

The Virtue of External Goods in Action Sports Practice

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Consistent with the idea that business ethics is a form of applied ethics, many virtue ethicists make use of an extant (pure) moral philosophy framework, namely, one developed by Alasdair MacIntyre. In doing so, these authors have refined MacIntyre's work, but have never really challenged it. In here questioning, and developing an alternative to, the MacIntyrean orthodoxy, I illustrate the merit of business ethicists adopting a broader philosophical perspective focused on constructing (new) theory. More specifically—and in referring to action sports (e.g., mountain biking, snowboarding)—I propose that an external good motive is not only much more consistent with virtuous practical excellence than MacIntyreans acknowledge, but that such a motive is fundamental to identifying and explaining how practices can be deliberately created (by businesses). Consequently, and in stark contrast with MacIntyre's deeply pessimistic outlook on modern business and society, I propose that those who value practices might celebrate our current era.

Key Words: action sports, applied ethics, digital technology, MacIntyre, philosophical perspective, virtue ethics

Like other disciplines grouped under the broad rubric of applied ethics, business ethics is commonly conceived as using theories developed in the field of (pure) ethics/moral philosophy to comprehend, explain, and provide normative prescriptions for a functional domain of broad, clear, and contemporary importance: that is, business. Whilst this nomenclature has merit—in that business ethicists are concerned with real world phenomena and not just with an ethics that is (somehow) entirely abstract—it has two limitations. First, in being exclusively associated with moral philosophy, the applied/business ethics label can be accused of slight misdirection: for business ethics is an evidently interdisciplinary, and not just a multi-disciplinary—let alone a single-discipline—endeavour. Second, the association of business ethics with applied ethics is problematic because it belies the fact that rules, ideals, value structures, and concepts in general, are not easily conceived in isolation from a lived existence that they can subsequently be used to direct and comprehend.

With regards to contemporary business ethicists, those influenced by the work of Alasdair MacIntyre should be amongst the most attuned to such limitations. To understand why, it helps to note that in his influential anti-modern tirade *After virtue* (initially published in 1981), MacIntyre (2007: 73) argues against the idea that moral

philosophy as “a set of conceptual enquiries” can or should be kept distinct from a “sociology of morals” concerned with “empirical hypothesis and findings.” Likewise, it helps to recognize that MacIntyre (1984: 508) has also proposed—in a no less combative, albeit much less cited, publication—that the “currently dominant conception of applied ethics” is mistaken due to its being founded on “ahistorical ... principles or rules” that are incapable of accounting for “problems specific to particular sets of social institutions in particular times and places.”

Such explicit antipathy to the simple, ‘top-down’ application of ‘master’ (moral) theories/frameworks would seemingly guard against MacIntyre’s own work being so conceived and applied. And yet, within the field of business ethics—whose utility MacIntyre has (unkindly) equated with that of astrology (Beabout, 2012: 405) and the substantive interest of which he evidently loathes: for example, MacIntyre believes that managers are unable “to engage in moral debate” (2007: 30) and that corporations are an “embodied excuse for irresponsibility” (1980: 33)—this is largely what has come to pass. So much so that one can identify a ‘MacIntyrean orthodoxy’ that takes the following as axiomatic: 1) that coherent, complex, and cooperative human “practices” with their own internal goods “always have histories”; 2) that institutions have practice “corrupting power”; and 3) that the motive to external goods (e.g., money, status, winning) is “always a potential stumbling block” to realizing “excellence and the internal goods” of practices, and the virtues more generally (MacIntyre, 2007: 221, 194, 196).¹

Although the MacIntyrean orthodoxy is just that, an orthodoxy, there are “lines of flight” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1988: 161) within it. Most notable in the present context is the work of Moore (2012a: 380): for in using empirical work to “refine” and “encourage further engagement” with MacIntyre (2012a: 364), Moore (2012a: 380) reveals that the relationship between internal and external goods (and practices and institutions) is characterized by a more “complex circularity” than is suggested by MacIntyre’s (1988: 35) admission that internal “goods of excellence cannot be systematically cultivated unless at least some of the [instrumental and external] goods of effectiveness are also pursued,” and vice versa. Indeed, in noting “the possibility of reverse causation” between internal and external goods, Moore (2012a: 380) suggests that MacIntyre’s framework can be profitably developed in unorthodox, dare I say non-MacIntyrean, ways.

Given such suggestion, I here show that in privileging the motive to internal over external goods (e.g., Beadle & Moore, 2006: 331; Sinnicks, 2019: 111; 2021: 264; Moore, 2002: 30), MacIntyreans have difficulty explaining the *creation and development* of practices in (modern) societies. More positively, I argue that the (prioritized or privileged) motive to external goods (e.g., money) can be generative of practices and their excellences, and make three supplementary contributions in doing so. First, I counter MacIntyre’s contention that an internal goods motive is practically superior to, and much more virtuous than, an external goods motive.

¹ Thanks to Reviewer 1 for suggesting the ‘MacIntyrean Orthodoxy’ terminology.

Second, I demonstrate that, as the motive to realize the internal goods of a given practice cannot exist prior to the practice's existence, the deliberate creation of a practice can be best, and seemingly only, explained by an external goods motive. Third, and as illustrated by the 'dangerous progression' of action sports, I posit that instead of "resisting as prudently and courageously and justly and temperately as possible the ... social, economic, and political order of advanced modernity" (MacIntyre, 2007: xvi), those interested in the flourishing of practices might celebrate it.

The action sports label refers to a "specific kind" (MacIntyre, 2007: 188) of "mostly individualized" (Thorpe, 2014: 4) activities such as climbing, kayaking, mountain biking, skateboarding, and snowboarding. As these activities are sometimes referred to by other labels such as alternative sports, extreme sports, lifestyle sports (Brymer & Feletti, 2020: 420; Melo, van Rheenens & Gammon, 2020: 1), I note that I use 'action sports' as it is the designation that "committed participants" commonly prefer (Thorpe, 2014: 4). Consistent with Sinnicks' (2019: 112) suggestion regarding sports in general, action sports can be considered an "especially useful" example for MacIntyreans. In fact—given the richness of their cultures, the virtuous demands they place on practitioners, and their clear standards of excellence—action sports can be taken as a practical (MacIntyrean) archetype.

Action sports are also interesting because they reveal something that the orthodox MacIntyrean perspective obscures: that is, the deliberate creation of practices by businesses. The practice of snowboarding, for example, has its roots in Sherman Poppen's development of the 'Snurfer' in 1965 and its subsequent production by the Brunswick Corporation (Muskegon, Michigan), which sold around 750,000 Snurfers over fifteen years (Einsiedel & Drever, 2013; MacArthur, 2010). During this period, Jake Burton Carpenter had a vision that riding a Snurfer "could be a sport" and decided to start making boards as a "get-rich-quick" scheme (Bridges, 2016). Thus, Burton Snowboards, a company that continues to play a central role in snowboarding's development, was conceived in 1977 due to what Jake Burton Carpenter personally acknowledged as his "attraction to athletics, to being cool, to being the guy ... [and] for lack of a better expression, to get laid" (Bridges, 2016).

Whilst modern enterprises have not played a central role in the creation of all action sports—for example, the foundations of surfing trace back to fifth-century Polynesia (Mach, 2017: 41), well before business as we know it today—snowboarding is not alone. Thus, modern skateboarding came into being when Larry Stevenson—who launched the skateboard mass production company Makaha in 1963—invented the kicktail in 1969 (Slotnick, 2012). Kicktails significantly increase a skateboard's maneuverability and have—in combination with (smooth rolling) polyurethane wheels first manufactured by Cadillac Wheels in the early 1970s (SHoF, 2012)—made the practice of skateboarding possible (Foley, 2020). Similarly, small businesses played an essential role in mountain biking's development in 1970s California (Berto, 2015; Retrobike, 2010). As suggested by (the now much larger) Specialized in an advertisement for their

Stumpjumper, which was the world's first production mountain bike in 1981 (Rogers, 2010), such enterprises helped create “not just a new bicycle ... [but] a whole new sport” (Specialized, 2022).²

In teasing out the conceptual importance of such empirical realities for MacIntyreans, for our comprehension of practices, and for the business ethics field as a whole, I structure the article as follows. First, I summarize the main tenets of the MacIntyrean orthodoxy. In particular, I emphasize that this orthodoxy obscures the possibility of new practices being created; and show that, once limitations of the human condition are acknowledged, the orthodox MacIntyrean belief that an external goods motive is of less practical value than an internal goods motive, is placed in serious doubt. Second, I build on a range of philosophical, psychological, and sociological works to conceive the emergence of action sports in terms of their practical differences from conventional sports, their practical exclusivity, and in terms of the enjoyment and external goods they generate. Third, I develop three concepts—that is, ‘dangerous progress,’ ‘commercial complexes,’ ‘digital acceleration’—that help explicate the dynamics of action sports excellence, and of contemporary (technologically mediated) practices in general. Fourth—and in conversation with Moore (2012a), and the broader (Aristotelian) literature on intentionality (Anscombe, 1957) and virtue (Foot, 1978)—I argue that an external goods motive can be generative of practical reason and the virtues more generally, and not just their “simulacra” (MacIntyre, 2007: 149–50, 196); and that the motive to financially profit from action sports will, so long as market freedom of entry exists, in effect require that businesses focus on developing excellence as a means to this end. In concluding, I propose that excellence-focused practices (Sinnicks, 2021), of which action sports provide one example, constitute a promising path for future research; that business ethicists should, by and large, be much less concerned with conforming to and enforcing any presumed theoretical “authority” (Peirce, 1877: 8); and that there are clear benefits in business ethicists adopting a qualitatively informed philosophical perspective of the sort that I employ here and elsewhere (Whelan, 2021), and that is also illustrated by Moore (2012a).

THE MACINTYREAN ORTHODOXY

The present section notes that the MacIntyrean orthodoxy presumes: the pre-existence of (practical) traditions; that institutions are created after, and are potentially corruptive of, practices; and that (the motive to) internal goods possess a value that is *a priori* much higher than that of external goods. Of these three, it is the third that provides the orthodoxy's core, and that largely explains the other elements. Nevertheless, I begin with the initial two for ease of exposition.

²I am not suggesting that there are no other examples of activities that resembled snowboarding, skateboarding, or mountain biking prior to the origins noted here. Isolated examples of broadly similar activities—that is, examples that effectively played no role in the initial development of such sports as we know them today—can no doubt be found at different times and different places.

The Limits of Tradition

MacIntyre holds tradition in very high esteem. This is manifest from his emphasizing that, whilst the likes of Homer, Aristotle, Aquinas, and Franklin all advocate for different virtues, they also similarly posit that virtues can only be made sense of within (varying) traditions of “social and moral life” (MacIntyre, 2007: 181–86). Likewise, it is evident from his belief that the perilous state of modern societies is due to their equating moral agency with the “capacity of the self to evade any necessary identification with any particular contingent state of affairs,” with the belief that “everything may be criticized from whatever standpoint the self has adopted, including the self’s choice of standpoint to adopt” (MacIntyre, 2007: 31). Given this fear of a “democratized self which has no necessary social content and no necessary social identity” (2007: 31), and which lacks “any rational history of its own” (2007: 33), MacIntyre’s contention that practices “*always* have histories” (2007: 221, *italics added*), that “we cannot be initiated into a practice without accepting the authority of the best standards realized so far” (2007: 190), is painted in the most positive of lights.

In following suit, MacIntyrean business ethicists commonly imply that practices are always and everywhere pre-established, almost as if they are *creatio ex nihilo* (Beabout, 2012: 409; Moore, 2012b: 304; Rocchi, Gerrero & Beadle, 2021: 84). Whilst Beadle (2013: 688), who in noting the role that the circus (a posited institution) played in inventing “the flying trapeze” (a posited practice), might be considered a partial exception, he shows little interest in the possibility of practices being created; preferring instead to comply with the “MacIntyrean account” (2013: 683) emphasizing that practices have “histories,” and that what is important about these “histories” is that they need to be humbly accepted by “students” and diligently enforced by “gatekeepers” (2013: 680).

Institutionally Corrupt

Given MacIntyre’s (2007: 221) suggestion that “practices always have histories,” MacIntyreans presume that practices (always) precede institutions. Nevertheless, as MacIntyre (2007: 194) has also written that “the relationship between practices and institutions” is “so intimate ... that institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order,” one might be tempted to suggest that this is not the complete story. But while MacIntyre’s account of the “relationship between practices and institutions ... is complicated,” it strongly implies a “theory of the origin of institutions. Practices give rise to and depend on institutions. *Institutions have their genesis and origin in social practices*” (Beabout, 2012: 411, *italics added*). Indeed, the widespread belief that “genuine practice-based communities emerge organically” (Sinnicks, 2014: 237) necessitates that institutions—as formal structures: for example, “clubs, laboratories, universities and hospitals” (MacIntyre, 2007: 194), “the corporation” (Moore, 2005: 659)—come second.

But of course, the formal nature of institutions does not just make them temporally secondary, but normatively secondary as well: for their systems and structures are inseparable from the managers and bureaucrats that MacIntyre despises (2007:

73–75). The upshot being that institutions are conceived as a sort of necessary evil; as something that we unfortunately need to create if practices are to “survive for any length of time” (MacIntyre, 2007: 194). Consequently, MacIntyre (2007: 194) and his followers (e.g., Beadle, 2013: 679; Moore, 2002: 22; Rocchi et al., 2021: 77; Sinnicks, 2021: 271) are constantly worried that once institutions are created, they will exert a “corrupting power” over the practices that are presumed to pre-date them.

Internal over External Goods

To make further sense of the MacIntyrean fear of institutions, it is necessary to distinguish between internal and external goods. On MacIntyre’s account, internal goods are associated with specific practices, and are such that they “can only be identified and recognized from the experience of participating in the practice in question” (2007: 188–91). Given this definition, MacIntyre’s illustrations of internal goods are (to presumed non-practitioners) necessarily vague: for example, he writes of “a certain highly particular kind of analytical skill” for chess, and “the good of a certain kind of life” for portrait painting (2007: 188, 190). By way of contrast, MacIntyre (2007: 189) is much clearer when it comes to external goods, for all he needs do is point to such things as the pursuit of “prestige, status and money”: three rewards or outcomes that are obtainable through any number of practices—for example, as a professional golfer, a famous academic, a great chef—and that can thus be considered external to, and/or transcendent of, any particular practice.

Although MacIntyre (2007: 194) suggests that internal and external goods form part of “a single causal order”—when his “need to emphasize ... that external goods genuinely are goods ... [that] no one can despise ... altogether without a certain hypocrisy” (2007: 196) is noted alongside his never making such apologetic qualifications for the status of internal goods—it is clear he prefers the latter. Whilst somewhat complicated, this preference relates to his associating internal goods with communal ownership and non-zero-sum games; and external goods with individual property and a Hobbesian war of all against all (2007: 190–91, 195–96). More generally, in tending towards an Aristotelian and “radical” autotelism (Lopez Frías, 2020: 177) fixated on self-sufficient activities that are “desirable in themselves” (Aristotle, 1984: 1176b), MacIntyre (2007: 198) disparages those that engage in practices as a means to ends that are not self-contained by such practices.

In this (austerely) Aristotelian fashion, MacIntyre suggests that just as “the educated moral agent” must do “what is virtuous *because* it is virtuous” (2007: 149); the virtuous practitioner must aim at internal goods as an end *because* they are internal goods. This contention—that (motives to) internal goods are better than (motives to) external goods—lies at the core of the MacIntyrean orthodoxy. It underpins MacIntyre’s (2007: 194) fear that “the ideals and the creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution.” It informs his contention that no matter how accomplished a practitioner may be, they will, so long as they focus on external goods, “deny themselves the experience of achieving those internal goods which may reward” other practitioners, even those that are “not very good” (MacIntyre, 2007: 193). And it shapes both his parable of the chess-playing child, whose motivations wondrously shift from external goods (“50 cents worth of

candy”) to internal goods (“a ... particular kind of analytic skill”) (MacIntyre, 2007: 188), and that of “two kinds of fishing crews,” in which the grandeur of the internal goods-focused crew is thrown into stark relief against the smallness of the crew focused on external goods (MacIntyre, 1994: 284–89).

The net result is that whilst MacIntyreans can question the exact balance that needs to be struck in pursuing internal and external goods (Moore, 2012a: 364–67), they cannot—so long as they wish to remain MacIntyrean—question the axiom that tilts the scales in the former’s favour (Beadle & Moore, 2006: 331; Moore, 2012a: 367, 380). Others, however, are free to consider the possibility of these weightings being reversed. And when they do, fissures in MacIntyre’s foundations can be seen to appear. Specifically, problems with the MacIntyrean orthodoxy come into view once one acknowledges the extent to which the posited value of the motive to internal goods is based on the presumption that such a motive is, relative to an external goods motive, much more likely to promote devotion to any given practice. That MacIntyre presumes as much is evidenced when he invites readers to:

Imagine an immensely skilled chess player who cares only about winning and cares for that very much. His skills are such that he ranks with the grandmasters. Thus he is a great chess player. But since what he cares about is only winning—and perhaps the goods contingently attached to winning, goods such as fame, prestige, and money—the good that he cares about is in no way specific to chess or to games of the same type as chess ... *For he could have achieved precisely the same good, that of winning ... in any other field in which there is competition ... had he been able to achieve a comparable level of skill in those fields* (MacIntyre, 2007: 274, italics added).

As this indicates, MacIntyre’s worry is based on the contention that a person focused on winning as an end could realize this external good in *any other field of competition*. This contention, however, is difficult to sustain given that humans are: 1) mortals that need to manage time scarcity, and 2) (very) limited in terms of their capacities.³ Consequently, any given human will only have the time and capacity to prove capable, let alone excellent, in relatively few practices. To suggest, for example, that a chess grandmaster obsessed with winning, could simply and quickly choose to become more winning as an urban planner, as a footballer, or as an agriculturalist, is to beggar belief. This point—that the motivation to external goods (as an end) can result in a formidable dedication to a practice’s internal goods or excellences (as a means)—provides a first reason to be more open to accepting the practical virtue of external goods.

A second and related reason is that those obsessed with winning as an end—and/ or with goods that often come with it, for example, status, power, wealth—can apparently be not just great practitioners, but practitioners who are, in attaining new heights, era-defining. For example, the Victorian-era cricketer W. G. Grace—whom MacIntyre (2007: 192) puts on a pedestal for his having “advanced the art of batting” to the “enrichment” of the entire cricketing community—was renowned for his

³ If certain efforts to ‘cure’ our mortality succeed, then the limitations associated with time scarcity would—for good or bad—be overcome (see Whelan, 2021: 115–35).

intense, abrasive competitiveness, and for his very profitable “blatant shamateurism” (Rae, 1998: 218). Likewise, Michael Jordan—whose all-round game and explosive athleticism transformed basketball back in the late twentieth century; and whose dunking silhouette (i.e., the ‘Jumpman’ logo) remains immediately recognizable to people worldwide—is renowned not just for his on-court capacities, but for his competitive streak. As Jordan himself put it, “To compete, to win ... it’s all I live for really” (Weitzman, 1999). Given similar reports by others—for example, Jordan’s metaphor-loving former teammate, Luc Longley, has described him as being “a menace at practice ... carnivorous ... he wanted to disembowel and eat his teammates” (NBA, 2023)—it is unsurprising that, following a relatively unsuccessful attempt at a baseball career, Jordan returned to basketball and the Chicago Bulls, with whom he won three titles on both sides of his year with the Chicago White Sox franchise, when a baseball player strike provided an opportune moment (Castrovince, 2022; Zwerling, 2015). In short, MacIntyre’s (2007: 274) belief that those fixated on winning in general, and on related external goods or “contingent rewards,” cannot fully realize the “excellence” of any particular practice no matter how “great” or “immensely skilled” they are, seems tenuous, even misguided: for it can seemingly only be maintained at the pain of also holding that the likes of Jordan in particular were not, given their (self-professed) motivational ‘impurity,’ so excellent after all.

A third reason to reconsider the posited primacy of internal over external goods, is that business entrepreneurs with a documented motive to external goods—such as Burton Snowboards founder Jake Burton Carpenter (Bridges, 2016)—have proven instrumental in not just the maintenance, but the actual creation of (subsequently flourishing) practices. Indeed, given the century-spanning fame of Philip Astley (1742–1814)—who as an entrepreneur “did little unless there was profit and glory attached to it,” and who is considered the “father of the modern circus” (Ward, 2018: 75)—it can be argued that the creation of a practice provides one of the surest means by which to achieve “prestige, status and money” (MacIntyre, 2007: 189). Consequently, there is reason to think that the (entrepreneurial) pursuit of external goods, and the (entrepreneurial) creation of institutions, can prove the catalyst of a practice’s development.

Given the just outlined reasons, I propose that MacIntyre’s framework has problems when it comes to making sense of the creation and advancement of practices and of the positive role that the motive to external goods, and business actors, can play therein. Thus, it is in seeking to move beyond the MacIntyrean status quo that I now conceive of the emergence of action sports in terms of their practical difference and exclusivity.

THE EMERGENCE OF ACTION SPORTS

One upshot of MacIntyre (2007: 221) emphasizing that “practices always have histories” is that his perspective is silent on new practices being (deliberately) created. This is a considerable lacuna. In beginning to redress it, I now build on philosophical, psychological, and sociological works to argue that the emergence of

action sports, and of excellence-focused practices in general (see Sinnicks, 2021: 266–69), can be explained in terms of their providing an excellent means by which to realize external goods.

Practically Different

The birth of action sports, and the need to distinguish them from more conventional or mainstream sports (e.g., basketball, golf, various forms of football, tennis), traces back to the 1960s counterculture in California (Bourdieu, 1984: 219–20). Since this time, many have noted that action sports differ from conventional sports along numerous dimensions (see Table 1). Indeed—and in duly noting that actions sports can have ‘conventional’ sporting elements, such as formally organized zero-sum competitions in which objective measures of size and speed play a role—the simple fact that they are novel and distinct, is important to their development.

To explain why, it helps to first note, along with Bourdieu (1998: 77–78), that significant benefits—for example, economic capital (money), social capital (connections)—can accrue to those that succeed in overturning what is valued within, and hence what is used to structure, a field (e.g., architecture, music, philosophy). But what is more important to note is that, whilst an increase in capital can be obtained through revolutionizing an extant field, one can potentially generate even more capital through creating a new one, and that, on this basis, it is possible to (economically) explain what Bourdieu (1998: 83) has simply described, namely: “the evolution of societies tends to make ... fields... emerge which are autonomous and have their own laws.” Of course, contextual realities will shape such evolutionary matters. Nevertheless, given that the creation of a new field avoids the costs associated with battling incumbent powers, and that there can be much value in being first, the creation of a field will at least sometimes prove much more profitable than the overturning of an extant field when it comes to generating external goods.

Table 1: Action Sports and Conventional Sports

	Action sports	Conventional sports
Activity	Individualistic	Collective (team) & individualistic
Form of interaction	Human–environment	Human–human
Participant relations	Non-zero-sum	Zero-sum
Objective outcomes (e.g., times, goals)	Sometimes important	Always important
Aesthetic/stylistic considerations	Nearly always important	Generally not important
Organization	Informal, open	Formal, rule bound
Amateur–professional boundary	Blurred	Distinct
Participation levels relative to media consumers	Very high	Low
Influence on personal identity/lifestyle	Very high	Low

Note. Sources: Bourdieu (1978, 1984), Brymer and Feletti (2020), Dumont (2016), Ford and Brown (2006), Melo, van Rheeën, and Gammon (2020), Thorpe (2014).

The benefit of this logic for understanding MacIntyrean practices is that it helps explain why people, and the organizations they create, can be motivated to create a practice without having to refer to internal goods which, by definition, can only be valued by practitioners once a practice exists. In this sense, the motive to external goods can be considered—and seemingly must be considered—as causatively prior to, and more fundamental than, any posited motive to internal goods when it comes to the deliberate creation of practices.

Practically Exclusive

If a (MacIntyrean) practice is to be said to exist, then two elements are required. First, there needs to be a specific form of excellence/set of complexly intertwined internal goods: for example, the aesthetic values, design skills, and contextual understanding that contribute to architectural development. Second, there needs to be a community of practitioners: for example, of architects. Without the first of these elements, a posited practice will be better conceived as either a (non-practice) pastime, such as watching Netflix with one's family, or as some sort of (non-practice) work, such as stamping number plates (see Sinnicks, 2019: 109; 2021: 265–67). And without the second of these elements, one might be able to talk of separate people (e.g., one person, ten people, one thousand people) that have a peculiar interest or hobby (e.g., collecting coins to coat with different types of candle wax), but they cannot speak of a (community of) practice.

When these points are taken together, they suggest that if a community of practice is to exist, then it must be possible to differentiate both practitioners (of a given practice) from non-practitioners (MacIntyre, 2007: 189–92); and to differentiate between practitioners (of a given practice) on the basis of their differing capacities (MacIntyre, 2007: 197). By their very nature, then, practices are exclusive. Thus, instead of suggesting that internal and external goods should be distinguished on the basis of the former being goods for the “whole [practitioner] community” and the latter being goods that “are always some individual's possession or property” (MacIntyre, 2007: 190); one can instead suggest that it is because of (exclusive) differences in individual possession and ownership—for example, different talents or traits that “are always some individual's possession or property” (2007: 190)—that people can initially be grouped into different communities of practice, and that we can subsequently identify outstanding (and less outstanding) practitioners there within.

In its turn, the recognition that practices are exclusive helps make sense of what MacIntyre (and Aristotle) suggests is a “harmless ... confusion”: that is, that people commonly find it difficult to differentiate their enjoyment of engaging in an activity from their enjoyment in succeeding at said activity (2007: 197). Indeed, it suggests that this perceived mingling of practical enjoyments is not due to some sort of (harmless) analytic confusion but rather due to the fact that, at some level, success at a given activity is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for its enjoyment. One cannot, for example, derive joy from the simplest of action sports activities (e.g., riding a bike, getting to one's feet on a surfboard), if they cannot accomplish such acts.

Enjoyment of practices is commonly thought to involve “flow,” a positively valenced personal experience in which “self-consciousness” is lost within, and “action and awareness” merge with (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014: 243), a (suitably) challenging context (Bourdieu, 1998: 79–80; Lubinski & Benbow, 2000: 147). Whilst flow is realized by engaging in specific activities and/or practices, the experience itself is common across them. As Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 3) writes, flow “is what the sailor holding a tight course feels when the wind whips through her hair, when the boat lunges through the waves like a colt.... It is what a painter feels when the colors on the canvas begin to set up a magnetic tension with each other, and a new thing, a living form, takes shape in front of the astonished creator.”

As these illustrations suggest, flow in particular, and enjoyment more generally, should not be confused with pleasure. Given that MacIntyre (2007: 198) also writes of such terms, it is important to note that there are differences in our conceptions. Specifically, and whereas MacIntyre (2007: 198) conceives of enjoyment as a particular internal good kind (or sub-type) of pleasure, I suggest that enjoyment is an external good experience that is common across practices (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990: 3), that enjoyment can—but need not—entail pleasure, and that enjoyment can also involve pain (Sumner, 1996: 105–108). Moreover, and whereas MacIntyre (2007: 198) illustrates ‘pleasure’ with such (rarefied) “psychological or physical states ... [as] that ... produced on a normal [sic] palate by the closely successive and thereby blended sensations of Colchester oyster, cayenne pepper and Veuve Cliquot,” I follow the likes of Freud (1920: 8–9) and Csikszentmihalyi in relating it to “*homeostatic* experiences that return consciousness to order after the needs of the body intrude and cause psychic entropy to occur,” and that are associated with such commonalities as “sleep, rest, food and sex” (1990: 45–46), with “scratching an itch” (Sumner, 1996: 106), and with relaxation and entertainment in general (Owens, 1981: 716).

Despite MacIntyre suggesting that enjoyment is an internal good (that thus changes from practice to practice), and my suggesting that it is an external good that transcends any given practice—for example, the experience of challenges met, novel accomplishments, realized objectives and capacities, flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990: 46; Sumner, 1996: 125; Rawls, 1971: 426)—we both conceive of enjoyment as being tightly coupled with agency. Indeed, it is because flow is a particularly agentic type of peak experience (Maslow, 1968; Ford & Brown, 2006: 157–58) that practitioners can, in seeking it out, develop further capacities that lead to experiences that are even more enjoyable (Seifert & Hedderson, 2010: 277–78). Furthermore, as flow experiences entail (relative) accomplishment and (observable) excellence (Ford & Brown, 2006: 157–58; Moran, Campbell & Toner, 2019), they tend to be positively associated with a boost to self-esteem and external recognition.

As illustrated in Figure 1, this (external good saturated) complex of relations can explain what it is that results in practitioners being initially attracted, and subsequently committed, to a practice. It also helps explicate the “ontological complicity between ... agents and the social world” (Bourdieu, 1998: 79), or what MacIntyre might term the practitioner–practice nexus. It helps us understand why, in the world of action sports, where considerations of aesthetics, style, and photography/

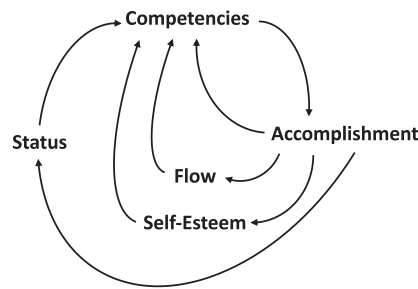


Figure 1: The Enjoyable and Positively Reinforcing Complex of Practical Competencies

videography, are close to omnipresent, practitioners are disposed to internalize the (judging/valuing) gaze of other practitioners (Ford & Brown, 2006: 122; Jones, 2011: 602; Woermann, 2012: 630). Likewise, it helps explain why action sports practitioners are often informed by a (potentially formidable) historical and contextual awareness: for it is through such understanding that one can satisfy their desire for accomplishment, status, and the sense of communal belonging that goes therewith. In the originality-emphasizing and heavily documented practice of skateboarding, for example, there is great value to be derived from accomplishing an NBD (never been done), and thus clear reason to know what is on the ABD (already been done) list (Snyder, 2011: 321).

In its turn, this cognizance of, and clear investment in, extant communities of practice helps to explain why practitioners can strongly resist the efforts of ‘outsiders’ to gain some sort of footing within, or control over, what they conceive as being ‘their’ domain. Many snowboarders, for example, continue to express dismay over the sport’s involvement in the Olympics, and to the role therein played by the Olympic committee appointed FIS (International Ski Federation)—an organization long considered antithetical to snowboard culture (Thorpe, 2012: 39), and that is commonly perceived as incompetent and uncaring by snowboarders (Associated Press, 2022; Sullivan, Otterstrom, & Leines, 2022).

Given that action sports often place great value in their “anti-establishment and do-it-yourself philosophies” (Thorpe, 2014: 4), it also makes sense that leading practitioners that have profited (in terms of prestige, power, and sometimes money) from embodying such philosophies, would resist incursions from mainstream actors. Terje Håkonsen for example—who is widely considered as one of the best snowboarders of all time, and who has opposed snowboarding’s involvement in the Olympics since its original inclusion at the Nagano games back in 1998—recently went on the record to note that:

I won more prize money in the ’90s than people win in a FIS contest right now. So, have things been good when ... popularity ... and prize money is lower than what it was in the ’90s? I don’t think so.... It’s just sad to see a lot of sports fooled by a lot of different things that don’t have anything to do with their sport ... I’d ... like to see the action sports community get stronger and stand up for themselves and have values and do their own thing (Pells, 2020).

Although such comments may be hypocritical—in that Håkonsen has arguably benefitted from his (historical) sponsors (e.g., Burton) having Olympic associations (Vanatta, 2018)—they nevertheless indicate how an external goods motive can explain why (action sports) practitioners will commonly be very heavily invested in protecting a practice—and the internal goods associated therewith—once it is established.

EXCELLENCE IN ACTION SPORTS

In line with the preceding section's argument that the motive to external goods plays a fundamental role in the creation and subsequent development of (action sports) practices, I now explicate the role that external goods and business play in the promotion of excellence within such practices. As the idea of excellence is central to such a concern, I begin by proposing that excellence in action sports can be conceived in terms of 'dangerous progress,' and then outline how 'commercial complexes' and 'digital acceleration' help advance it.

Dangerous Progress

The action sports literature consistently suggests that two elements are fundamental to action sports standards of excellence. The first element is danger. Although the dangers of action sports can be overstated (Brymer & Feletti, 2020; Thorpe, 2010: 91), the belief that action sports participants run the risk of significant harm (e.g., Mackenzie & Brymer, 2020) is not misplaced. Sadly, even the most expert of practitioners have died whilst engaging in their chosen practice (e.g., in avalanches, big waves) or from injuries sustained therefrom (Thorpe, 2014: 83–84; Thorpe & Dumont, 2019: 1642).

Whilst the death of action sports practitioners thankfully remains relatively rare (in terms of deaths/participation hours for example), significant injuries are common. Red Bull Rampage—which represents a pinnacle of mountain bike 'freeride' (a non-racing discipline of the sport), and which is fairly described as mountain biking's "Super Bowl" (Red Bull, 2022)—provides a case in point. In 2021 Rampage had 15 participants. Before the event was held, two riders had to pull out due to injuries sustained elsewhere (and were subsequently replaced). During Rampage practice, three riders sustained (multiple) injuries (e.g., dislocated shoulder, broken collar bone, broken arm) in massive crashes, all of which can still be viewed on various social media. And during the final day of Rampage, Tom van Steenburgen suffered a huge crash that resulted in his breaking his right hip socket into multiple pieces, shattering his left hip socket, breaking pieces off his femur and lower vertebrae, and his separating his shoulder (Moore, 2021).

Two points must be emphasized regarding the injuries sustained at Rampage 2021. First is that of the 17 riders that were given the chance to compete, five suffered injuries that prevented them competing on the final day, and a sixth (Van Steenburgen) was injured during the final session. Rampage 2021 thus had a (physical) attrition rate of more than 40 percent. Whilst exact comparisons are complicated, such attrition rates seem unlikely in mainstream sports, even particularly violent

ones like the actual (American football) Superbowl. The other point of note is that the injury Van Steenburgen sustained in failing to land a backflip followed his successful landing of a front flip off a drop (of approximately 50 feet) for which he was awarded the Red Bull Rampage Best Trick award. The veteran snowboard filmer Joe Carlino (Bomb Hole, 2021a), who was involved in filming at Rampage 2021, gave a relatable perspective on just what is involved for Rampage riders like Van Steenburgen when he noted that “the cliffs they were hitting I wouldn’t jump off with my feet into water.” Suffice it to note that, if Van Steenburgen’s front flip was not both very dangerous and technically difficult, then he would have left Rampage’s location in Virgin, Utah, with his hands as metaphorically empty as his body was literally broken.

As the technical difficulty associated with Van Steenburgen’s exploits begin to suggest, progress—the capacity to complete increasingly complex techniques/maneuvers—is the second element that is often associated with excellence in action sports (Ellmer & Rynne, 2020: 1743; Snyder, 2017: 70). Of course, different techniques and skill sets will be associated with different activities, and athletes can be renowned for a relatively simple style. But in general, (technical) progress can be said to occur when more elements are combined into one specific act.

In elaborating upon this idea, Hurka (2006: 2023–24) has proposed that the value of an achievement or task should not be summed as the simple total of elements of which it is composed, but by a process of hierarchical integration. As per Figure 2, this process can be applied to (here simplified) combinations found in board sports where ollies (jumps), spins and board slides (where one slides their board along a rail) play an important role. Thus, rather than only being worth 6 points (the sum of each independent task completed), an ollie with 360 and boardslide is worth 15 points (the sum of each independent task plus the value of each mid-level goal). In setting various complexities aside (e.g., spin direction), it will suffice to note that the calculation of an ollie with 360 and board slide as being 15 times more difficult than a simple ollie, board slide, or 360 spin on the ground, seems closer to the mark than does it being 6 times more difficult. Indeed—and as indicated by many board sports participants never performing such a combination—the 15 times multiplication is, if anything, way too low.

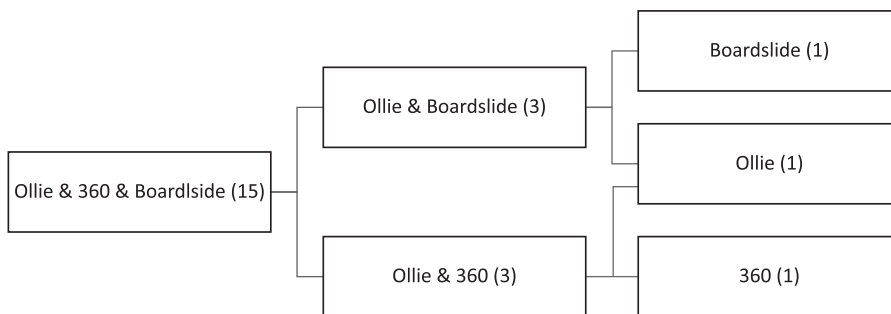


Figure 2: Measuring Progress with Hierarchical Integration

Whilst the world of action sports is big enough to include and encourage participants that tend more towards technique than danger, or vice versa, their highest echelons are reserved for those that can complete the most technically difficult acts in situations of real consequence (Atencio, Beal, & Wilson, 2009; Brymer & Feletti, 2020: 430–31; Snyder, 2017: 64–65; Thorpe, 2010: 191–92; Woerman, 2012: 69). Given as such, action sports participants commonly desire, and are provided with access to, terrains that are difficult and dangerous (Heshka, 2017: 452). Moreover, action sports participants commonly disparage terrains that are deliberately ‘dumbed down’ or made less ‘technical’ (i.e., too safe/simple), and—not unimportantly for those that take their gatekeeping seriously—too accessible.

Commercial Complexes

The term ‘commercial complex’ highlights the fundamental role that businesses, and ‘core’ brands in particular, play in the constitution of action sports. Core brands are (circularly) defined as those that highly devoted core practitioners (Scott & McMahan, 2017) acknowledge as making authentic products/services that are suitable for use. Non-core brands, on the other hand, are those whose products and services are conceived as being somehow less authentic, legitimate, or valuable. Consequently, non-core brands often face difficulties in action sports markets: for example, concerns relating to maintaining status within a community of practice have contributed to recognized pros (e.g., climbers) rejecting financially lucrative sponsorship offers from non-core brands (e.g., Adidas) that want to boost their profile (Dumont, 2016: 534).

Given the benefits of being a core brand, businesses are anything but shy when it comes to highlighting their ‘coreness.’ During the January 2022 broadcast of snowboarding’s Natural Selection Tour at Jackson Hole, Wyoming, for example, the chief executive officer of the Natural Selection Tour noted that the competition’s financiers, the Natural Selection Industry Alliance, “is a collective of endemic brands [e.g., Burton, Vans, Volcom, Libtech, Union Bindings] within snowboarding who truly represent the lifeblood of the sport.” As a telecast co-host put it, the Natural Selection Industry Alliance companies comprise snowboarding’s “core” and “foundation” (Natural Selection Tour, 2022).

The ‘coreness’ of brands is also signaled by their engaging with—read advertising within—core publications such as *Thrasher* magazine, which has been a powerful voice in skateboarding for decades (Beal & Weidman, 2003). Indeed, *Thrasher* is so renowned that other brands will do its advertising for it. Thus, when Mark Suciú—a pro-skater sponsored by board manufacturer Habitat—was awardee skater of the year (SOTY) by *Thrasher* in 2021, Habitat released a Suciú SOTY pro model with the *Thrasher* logo on it.

Relative to *Thrasher*’s logo, the logo of mountain bike website Pinkbike is less iconic. Nevertheless, and just as *Thrasher* is widely recognized as playing a central role within the skate community, Pinkbike is widely recognized as a mountain biking focal point. The extent to which mountain bikers identify with Pinkbike was brought to the fore following the announcement in July 2021 that Pinkbike had been bought by Outside. Outside is the owner of a variety of other publications/

websites (e.g., *Outdoor TV*, *Yoga Journal*, *Ski Magazine*), and styles itself as the world's "leading active-lifestyle platform" (Park, 2021). In the announcement's aftermath, many Pinkbike commentators expressed disgust at Pinkbike's sale to this profit-focused conglomeration. But as Pinkbike's editorial team clearly recognized, Pinkbike has—in using advertising to fund 'free' content—always been part of an (informal) profit-driven conglomeration. In fact, given comments made by Mike Levy—who worked at Pinkbike for around 15 years—Pinkbike appears to have always been informed by the (former) owners' dream of "building something" that could one day be (profitably) sold (Levy, 2021a).

Whilst some mountain bikers might be surprised to learn that core media outlets like Pinkbike have never been operated as a "cooperative" (Altron5000 comment, Levy, 2021a), and whilst some skaters might be surprised to learn that *Thrasher's* founder, Fausto Vitello, used it to "push the success" of trucks (the metal t-hanger that connects the deck to the wheels) manufactured by the Independent Trucks company that he also founded (and whose logo, non-coincidentally, has historically rivaled *Thrasher's* in terms of its omnipresence) (Sebastian, 2006)—few will be surprised to learn that brands straddling the core/non-core divide, such as energy drink manufacturers Redbull and Monster, want to make money. And even though some express misgivings about the link between action sports and energy drinks, few will deny that being a Red Bull or Monster sponsored athlete is an indication of action sports excellence (Rinehart, 2017). Likewise, few will deny that Red Bull have manifestly advanced action sports like mountain biking (Park, 2022). The point to emphasize, then, is that business corporations do not simply cater to the (pre-existent) demands of action sports practitioners. Rather, it is that brands that are (more or less) core to specific practices (e.g., *Thrasher*, Pinkbike, Burton, Red Bull) actively advance and construct action sports excellence and communities, and that they have clear external good motives for doing so.

Digital Acceleration

Given the fundamental role they play in developing and promoting dangerous progress in action sports, it is tempting to think that when professional practitioners suffer grave injuries, it is the corporations that pay/encourage them that are to blame. But as professional mountain biker (and trials rider) Ryan Leech has noted, this line of thinking is reductive:

It is not the film maker [or the film's producers] per se that is pressuring the rider ... it's a combination of the film maker, the rider, the sponsors, the audience, the notoriety, all these things are combined together to result in choices to ride certain stunts and lines that wouldn't be ridden otherwise.... If there wasn't the competition ... the ... film ... the incentive to make money ... the chance to meet really cool people ... [then athletes wouldn't do it] ... These are all amazing things and you gotta take these risks to get there (Singletracks, 2019).

As Leech indicates, the reason that action sports practitioners who seek professional status take (significant) risks is a function of two considerations. First, it is due to action sports excellence taking the form of dangerous progress. Second, it is due to

the zero-sum competition described by former pro snowboarder Jake OE, when he noted that “If you want to be a pro snowboarder you have to be better than a [n existing] pro snowboarder. You can’t be just as good as them because then they’re not replaceable” (Bomb Hole, 2022a).

One tragic upshot of this logic, as Leech once again notes, is that in a sport like mountain biking, where professionals “ride this razor’s edge between pushing the boundaries and complete disaster ... there’s a whole pool of riders that have wrecked themselves in their quest to become pro ... [there’s] a lot of carnage ... people who you never hear about dealing with catastrophic ... injuries at a young age” (Singletracks, 2019). Although one would hope that as action sports develop and grow the number of catastrophic injuries that are suffered amongst practitioner communities will diminish (if only in relative terms), this possibility seems unlikely given how information and communication technologies, and social media in particular, act as what can be termed a ‘digital accelerant’ of dangerous progress.

As former pro snowboarder Eddie Wall has explained, whereas snowboarding “would progress like on the year” back when feature films (VHS, DVD) and print magazines were the primary forms of media, it now progresses “on the day, by the minute” given the ubiquitous immediacy of digital technologies (Bomb Hole, 2022b). And in the (more platform specific) words of pro snowboarder and co-host of *The Bomb Hole*, Chris Grenier: “Instagram ... take it or leave it, but you can kind of ... create your own destiny.... If you’re good enough, and your clips are psycho enough, and they rise to the top of the feed ... you’ll be seen and noticed” (Bomb Hole, 2021b).

In light of such testimonies, it is difficult to deny that dangerous progress is being accelerated at the (aspiring) pro level due to digital technology enabling any ‘kid’ to record, and readily distribute, their feats amongst action sports communities. Whilst gatekeepers still exist, practitioners with the requisite skills and necessary resources (i.e., anyone with a camera/person to record them) can now “partly skip the early stages of a career, bypassing a tightly woven network of managers, producers, and marketers on the [hoped for] way to global fame” (Woermann, 2012: 632). As a result, extant professionals face unprecedented pressure to dangerously progress. For if they don’t continuously advance, they risk being displaced by any one of the “thousands out there dreaming about doing what ... [action sports professionals] do everyday” (pro-climber interviewed by Dumont, 2016: 532).

Importantly, the digital acceleration of dangerous progress impacts not just (aspiring) action sports professionals, but practitioners across the board. Methods and techniques that could only be learnt through years of trial and error can now often be learnt with the help of online tutorials in a fraction of the time (Enright & Gard, 2016: 48–49). Likewise, training suggestions from experts that used to require geographic proximity and/or significant financial resources to be received, are now provided by experts to anyone in the world with online access at a relatively minimal, or no direct, financial cost. When such possibilities are noted alongside the “frame by frame” analysis of technique (Jones, 2011: 60; Woermann, 2012: 630) that is possible for anyone with a smart phone, the reasons for thinking that

dangerous progress is being digitally accelerated for practitioners at all levels of development, are very strong indeed.

Just as with professional practitioners, these developments can result in amateur action sports practitioners placing themselves in difficult and dangerous situations so as to increase, or simply maintain, their sense of self-worth. Moreover—and as many in action sports communities appear to agree with MacIntyre’s (2007: 190–94) belief that the value of a practical activity cannot be judged in subjectivist or emotivist terms but, rather, must be judged by a community of contemporary practitioners well versed in the practice’s standards and history—it makes sense that action sports communities are saturated with digital recordings of practitioners that (fail to) achieve ever higher standards: for it is in this way that their standing as a practitioner can be (continuously) confirmed by others (Jones, 2011).

Given the presumption that a practitioner’s self-worth will often be influenced by comparisons between themselves and relevant others (e.g., beginner versus intermediate, intermediate versus advanced) (e.g., Festinger, 1954; Sinan & Nicolaides, 2017)—digital recordings posted online can result in practitioners feeling pushed and pulled into doing new things (Braumüller, 2020). Pinkbike’s Mike Levy gives a good example of the former when he talks of seeing someone “riding that gnarly rock” on Instagram and feeling like he needs to do it himself: for otherwise he will be “a weak piece of shit” (Levy, 2021b). On the other hand, people can feel positively pulled up by social media when it encourages feelings of “If he/she can do it so can I” (Tesser, 1988: 189).

Undoubtedly, these types of push and pull pressures have always existed. But whereas it was once relatively easy for individuals to distance themselves from such felt needs—for example, they could engage in (unrecorded) practice by themselves—the invisible “everywhereness” of digital technologies means that this is less simple to realize for many today (Isaak, 2016: 233). As a result, Big Tech corporations such as Alphabet (Android, YouTube) and Meta (Facebook, Instagram) can, along with telecommunications giants that build (satellite and cable) networks (e.g., AT&T), be considered a major digital accelerant of dangerous progress in action sports despite their having no direct or immediate interest in advancing such a goal.

PRACTICAL REASON AND THE EXTERNAL GOODS MOTIVE

The preceding suggests that the MacIntyrean fear that practices are undermined by businesses and individuals that are (primarily) motivated (to maximize) external goods is, by and large, misguided. Indeed, when the second section’s argument (that the motive to external goods plays an essential role in the deliberate creation of, and deliberate commitment to, practices) is combined with the third section’s illustrated conception (of how commercial complexes contribute to the digital acceleration of dangerous progress in action sports), it appears that the motive to external goods—which arguably saturates contemporary societies—plays a strong and positive role in the founding and subsequent development of practices, and the enjoyment that practitioners derive therefrom.

Whilst “right MacIntyreans” in particular, may welcome parts of my argument—for example, my countering of MacIntyre’s pessimism regarding business—both “right” and “left” MacIntyreans (see Sinnicks, 2021) are likely to forcefully resist my suggestion that MacIntyre’s privileging of internal over external goods might be reversed. Perhaps the best way to illustrate this expected tension is with reference to the work of one of the most influential of MacIntyrean business ethicists, Geoff Moore. Specifically, in seeking to refine and encourage further engagement with MacIntyre’s framework, Moore (2012a: 365, 383), who does not share MacIntyre’s pessimism regarding business and markets, has used his study of the Alliance Boots health and pharmaceutical conglomerate (now part of the even bigger Walgreens Boots Alliance conglomerate) to argue that there is an “essential but complex circularity between internal and external goods.” Nevertheless, and whilst Moore (2012a: 383) clearly shows that external goods can be the outcome of “the pursuit of internal goods,” he maintains, in accordance with the “MacIntyrean understanding,” that “internal goods should be prioritized.”

Further to considerations detailed in the article’s first section, this felt need to prioritize internal over external goods is a function of MacIntyre’s (2007: 196) belief that, whereas “possession of the virtues ... is necessary to achieve” internal goods, “the possession of the virtues may perfectly well hinder us in achieving external goods.” Indeed, MacIntyre goes so far as to suggest that “we should ... expect that if in a particular society the pursuit of external goods were to become dominant, the concept of the virtues might suffer first attrition and then perhaps something near total effacement, although simulacra might abound” (2007: 196; see also Beadle & Moore, 2006: 331). In short, MacIntyre and his followers posit that, in direct contrast with an internal goods motive, an external goods motive tends to be inconsistent not just with practices and practical excellence, but with the development of personal virtues.

In addition to the influence it holds within the MacIntyrean orthodoxy, this claim—that an external good motive tends away from virtue, and towards vice—is likely to have intuitive appeal amongst other (non-MacIntyrean) business ethicists who find it difficult to acknowledge the “value of the profit motive,” and to thus “make peace with capitalism” (Heath, 2014: 7). But just as one can argue against the posited inconsistency between a (primary) external goods motive and practitioner excellence, one can argue against the idea that an external good motive and the development of personal virtues approach mutual exclusivity.

Indeed, one need only venture slightly beyond the work of MacIntyre, into the Aristotelian influenced philosophical literature more generally, to find considerations that problematize this claim. Foot (1978: xiii, 3), for example, suggests that virtues such as “courage, wisdom and temperance” are generally “beneficial characteristics” that are “necessary for a man’s [sic] well being whatever his particular interests and desires,” and that no person “can get on well without” them. And in slightly different fashion, Anscombe’s (1959) work on intention suggests that the quality and manifest characteristics of a given act (or accumulated set of acts) are not necessarily changed just because an answer to a why question—for example, why do you engage in this practice?—is presumed to have altered; or just because the act in

question (e.g., the apparently virtuous pursuit of internal goods) is subsequently revealed not as an end in itself, but rather, as a means to another end (e.g., external goods). Moreover, as “there is room for much dispute and fine diagnosis” as to the “genuineness” of posited intentions (Anscombe, 1957: 44), and as it may not be obvious at what point internal goods transform into external goods and vice versa (Moore, 2012a: 377–81), any MacIntyrean inspired efforts to distinguish (real) internal good motivated virtues from their (fake) external good motivated simulacra run the continuous risk of being in vain.

Such methodological considerations are interesting. Nevertheless, the point to emphasize here is that those that (we presume to) engage in practices as a means to external goods can have strong reason to develop the virtues (Foot, 1978: 125). In other words, it is not clear why apparent manifestations of the particular virtue of practical reason, also known as *phronesis*, prudence, or wisdom (Aristotle, 1984: Book VI; Beabout, 2012; Pieper, 1965: 3–40), are reduced to what MacIntyre (2007: 196, 154) pejoratively suggests is practical reason’s “simulacra”—that is, “a certain cunning capacity”—if it is revealed that the underlying motive of such manifestations is not the realization of a practice’s internal goods but, rather, of external goods that transcend it. Indeed, it is only by resorting to an austere Aristotelian autotelism positing that genuinely moral and virtuous acts must be done as ends in themselves—and never as a means to another end; or even just out of some natural or trained inclination towards them—that the MacIntyrean (2007: 149–50) belief that the pursuit of external goods is inconsistent with (genuine) practical reason and the other virtues can seemingly be upheld.

But in line with Foot’s (1978: 164–65) questioning the claim that “actions that are truly moral must be done ‘for their own sake’,” one can posit that the development of the virtues, and practical reason in particular (Anscombe, 1957: 79), provide a clear means by which to realize the internal goods of many practices, and that, in their turn, the realization of such internal goods are not simply diminished in value—or transformed into some sort of simulacra—because the practitioners associated therewith are primarily motivated by the external good saturated enjoyments they derive therefrom. Consequently, we can continue to think that someone like Michael Jordan—who appears to have had winning (and related external goods) as his basic intention—genuinely embodied basketball excellence “because of his” evidently exceptional ability to do the “things” that basketball requires (Foot, 1978: 136, 144).

To further illustrate and contextualize this logic, I use the remainder of the present and penultimate section to do two things. First, and with MacIntyre’s (2007: 188) example of the (sweet-toothed) chess-playing child providing inspiration, I outline my own brief tale of the ‘Social Media Surfer.’ Second, and in referring to ongoing developments in snowboarding and mountain biking, I argue that, so long as the freedom to enter action sports markets exists, any organization that wishes to sustainably profit therefrom will generally be required to develop practical reasoning capacities that help further the internal goods/excellence of action sports practice.

The Social Media Surfer

Consider a 10-year-old child that has some general athletic ability and inclination, and whose parents want to encourage to engage in surfing. Whilst not horrified by the idea, they are not, as is their best friend, obviously fascinated by it. Thus, and unlike their best friend, who might be said to have an (intrinsic) attraction to the internal goods of surfing, the child's motives are oriented towards external goods: for example, social belonging (to please their parents), social status (the desire to impress friends), and the vague prospect of generating wealth (they really want a phone). In light of the last motive in particular, the parents and child make a deal: they agree that if the child proves capable of performing certain skills within certain time frames—such as completing three cutbacks on a wave by the end of a summer—then the child will be given \$50 that they can put in the bank (and that they can only spend once they have turned 13).

Following three years of practice, the child is free to stop surfing. But as it turns out, they are very talented in the water, and have managed to win a number of local competitions alongside the \$200 they have garnered from their parents. Thus, at the age of 13, the young teen, who remains strongly motivated by external goods (e.g., fame, winning), decides to continue surfing, and starts making surfing-related posts on Instagram with the help of a camera they have bought with their lucre. Their Instagram proves popular, and they garner 5,000 followers by the time they are 15. By the age of 18, their follower numbers have grown to 100,000, and their influence is such that they are widely referred to as the 'Social Media Surfer.'

At the age of 19, however, the Social Media Surfer suffers a career threatening injury whilst surfing massive waves. In slowly recovering from the injury over the next two years, they have ample opportunity to reflect on events leading up to the injury. In particular, they come to the harrowing realization that on this day, they ignored both their relative inexperience in such waves and a niggling groin injury, and gave in to the push and pull effects of social networks (Sinan & Nicolaides, 2017); to "Kodak courage" or "GoPro guts" (Paumgarten, 2014); and to the "invisible pressure" of the digital public (Isaak, 2016: 233). Consequently, at the age of 21, their status within surfing—and the sponsorship dollars that go with it—has suffered: for in being caught up in a slow and painful recovery process, they have been unable to produce content to post on Instagram and various other platforms.

Despite this setback, the Social Media Surfer's desire for external goods continues to grow. Thus—and having considered pursuing other practices that they also enjoy, but which they are merely very good at, such as mathematics—they devote themselves to the realization of a long-lasting, hugely popular, and financially lucrative career. Moreover, and given their painful lesson that chronically injured surfers produce little value for anyone, the Social Media Surfer has had to develop the virtues of honesty, courage, and practical reason—for example, they have had to develop the very difficult skill of deciding when and when not to surf—and are recognized by all as having advanced surfing excellence over the course of their successful career.

Over the same period (an effective lifetime), the social media surfer's childhood friend has also continued to surf. Unlike the external good oriented Social Media Surfer—who famously once stated that “I do it for the loot”—their childhood friend is acknowledged as being motivated by surfing's internal goods in-and-of-themselves in the purest and fullest sense possible. Whilst the childhood friend has also developed various virtues through their dedicated practice, they have ‘only’ managed to become a very good surfer in absolute terms (approximately within the 95th percentile worldwide), and have never had more than 1,000 followers on their Instagram. They are thus fairly described as being a highly proficient yet unexceptional surfer that has had no discernible impact on surfing as a whole. And whilst they have organized their life in such a way as to give them as much time in the water as possible, this only amounts to approximately half the time that their still best friend, the Social Media Surfer, has managed to accumulate thanks to their time in the water equating to time at work.

On MacIntyre's account, this tale of the Social Media Surfer creates tensions that require various qualifications to be resolved. In particular, and whilst MacIntyre (2007: 193) might acknowledge that the Social Media Surfer is a “great” surfer, his autotelism seemingly requires that they cannot be considered to have realized surfing's internal goods to the same extent as their childhood friend. Moreover, MacIntyre (2007: 195–96) would seemingly suggest that, whilst both the Social Media Surfer and his friend appear to have acted in ways that are consistent with the virtues, the former has, unlike the latter, only realized their simulacra. On my account, by way of contrast, there is no need for such qualifications. Indeed, I consider that the Social Media Surfer's virtue is, at a minimum, no less than their friend's, and that their realization of surfing's internal goods are unequivocally much greater.

Core Demands and Competitive Pressures

The final concern that needs redressing relates to MacIntyre's (2007: 194) contention that institutions can have a “corrupting power” over pre-existing practices. Further to being a central element of the MacIntyrean orthodoxy (e.g., Beadle, 2013: 679; Moore, 2002: 22; Rocchi et al., 2021: 77; Sinnicks, 2021: 271), this fear is widespread amongst scholars of institutions more generally (e.g., Van Houtum & Van Uden, 2022). Indeed, and as a number of examples already discussed indicate—for example, the pro-climber who turned down a lucrative sponsorship deal with Adidas given the brand's non-core status (Dumont, 2016: 534); the fear that Pinkbike's ownership by the media conglomerate Outside (Park, 2021) would destroy the mountain biking website's authenticity—the concern that (relatively well-established) action sports will be corrupted by (direct) association with non-core businesses and/or organizations is widespread.

Although I do not want to suggest that it is impossible for institutions motivated by external goods (or, for that matter, any that one might imagine are ‘purely’ motivated by internal goods) to undermine a practice, I believe this fear is overstated with regards to businesses in particular for two reasons. First, any business that wants to enter action sports markets will, by and large, need to further its

standards of excellence if its efforts are to prove profitable. Thus, in what amounts to a reversal of Moore's (2012b: 305) suggestion that businesses "should focus on external goods ... but only to the extent necessary for the sustenance and development of the practice"—what one can say is that the development of a practice's internal goods is the surest means by which to sustainably earn profits therefrom. Even mainstream companies like Nike, who are not a historically core brand within sports such as skateboarding have, over time, managed to carve out apparently profitable niches through demonstrated commitment to such practices and the legitimacy they have garnered thereby (Wheaton & Thorpe, 2021: 282).

Second, the possibility of resistance, and of creating alternative institutional structures that better support a practice (Beadle, 2013: 679), is ever present. Thus, the Natural Selection Tour—which is funded by Natural Selection Industry Alliance companies such as Libtech (along with other core snowboarding brands) and which was founded by current pro Travis Rice, who many consider the most influential snowboarder of all time (and who is sponsored by Libtech amongst others)—was created within the context of the previously noted, and broadly felt, dissatisfaction with snowboarding at the Olympics. As Rice put it:

The Natural Selection ... was meant to be complementary, not counter, to current ... events But if we use the word "authenticity," there's a Winter Olympics being held on the desolate, ice-cold east coast of China [in 2022], where there's almost no natural precipitation ... it's pretty fucking far-fetched. Snowboarding lends a lot more credibility to the Olympics than the Olympics is lending to snowboarding (Zieff, 2022).

In building on Rice's point, it must be emphasized that neither the Natural Selection Tour, nor any other event, is going to 'replace' Olympic competition any time soon. But what such competitions can do is contribute to a reduction in whatever prestige is currently associated with the Olympics for snowboard athletes and their various sponsors. Consequently, if the Olympics wishes to continue to derive benefit from snowboarding, then changes approaching the wholesale may be required. But even if such changes are not forthcoming, snowboarding practitioners and companies can always decide to turn their back on this mainstream event and (very literally) corrupt institution (Shaw, 2008), and pursue their own, self-defined interests, at events like the Natural Selection Tour.

At the time of writing, such considerations of authenticity, excellence, and internal goods, are perhaps nowhere more evident than they are in mountain biking. The reason why is that early in 2022 the world governing body for cycling, the UCI (Union Cycliste Internationale)—which first hosted mountain biking World Cups back in 1989—announced that one part of the Warner Bros. Discovery media conglomerate, Discovery Sports, had been selected following a tender process and would be responsible "for the organisation and promotion of the UCI Mountain Bike World Cup ... from 2023 to 2030" (Spratt, 2022). As with the 2021 announcement that the mountain bike website Pinkbike had been bought by the Outside conglomerate, the 2022 announcement was met with a sort of existential dread. The reason why is that, for ten years prior, the UCI World Cup events had been

organized and produced by Red Bull Media House, who, as the UCI themselves graciously noted, had used “all its expertise to satisfy the passion of mountain bike fans around the world ... while significantly increasing the series’ audience” (Spratt, 2022).

Further to having been the subject of sustained and significant critique for (real or perceived) shortcomings throughout 2023, the longer-term difficulty faced by UCI and Discovery Sports is that any changes they make to race formats, televisual rights, team structures, rider compensation, health protocols, and so on, could easily be perceived as running counter to the internal goods of mountain biking. In light of such, downhill riders have discussed the possibility of forming a union, and approximately 50 percent of polled riders have expressed their willingness to consider moving away from UCI sanctioned events entirely (Quinney, 2023). Consequently, those within the Warner Bros. Discovery Sports group will have to lean heavily on whatever practical reasoning they possess if they are to ensure that their efforts to grow the sports audience and revenues do not backfire by alienating the sport’s core. And whilst only time will tell if the move to Discovery Sports benefits the practice as a whole, once their financial motives are noted alongside their broad expertise in sports broadcasting, and the possibility of alternative competitions/organizers/producers emerging, it would seem that they will at least try to advance excellence in mountain biking.

CONCLUSION

The basic argument here advanced is that a primary motive towards the realization of external goods is much more consistent with the internal goods/excellence of (action sports) practices, and with the development of the virtues, than MacIntyreans acknowledge. Indeed, as the motive to external goods can explain why people (e.g., entrepreneurs) would want to create practices that don’t yet exist, and whose internal goods can only be realized once a practice has been brought into existence, external goods can be considered fundamental to the deliberate creation of practices. By way of contrast—and given the presumption that practices “always have histories,” that (business) institutions have a “corrupting power” over (pre-established) practices, and that an internal goods motive is of greater (practical) virtue and excellence than an external goods motive (MacIntyre, 2007: 221, 194, 188–98)—the MacIntyrean orthodoxy seems unable to identify, let alone explain, such a possibility. Moreover, in conceiving the role that commercial complexes play in the digital acceleration of dangerous progress in action sports, I have posited that instead of “resisting as prudently and courageously and justly and temperately as possible the ... social, economic, and political order of advanced modernity” (MacIntyre, 2007: xvi), those interested in the flourishing of practices might celebrate it.

In so countering, and offering an alternative to, the MacIntyrean orthodoxy, it is hoped that the importance of the present work will already be clear to MacIntyre and his followers (including those that are, for whatever reason, most strongly inclined to counter my countering of MacIntyre). On the other hand, the importance of the

article's contents for the business ethics field as a whole is, unavoidably, a little less explicit. Consequently, I use these brief concluding remarks to quickly identify three ways in which the article suggests future work in business ethics can be profitably developed more generally.

Most substantively, the article suggests that practices deserve much more attention from scholars informed by a broader range of scholarly traditions, including those that MacIntyre (2007: 65) characterizes as being a "philosophical failure." For example, and as indicated by my tale of the Social Media Surfer, utilitarianism can add nuance to any posited merits or shortcomings of the motive to internal and external goods when it comes to the advancing of practices. Additionally, the article suggests that business ethicists might focus on what Sinnicks (2021) terms excellence-focused practices (e.g., leisure practices) that are not, in contrast to community-focused practices (e.g., agriculture, construction), necessary for basic (individual and/or social) survival. In short, more theoretically diverse work on excellence-focused practices—whose importance is likely to increase relative to that of community-focused practices given the secular trend towards diminished work hours in the Western world (e.g., Huberman & Minns, 2007)—is seemingly needed if well-being is to be fully realized in the decades to come.

The article also suggests that business ethicists should be less concerned with conforming to, or enforcing, any presumed theoretical "authority" (Peirce, 1877: 8), especially when there are clear differences between any given follower and their respective leader. The simple fact, for example, that MacIntyrean business ethicists are concerned with a subject matter—that is, business—that MacIntyre himself has little hope for (e.g., 1980: 33), suggests that MacIntyrean business ethicists may never have really been 'MacIntyrean' (see Sinnicks, 2021). Thus, rather than having to continually explain why their perspectives are, despite evident differences, still 'MacIntyrean' (e.g., Beabout, 2012), those informed by his work might simply note that whilst their work is influenced by MacIntyre, it is not MacIntyrean. This, at least, is what I have sought to do here. But of course, as MacIntyre (1984) himself was resistant to the application of 'master' theories, I may have paradoxically failed to escape MacIntyre's perspective after all.

Finally, and in a closely related fashion, the article suggests, much like Moore (2012a) and another of my own works (Whelan, 2021), that business ethicists can benefit from adopting a philosophical perspective that enables and encourages a fuller engagement with qualitative details. In business ethics, which is an inherently interdisciplinary field, this sort of approach seems eminently suitable. Thus, rather than seeking to maintain neat distinctions between purely conceptual work (which we tend to associate with philosophy), and work that is more empirical (which we tend to associate with the social sciences), the discipline might benefit from being less concerned with any such demarcation disputes. Indeed, a considered insouciance regarding such matters might help us recognize that business ethics need not be conceived as a field of applied ethics that only works once (fundamental) concepts have been developed in other fields (e.g., moral philosophy), but rather, as a field that develops (fundamental) concepts in its own right through a rich connection to the business of daily life.

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