

PSYCHOLOGY AT WORK: OPTIMAL EXPERIENCES AND MORE

Abstract

“Through work, man must earn his daily bread and contribute to the continual advance of science and technology and, above all, to elevating unceasingly the cultural and moral level of the society within which he lives in community with those who belong to the same family.” With the above opening statement of the encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, Pope John Paul II highlights the importance of work to the human being. Further on in the document, he describes two dimensions of work: an objective sense (technology) and secondly, work in a subjective sense (the human being as the subject of work). A concern for the psychological wellbeing of the human being at work is an important theme in contemporary debates.

Psychology has its roots in ancient philosophy and was often linked to theology and a desire for great things beyond personal satisfaction. The split between the psychological inquiry and philosophy in the nineteenth century was followed by a development of psychology as an empirical science often times independent of anthropology and philosophy in general. Additionally, with time, it focussed more on pathologies and their remedies. Today, many psychologists seek to understand psychological health in order to promote and explain work and the enjoyment of work in our world. There is also a humanistic tendency in some subspecialties of contemporary psychology.

Many of the humanistic trends in contemporary psychology however have lost touch with classical philosophy and theology. Scholars engaged in the quest of understanding normal psychology often come up with explanations which partly respond to the needs and desires of the human being. An example of such is the contributions of positive psychology to the psychology of work. Themes like flow, character strengths and signatures are common terms in that psychology. These concepts can be enriched and fit into a more robust anthropological framework without undermining the scientific authority and autonomy of psychology. For example, the studies which focus on optimal experiences, flow, at work may be enriched with a more stable motivation for work or a stronger source of fulfillment and enjoyment at work such as the concept of generativity taken from narrative psychology. Generativity is a concern for people besides self and family that usually develops during middle age; a need to nurture and guide younger people and contribute to the next generation. Generativity in the psychosocial sense refers to the concern for establishing and guiding the next generation and is said to stem from a sense of optimism about humanity.

Even though the sense of enjoyment and optimal experiences may be present a work, they are not always achieved by everyone. This paper explores themes of satisfaction, enjoyment and meaning at work within contemporary psychology that focus on the subject of work. They may inadvertently propose solutions to the challenges presented by an over-emphasizing the technological aspect of work.

For example, generativity which can directly be linked to robust anthropological frameworks such as our dependence on others as human beings, could be more enriching for psychology of workers. An interest in generativity would be more sustainable on a long term basis and more open to contribute not only to personal fulfilment, but to the flourishing of the other members of one's community. The paper will explore the benefits and limits of optimal experiences for obtaining a

sense of fulfilment at work. It will also present the pros and cons of generativity and the importance of having highly generative adults who see their work as a contribution to human development. Furthermore, generativity and optimal experiences could be open to a more transcendent understanding of the meaning of work for today's adult.

Thomists describe human activity as part of the narrative of creation. One can describe the task of building one's society as part of that narrative, guided by divine providence, as a means of fulfilment by developing one's self with work. An advanced psychology of work should keep the ontological status of a person as a creature and as *homo viatus*: a being on the way to perfection, often through his work. This rich understanding of work could also be explained with narrative philosophy and in contemporary spiritual theology as living a unity of life with all one's activity leading one towards true happiness, *eudaimonia* or *beatitudo*, or to God the source of the human being's happiness.

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Introduction

Enquiry about good work and satisfaction with work is common topic in many fields today including psychology, theology and philosophy. These fields often discuss the place of work in human life and its contribution to true happiness and fulfilment. Given the common interests, objects and subject, one could expect some harmony or complementarity in the findings across fields. However, experience has shown that isolated discussions in the disciplines may lead to some misconceptions about the perception of work by authors from different fields.

For example, some psychologists point to religion as a source of many people's understanding of work as a burden. At the same time, these psychologists accept the notion that religion may give a deeper meaning to work although they affirm that religious traditions are often not available the contemporary young people. In the appraisal of good work made by positive psychologists Gardner and Csikszentmihalyi, religion plays a limited role in giving meaning and motivation to work. People who do good work, at best, are thoughtful about their responsibilities and the implications of their work. Such responsibilities could include the worker's accountability to others, to the planet or to God.¹ As we shall see, their understanding of work is not common to all religions.

In evaluating work, it is important to keep in mind that it occupies a great portion of human life and choosing one's job or career path is often a decision which marks a wide frame work within which a person lives his life. Furthermore, as a consequence of its being a freely chosen activity that takes up a significant portion of one's lifetime, work is key to the pursuit of the person's ultimate end and happiness. Understanding work then is very important to having a good grasp of human fulfilment.

When only partially understood, work can have a negative connotation. For example, some traditions compared the work of slaves to those of animals saying that it only required manual or bodily force and obedience to a master. Work requiring bodily effort was seen as a manifestation the animality that is a common factor shared between humans and other animals and work was thought to make humans more beastlike. In the ancient Greco-Roman culture, the necessity to work negatively influenced the worker. It placed him outside public circles and made him less a citizen. For that ancient society, manual labour deprived people of the possibility of developing their intelligence in the practice of virtue and contemplation of the good, and made them vile.² Psychologist Csikszentmihalyi, also notes that an Italian proverb conveys the same idea: "*Il lavoro nobilita l'uomo e lo rende simile alle bestie*"; or, "Work gives man nobility, and turns him into an animal."³ In the absence of the concept of personhood and the dignity that confers on the human being, as Christianity later developed it, humans were seen as an animals with *logos*; a higher one, but still animals.

Today, thanks to a deeper understanding of the human dignity, a person's unity of body and soul and the implications of that unity for directing ones actions towards end, the concept of work has

¹ See Howard GARDNER –Mihaly CSIKSZENTMIHALYI –William DAMON, *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet*, Basic Books, New York, 2008, 3.

² For a more detailed explanation of work in the Greco-Roman culture and philosophy of work, see Rafael CORAZÓN GONZALEZ, *Filosofía del Trabajo*, Rialp, Madrid 2007.

³ Mihaly CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper Perennial, New York, 1990, 143.

been greatly enriched from different perspectives. I will briefly highlight some specific insights taken from John Paul II's *Laborem Excercens* to clarify some misconception about religion and work from positive psychologists. This paper also explore some notions about good work and optimal experiences given by positive psychologists while aiming to enrich these psychology concepts by putting them together with the insights from *Laborem Excercens* and Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy.

A Robust Meaning of Human Work

Laborem Excercens presents work as a means of self-development. Work is our way of dominating the world rationally, of subduing it. The human being, a rational animal, applies his⁴ capacity to reason in adapting the world to his needs, thus showing his control over his natural habitat. We often define work in many ways. It is not strange to hear work described as activity, often requiring sustained physical or mental effort, in which one exerts strength or faculties to do or perform something.⁵ Such human activity can be directed towards ends chosen by the subject. John Paul II in *Laborem Excercens* describes work as “any activity by man, whether manual or intellectual, whatever its nature or circumstances; it means any human activity that can and must be recognized as work, in the midst of all the many activities of which man is capable and to which he is predisposed by his very nature, by virtue of humanity itself.”⁶ As human nature is rational, the rationality which stems from human nature underlies and permeates human activity even when that rationality is not adequately manifested or when rationality is wrongly applied.

John Paul II further affirms that work is one of the characteristics that distinguish humans from the rest of creatures, whose activity for sustaining their lives cannot be called work. In other words, among the animals, only a human being works, in the strict sense of the word. One can say that work is a part of human nature and a feature which raises humans above animals. A person's rational nature makes it possible to identify his constructive activity (be it intellectual or manual) as work. His awareness of his activity (his self-consciousness and auto-reflexive capacity) and understanding of the basis and reasons for his acting, makes it possible for him to order them towards proximate or remote ends which he wishes to achieve in life; and ultimately to his final end in accordance with his essence. Human activity is thus different from other activities carried out by animals. “Thus work bears a particular mark of man and of humanity, the mark of a person operating within a community of persons. And this mark decides its interior characteristics; in a sense it constitutes its very nature.”⁷ With work humans manifests superiority over other animals as we demonstrate our rational capability to order things towards the ends which we find fitting.

Laborem Excercens is a document devoted to “human work and, even more, to man in the vast context of the reality of work.”⁸ The encyclical highlights the importance of work to the human being, human dignity and self-development. Within this document, John Paul II calls attention to

⁴ In order to avoid cumbersome repetitions of pronouns, in the paper I will use the masculine form of pronouns “he, his or him” to represent human beings.

⁵ Many dictionaries define work with similar words.

⁶ JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem Excercens*, Vatican Polyglot Press, Vatican City, 1981, Blessing.

⁷ JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem Excercens*, Blessing.

⁸ JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem Excercens*, no. 1.

“the dignity and rights of those who work, to condemn situations in which that dignity and those rights are violated.”⁹ He describes two dimensions of work: an objective sense (technology) and secondly, work in a subjective sense (the human being as the subject of work). He explains that the human being is the subject of work and that work involves self-realization as it is carried out by a free rational agent. In so doing, he means to emphasize the importance of the subjective, in order to overcome a modern tendency of mechanization and instrumentalization of work. He also noted that the general situation of modern work “calls for the discovery of the new meanings of human work.”¹⁰ Positive psychology’s quest for understanding good work when launched into a richer framework for understanding the unity of human activity and their direction towards human flourishing could be a response to that call. Philosophical considerations clarify the link between the two fields of study.

The distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis* gives insights for a deeper meaning of work in its subjective dimension. Terence Irwin, while exploring Aristotle’s notion of happiness, points out these two types of goal directed actions: production (*poiesis*) aims at some end other than production itself, while ‘action’ or ‘activity’, (*praxis*), good action is itself the end.¹¹ Actions in this sense are a means for acquiring virtue and for moving towards happiness.

Work, in as much as it consist of free human actions, greatly shapes the worker’s personality, life and ultimately happiness. Often times, work involves the use and creation of material goods or intellectual information leading to results distinctly separate from the worker and which are perceptible to others. However, while handling these resources, human beings also transform themselves, by way of self-realization and by contributing to their development as rational beings, while exercising their freedom and demonstrating creativity at work. In other words, a person is completely involved in the acts carried out as work and these freely chosen acts in turn leave an effect within their subject even though he transcends his work. One can say that we human beings create ourselves with the actions we choose, we form ourselves by our choices and actions. Thus human creativity is also be expressed when one acts on oneself as a raw material, shaping oneself with actions and choices. In other words, while at work, we not only makes things but “make ourselves”¹² at the same time.

The importance of the subjective dimension of work cannot be over emphasized if one is to create an equilibrium for evaluating the external results of work with the values it adds to the person interiorly. These considerations for the possibility of an interior enrichment of the person at work makes for a robust understanding of work in at least two dimensions: Firstly that of transforming the self with the practice of good acts and acquisition of virtues necessary for good work (or refusing to form good habits and therefore doing bad work and making the self vicious) and

⁹ JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem Excercens*, no. 1.

¹⁰ JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem Excercens*, no. 2.

¹¹ Terence IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics. Volume 1: From Socrates to the Reformation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, 117.

¹² By saying that a person makes himself, I am referring to the fact that he defines his character, and description that one can give of him, by his actions. For example, if I steal, I make myself a thief. My singular or multiple thefts give the world a description of me. This idea of self- creation with one’s actions is expressed by Karol Wojtyła. See Karol WOJTYŁA, *The Acting Person*, D. Reidel, Dordrecht, 1979, 69–71.

secondly that of working for outcomes separate from the self. Both dimensions are however intertwined and inseparable.

Work has an economic value but at the same time, it has another value which supersedes that which is economic, that is its contribution to the workers development. A person's work affects him both interiorly and exteriorly and is a tool for moving him towards his ultimate end. "Work is a good thing for man-a good thing for his humanity-because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense, becomes "more a human being"."¹³

In addition to self-development, work presents an occasion to care for the others. Humans depend on each other for various needs. The exercise of our skills can be a gift to our community and we can receive from other who have other service to render us or other skills to offer. Work can be an opportunity to build one's present community and prepare it for the future generations. As John Paul II says: "Man must work out of regard for others, especially his own family, but also for the society he belongs to, the country of which he is a child, and the whole human family of which he is a member, since he is the heir to the work of generations and at the same time a sharer in building the future of those who will come after him in the succession of history. All this constitutes the moral obligation of work, understood in its wide sense."¹⁴

Furthermore, the self-perfection acquired with the practice of virtues is not only helpful to the acting person; its effects reach those around him. Virtues acquired at work are lived in different aspects of life with one's family and in the community including the workplace. The building blocks of a good society are good individuals. It is therefore understandable that within Aristotelian and ancient Greek thought, virtues have their place within a social context of the city-state and being a good person was considered to be allied to being a good citizen.¹⁵ Thus the development of individuals within the community was prized as something that eventually led to societal development. Although psychology has marked differences from classical philosophy, it provides other insights for human fulfilment and societal development.

Psychology, Optimal Experiences and Good Work

Flow is one of the topics in contemporary psychology which describes the relationship between happiness and the quest for the good with goal oriented actions. Csikszentmihalyi explains the concept of *flow* principally from the perspective of "Positive Psychology"¹⁶ and the development of a 'positive character'¹⁷ by humans. *Flow* is referred to as "*the psychology of optimal experience*."¹⁸

¹³ JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem Excercens*, no. 9.

¹⁴ JOHN PAUL II, *Laborem Excercens*, no. 16.

¹⁵ See Alasdair MACINTYRE, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*, second edition, Duckworth Press, London, 1985, 134.

¹⁶ According to Martin Seligman, Positive psychology focuses on three related topics, the study of positive experiences, the study of positive individual traits and the study of institutions that enable positive experiences and positive traits. See Martin SELIGMAN- Christopher PETERSON, *Character Strengths and Virtues, Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, American Psychological Association, Washington, DC, 2004, 5.

¹⁷ See SELIGMAN, Martin, *Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment*, Nicholas Brealey, London, 2003, 273. The 'Positive Psychology Network' coordinated by Martin

Optimal experiences are situations in which attention can be freely invested to achieve a person's goals. *Flow* is described as a state of consciousness in which a person's state of concentration so focused that it amounts to absolute absorption in an activity. While carrying out activities which give *flow*, both a sense of time and emotion are altered. For Csikszentmihalyi¹⁹, *flow* is an experience which is close to happiness. In spite of these results in his studies, Csikszentmihalyi claims that "if one finds flow with work and with other people one is well on the way toward improving the quality of life as a whole."²⁰ Gardner asserts that "doing good work *feels* good."²¹ He adds that for work to lead to flow, and thus feel good, it ought to have "clear goals, immediate feedback, and a level of challenges that matches our skills."²² When those conditions are present people should feel their work as good and enjoy what they do or find it rewarding.²³ Additionally, such work should have a mission, follow high professional standards and should keep the identity of the worker, his personal integrity and beliefs in sight.

Csikszentmihalyi points out that, in order to reach *flow*, we need the help of others. Learning from the experiences or from stories of others is important to *flow*. Csikszentmihalyi citing Viktor Frankl's book: *Man's Search for Meaning* says that success, like happiness, cannot be pursued. It must ensue as the unintended side-effect of one's personal dedication to a course greater than oneself. The human being should be aware that he is not alone in his search for happiness. He should take the people around him into account in his quest, learning from them and also helping them in their own quest for happiness. In other words, flow includes interaction with others and an interest in their needs.

Although it is not a term used within positive psychology, generativity is a way of expressing a concern for others. Narrative psychologists refer to the concern for the future generations, and the will to leave a positive lasting mark for them, as generativity.²⁴ The human tends to want to leave a legacy behind him. He wants to leave an impact on the world after his demise. In mid-life, there is a tendency for a person to be concerned with the anticipated ending of the life story and such people may be moved to seek to give creative contributions to society. The "generativity script (of personal myths) links the individual personal myths to the collective stories and myths of society as a whole and to the enterprise of promoting and improving human life and the welfare from one generation to the next."²⁵

Seligman consists of three centres: that of *Positive Emotions* -directed by Ed Diener; *Positive Character* -directed by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and positive institutions directed by Kathleen Jamieson.

¹⁸ Mihaly CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*, Harper Perennial, New York, 1990.

¹⁹ Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is a major figure in the studies of *flow* and of fulfilling human activity.

²⁰ CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, *Flow*, 143.

²¹ GARDNER, *Good Work*, 5.

²² GARDNER, *Good Work*, 5.

²³ One may however ask if one can enjoy work even when one does not have immediate positive feedback. For example when work is for a bigger future goal which will not be attainable soon.

²⁴ Theory and research on generativity are described in detail in a book edited by Dan P. MCADAMS and Ed de St. AUBIN, *Generativity and Adult Development: How and Why We Care for the Next Generation*, APA Press, Washington DC, 1998.

²⁵ Dan P. MCADAMS, *The Stories We Live By: Personal Myths and the Making of the Self*, Guilford Press, New York, 1997, 14.

Generativity shows an adult's concern for and commitment to promoting the well-being of youth and future generations through involvement in parenting, teaching, mentoring and other creative contributions that aim to leave a positive legacy of the self for the future. It is a complex psychosocial construct that can be expressed through social demand, inner desires, conscious concerns, beliefs, commitments, behaviours, and the overall way in which an adult makes narrative sense of his or her life.²⁶ One may propose that generativity can be a motivating factor for work and causing optimal experiences.

For Csikszentmihalyi and other positive psychologists who describe good work, in the bible account of creation, work is a punishment for Adam's ambition.²⁷ However, his studies showed that many people experience *flow* more at work than in leisurely activities but they are not content with their work. Those findings did not correlate with Csikszentmihalyi's interpretation of the passage in the book of Genesis. From Csikszentmihalyi's studies, one of the causes of this discontentment is a tendency to see work as an imposition, a constraint, an infringement of freedom²⁸ an attitude he attributes to religious beliefs. Therefore, within his description of flow, he seeks to correct the bible.

How then is one to reconcile the affirmation of *Laborem Excercens* in which work is natural to humans, with a negative concept of work? In other words, how can a worker relate to his work such that he finds that activity fulfilling? There is the question of understanding the role of work within the broad context of his life goals and aspirations. Uniting human actions spread throughout different aspects of life with teleological philosophy, specifically Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophical tradition, is an option for resolving the apparent conflict between work and self-fulfilment or happiness. Additionally, narrative philosophy within that tradition could facilitate that understanding.

Work as an Integral Part of Life: An Activity for Achieving the Ultimate End

Human beings act for ends and those ends are in a hierarchy.²⁹ One may act for a proximate end which is but a step towards a greater goal which in turn may be a step towards a greater good and so on, until one ultimately reaches the Supreme Good.³⁰ Aristotle asked this question: "Will not then a knowledge of this Supreme Good be also of great practical importance for the conduct of life? Will it not better enable us to attain our proper object, like archers having a target to aim at?"³¹ Reframing Aristotle's question today in relation to our topic, we can ask: Would it not be

²⁶ This information is available on the official website of the Foley Center for the Study of Lives: <http://www.sesp.northwestern.edu/foley/research/generativity/> (27.8.2017).

²⁷ He quotes Genesis 3:17. See CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, *Flow*, 144-145.

²⁸ See CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, *Flow*, 160.

²⁹ Aristotle explored this hierarchy of goals in human actions in the book 1 of *Nicomachean Ethics*.

³⁰ Aristotle regards human life as consisting of aims and ends and describes the ultimate end or Supreme Good at which all men ought to aim. He describes this end as eudaimonia and this word is usually translated as 'happiness' and it involves an activity which is a knowledge and contemplation of the Supreme Good. Interpreters of Aristotle generally find this translation of "eudaimonia" as "happiness" unsatisfactory as happiness in common language describes a feeling whereas Aristotle's eudaimonia means a certain kind of activity which is in accord with virtue. For more details see the introductory notes in ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, (translated by David Ross), Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989.

³¹ ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1094a 22.

appropriate to keep the ultimate end in mind when performing each of our daily activities including work?

Similarly, even though Thomas Aquinas, distinguishes between *finis totius vitae*, *finis operis* and *finis operantis*, these ends of activities are interconnected. The ultimate end of one's life is for him the highest point of reference for a morally upright life. Human actions, also expressed as work, are a means for people to reach their ultimate end, the end of the whole human life. It is therefore necessary to have the ultimate end in view if one wants to act and work well. "In the making of a work of art it is directed to a particular end as is thought out. In moral activity however, it is directed to the common end of the whole of human living. Particular ends are subordinate to the common end."³² This common end which humans aspire for—true happiness—must be kept in sight with each act and thus it forms a constant point of reference for him. One can say that work, in as much as it involves free human actions is one of those acts with which a human being directs himself towards his ultimate end.

It may be challenging to explain a nexus between separate actions and different aspects of human life. Some contemporary philosophers within the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition use narrative philosophy to explain the dynamics of human life as it is composed of various temporarily dispersed actions be they work, leisure social life etc. MacIntyre is perhaps the most important author in narrativity within that tradition and this paper will refer mainly to his works.

Contemporary narrative philosophy proposes that the self is best understood when seen as a narrative self. The objective meaning of each human action and the meaning of human life as a whole is best understood when viewed as a narrative. The acting subject defines himself and describes his identity to other people with his actions within his personal narrative. Theorists affirm that narrative is embedded in human nature and is constitutive of being human.³³ We knowingly, or unknowingly live out narratives as our lives have that structure. Our ability to narratively recount our experiences to others or to ourselves points to the reality of our narrative living. Even though we may think of the storyteller as key to narratives, some stories may not have oral narrators but are simply acted out by characters. In such narratives, the transmission of ideas is achieved through audiences' observation of the actions of the characters. Acting out a narrative is what the narrative self does. As MacIntyre explains, every particular life consists of particular parts and projects which are the enacted narrative of that life.³⁴ He also says that the narrative identity of a person presents a concept of "a self whose unity resides in the unity of a narrative which links birth to life to death as a narrative beginning to middle to end."³⁵

With the view of narrative self-understanding presented above, an "application of narratology to moral philosophy contends that human fulfilment or happiness may only be achieved by living an intelligible, coherent, unified, meaningful and successful story. According to such a moral philosophy, we are all artists constantly engaged in the most important task possible: crafting our

³² THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa Theology*, I-II q21 a. 2.

³³ See MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*, 143-144. Also see Robert A. GAHL Jr., "*Human Nature, Poetic Narrative, and Moral Agency*", Jacques Maritain Center: Thomistic Institute, 2001.

³⁴ See LÍDIA FIGUEIREDO, *La Filosofía Narrativa de Alasdair MacIntyre*, EUNSA, Pamplona, 1999, 77.

³⁵ MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*, 205; see also Alasdair MACINTYRE, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry*, 197.

own selves by building the narratives of our lives around everyday actions.”³⁶ From the above quote, every action is a part of our self-created narrative. As autonomous agents, at work we also weave an important part of our life story. We can consciously choose to build one kind of story or another, we can choose to make a good story or not to as we pursue happiness even at work.

However, in order to consciously make the right decisions that lead to happiness, one needs to know what the appropriate standards according to which one should live are. People need reference points proper to a human being’s constitutive identity which could serve as a guide in the task of self-development. In teleological ethics, human nature³⁷ understood in a metaphysical sense gives these coordinates for action. For example, MacIntyre speaks about the difference between “man-as-he-happens-to-be” and “man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realised-his-essential-nature”. The reference which MacIntyre makes to the human being’s essential nature as a guide for constructing one’s personal narrative, could be understood as a call to listen to nature and the objective truth of who a human being essentially is. Thus, human nature and the laws inscribed in it are the guides to what a successful personal narrative should be.

MacIntyre adds that the transition from the former state to the latter pre-supposes some metaphysical concepts: potentiality and act, and some account of the essence of a human being as a rational animal and above all some account of the human *telos*.³⁸ Thus, as a good Aristotelian-Thomist, MacIntyre’s approach to ethics is characteristically teleological, in that it interprets individual actions in terms of their ultimate end (*telos*). According to MacIntyre, that which is the good thing to do is that which is virtuous, and that which is virtuous is nothing else than that which will effectively lead to human fulfilment specifically *eudaimonia*.³⁹ Only in reference to the *telos* can one speak of an accomplished or unaccomplished life.⁴⁰ Teleology and happiness are two important elements in MacIntyre’s analysis of human actions within narratives. These two elements, understood in the MacIntyrean sense, can enrich psychology of work and satisfaction.

Teleology in regard to ultimate purpose of existence often leads to religious questions which are often resolved with the acceptance of the Supreme Good as a Being to whom humans owe their existence. Thomas Hibbs, a contemporary Thomistic scholar affirms that “Aquinas inscribes metaphysics, even in its mode as divine science, within a comprehensive narrative of creation and redemption, the centerpiece of which is a series of historical events unknown to, and unknowable by, philosophy”⁴¹ From Hibbs, view, every event revolves around human beings, redemption and a salvific plan by the creator. One can infer that the narrative of each life can fit into a greater one which is guided by divine providence towards eternal beatitude or happiness, a goal which some thinkers liken to *eudaimonia*.

³⁶ See GAHL, *Human Nature, Poetic Narrative, and Moral Agency*.

³⁷ Aristotle’s conception of an objective human good derived from a foundation in human nature is generally absent from many modern moral theories. See Terence IRWIN, *The Development of Ethics. Volume 1: From Socrates to the Reformation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2007, 114.

³⁸ See MACINTYRE, *After Virtue*, 52.

³⁹ MacIntyre’s interest in *eudaimonia* is Aristotelian.

⁴⁰ See Jorge PEÑA VIAL, *Poética Del Tiempo: ética Y Estética de La Narración*, Editorial Universitaria, Santiago de Chile, 2002, 93.

⁴¹ Thomas HIBBS, *Aquinas, Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion*, Indiana University Press, Indianana, 2007, 163.

The quest for eudaimonia is however not a solitary quest as our decisions often affects many other people. The quest involves others individuals to which one is accountable. Authors affirm that moral agency requires the construction of one's own narrative within one's community, and as a member of that community.⁴² MacIntyre affirms that the human being's practical reason is developed through participation in a set of relationships with others who contribute to our education, growth and maturity.⁴³ Human work, development and flourishing takes place within his community. Being an active part of a community implies working together with others for a common good. Human beings depend on others for reaching self-fulfilment. Interestingly, it is important for humans to acknowledge this dependence in order to be ready to accept help from others. We are dependent rational animals.

This take on narrative philosophy explains that the fullness of human flourishing can be reached through virtuous interactions within a community. Often times, these interactions will be in the work place, a service to the society. Within such a community, the human being can learn to develop virtues while following examples and advice from models and mentors. "Each person lives within a fraction of a wider time span attributable to the life of a community. Thus, his activity forms part of the broader phase of his community and he constitutes an element of the history of the future generations."⁴⁴ However, each of life's aspects including work, is a contribution to the narrative of that community.

Conclusions

The concept of happiness which positive psychology presents with optimal experiences is a helpful but limited one in as much as it makes no reference to the ultimate good of the human being qua human being. It is difficult to explain how flow, cut off from the "Supreme Good" which could satisfy humans desires can lead to full human flourishing. One can launch flow into a richer context in which the Supreme Good unites all the quests and motivates work and other actions giving coherence to personal narratives.

The sustainability of flow and peak performances may be more possible and plausible if flow is set within a wide teleological framework similar to the one Aquinas does by putting the *finis operans* and *finis operantis* in contact with *finis totius vitae*. For that nexus, work is a means to attaining one's ultimate end and not as an end in itself or not seeing work as one's ultimate end). Such robust framework brings a deeper understanding of *Laborem Excercens* subjective dimension of work to the forefront of evaluating work. That integration also stems from the Aristotelian dimensions of *praxis* through which work perfects the person and thus may aid the contemplation of the good. With such an integration, one can see that satisfaction with work, even though it is aided by optimal experiences, is much more than *flow*. Good work then goes beyond enjoyable subjective experiences to a more profound value of the contribution of work to the highest good of the person.

⁴² See Robert A. GAHL Jr., "God in Dramatic Narrative". The article is published in Italian as "Etica Narrativa e Conoscenza di Dio" in *Dio e il Senso dell'Esistenza Umana*, Armando Editore, Roma, 1999, 189-202.

⁴³ See Alasdair MACINTYRE, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Human Beings Need the Virtues*, Open Court, Chicago, 1999, 99.

⁴⁴ Omowumi OGUNYEMI, *Unity of Autobiographical Temporality of the Narrative Self in Contemporary Psychology and Neurosciences: A Philosophical Study*, EDUSC, 2017, 186.

That contribution may be expressed initially as a generative trait in interactions between adults who look beyond themselves to care for others. However, a concern for the true good of others their fulfilment *qua* human being is a richest form of generativity.

As earlier noted, John Paul II emphasizes that human beings were created to work and that work is not a punishment for sins. This Christian understanding of sacred scripture about work and human life is misinterpreted by Csikszentmihalyi who claims that the bible states that work is a punishment for sin. Based on his interpretation of the book of Genesis, Csikszentmihalyi responds to his own interpretation of Genesis (in which he sees human work is a punishment) that work is not necessarily unpleasant and therefore cannot be a punishment for crimes. Flow psychologists admit that most people are dissatisfied with work even when they seem to have more optimal experiences at work. Such dissatisfaction brings up a question of how to give a deeper meaning to work so as to find it fulfilling and satisfying.

From the previous discussions, one can approach the challenge in various ways. Firstly from the deeper understanding of work as part of the proximate ends which leads one to a final end. Narrative philosophy is a tool for describing the quest of directing all human activity, including work, to one's ultimate end and true good which is fully satisfying. An intermediate phase to that end is seeing work as service to one's community and as a legacy for a future generation. In that line, one can situate work as part of the narrative of creation, in which a human being, while perfecting himself, puts his talents to use and contributes to the unfolding of human history and plays a role in the dynamics of divine providence which guides history.

The dualism seen in some interpretations of Greco-Roman thought that separates work from the possibility of contemplation of the good and happiness, should be discarded. As earlier discussed, work is an avenue for acquiring virtue, self-development and it can be a path to happiness and the human being's ultimate end.

The value of human work stems from the dignity of the one who carries it out: a person, a conscious and free subject, a subject that creates himself with his action including his work. Work is an important means of auto-realization and self-perfection; a manifestation of love for the others and a means for him to show his concern for the progress of society. Diligent work is work which is well done out of love. Humans work in order to cater for the needs of loved ones, to raise and support his family. All these are a contribution towards a good greater than the self.

Most people spend a significant portion of their life at work and that time could be an occasion for the practicing virtues and for holistic growth. For example, work done for the good of the other person (viewing work service) makes a person even more human in as much as it demands an exercise of charity. The family of benefits directly from work done as service, carried out as a way of loving others. Such benefits often reach the whole community, contributing to its development both in the present and in building the future.

Understanding work as a crucial part of one's narrative could broaden one's vision of human life and shed more light on how to reach human fulfilment through good work. Good work however goes beyond the current description given by positive psychologists as it reaches to the nature of

human beings for a rich description of flourishing. It would involve channelling all one's energy and work towards achieving true happiness, eudaimonia or *beatitudo*, a task which involves generative traits.

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