, health, the establishment of intimate relationships, and the education of children. Similarly, work should not interfere with other goods of workers' rational nature, involving a well-ordered "social life" (MacIntyre, 2000: 107).

However, adjunct instructors (Bone, 2021) and precarious workers in "film, television and certain types of journalism" (Phillipov, 2022: 4), like precarious workers in the gig economy (Moisander et al., 2018), more broadly, as a result of their working conditions, are unable to achieve the species-specific goods toward which human beings are directed by the natural law (MacIntyre, 2000: 107). More specifically, financial insecurity—for example, low and uncertain wages—frequent lack of healthcare, and poor health outcomes facing workers of all types in the gig economy (Macmillan & Shanahan, 2021) make it difficult for them to satisfy their basic needs, at the extreme, conflicting with species-specific goods involving the preservation of life and health. Precarity is also at odds with the goods of educating and caring for children, as well as the preservation of well-ordered intimate relationships and participation in social life, more broadly. This is partly because the demand for flexibility and lack of a fixed schedule, typical of precarious work, makes it harder for parents to establish a regular routine that so obviously benefits young children, or to be present for mealtimes, bedtimes, and the like. But it is also because precarity encourages people to put off starting a family (Schmitt, 2021). Similarly, demands for flexibility, a frequently varying schedule, and work during "off-hours" may interfere with the preservation of the wider net of social relations necessary for a flourishing life, involving "those distinctively human abilities … that enable us to associate cooperatively with others in ways not open to nonhuman animals" (MacIntyre, 2016: 29; see also 1999: ch. 9).

MacIntyre has lamented the fact that many people are burdened with a "treadmill of a job" (MacIntyre, 2015: 18). And while much work in the gig economy can be faulted for failing to have the structure of a practice, expanding the MacIntyrean perspective—by incorporating an account of human nature into the practice-

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institution frameworks—provides a more far-reaching way to critique work in the contemporary gig economy, highlighting the way that precarious work interferes with a range of species-specific goods (MacIntyre, 2000: 107), not only the goods of rational nature realized within productive practices. An expanded MacIntryean framework that incorporates the natural law also provides a basis for criticizing practices that have become insular or "self-referential" (Tsoukas, 2018: 333–34), calling attention to a set of deontic constraints that must be followed when interacting with outside stakeholders to ensure that those interactions facilitate practical rationality (MacIntyre, 1994b: 184).

CONCLUSION

In *AV*, MacIntyre (2007a: 197) rejects Aristotle's "metaphysical biology," developing a novel account of the virtues, centered on their role within a "social teleology." This account has made a significant impact on business ethics (see Beadle, 2017; Moore, 2017). In subsequent work, MacIntyre (2007a: xi; see also 1999; 169: 2002a: 169) argues that his early account of social teleology needs a "metaphysical grounding," which he provides by adopting a form of neo-Aristotelian naturalism (see 2002b: 624), giving the concept of human nature a fundamental role in his later work (e.g., 1999: ch. 8; 2016: 25–28). However, research in MacIntyrean business ethics has done little to explain how this concept further grounds its account of the role of the virtues within productive practices or the implications for business of an explicit consideration of the role of work in actualizing fundamental human capacities. Accordingly, we extend the MacIntyrean perspective within business ethics by incorporating a notion of human nature, drawing especially on the account introduced in *DRA* (MacIntyre, 1999).

We first explain the role of practices in actualizing and sustaining the fundamental human capacity for practical rationality (see MacIntyre, 1999: chs. 8 and 9). Following this, we argue that this account of the role of practices in actualizing practical rationality provides a basis for rejecting a relativistic objection noted by Beadle and Knight (2012: 433) in their discussion of meaningful work; namely, that it is not morally obligatory to ensure that work is structured as a MacIntyrean practice because individuals pursue many different goals through their work. In response to this challenge, we argued that because the ability to formulate and act upon reasoned preferences presupposes the capacity for practical rationality—and practical rationality is sustained by participation practices—there is reason to discount workers' preferences for modes of work that lack the structure of a MacIntyrean practice. More broadly, in light of the developmental account outlined in *DRA*, it is apparent that work lacking the structure of a practice is likely to undermine the full realization of human nature.

We also outlined additional criteria for distinguishing productive practices in good order from other activities, highlighting integrative and diachronic dimensions of practices. Concerning the latter, MacIntyre (1999: 144) says, "[T]he exercise of shared deliberative rationality is always imperfect and what should impress us is not so much the mistakes made and the limitations upon its exercise at any particular

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stage as the ability through time and conflict to correct those mistakes and to move beyond those limitations." As such, beyond considering whether some practice-like activity involves a good purpose and a commitment to excellence (Moore, 2012), we argued that it is also necessary to consider the extent to which the activity contributes to the development of participants' capacity for practical rationality over time. Doing this involves overcoming various biases, learning to separate oneself from one's desires, imagining alternative futures, and developing an ability to evaluate one's reasons for action. Similarly, participation in practices should enable participants, over time, to better grasp the relationships between the internal goods of specific practices and their flourishing and to learn to navigate the tradeoffs. These considerations, centered on the role of productive practices in actualizing the capacity for practical rationality, we argue, offer a significant development of the practice-institution framework (Moore, 2017) suggesting opportunities for future research and more far-reaching criteria to be employed when considering whether some activity is a productive practice in good order.

In addition, we highlight the way an account of human nature can address large-scale problems that involve issues extending beyond the question of whether work has the structure of a practice. Developing MacIntyre's account of the natural law, we highlight its twofold function: On one hand, the natural law involves a set of deontic constraints that facilitate shared inquiry, deliberation, and mutual learning. These constraints give expression to human nature, especially the fundamental capacity for practical rationality. Accordingly, these norms of the natural law mitigate the problem of self-referentiality (Tsoukas, 2018: 333–34). On the other hand, the natural law involves a set of inclinations toward humans' species-specific goods that provide a basis for understanding why precarious work is unethical, namely because it undermines workers' flourishing, not only or always because it lacks the structure of a practice. Thus, an expanded practice-institution framework that incorporates an account of human nature not only offers a better grounding for the MacIntyrean perspective in business ethics (see MacIntyre, 2007a: xi) but also enables it to address a broader range of ethical challenges facing contemporary business.

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