

Markets, Firms and Practices*

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1 The rise of the market and the decline of practices

Is it possible for economic production conducted in a market system to possess the character of a *practice*, as MacIntyre defines this concept in *After Virtue*?¹ Clearly, MacIntyre himself thinks not. I shall argue that there are reasons for doubting this judgment, and hence for a more optimistic view of the possible relations between markets and practices.

The claim that the market is antithetical to practices plays an important part in a central thesis of *After Virtue*: that in modern societies, by contrast with their predecessors, social activities with the character of practices occupy an increasingly marginal position. Influenced strongly by Karl Polanyi's historical account in *The Great Transformation*, MacIntyre sees the emergence of the 'self-regulated market' as crucial to the transition from pre-modern to modern society, undermining the practice-like manner in which productive activities had previously been conducted, and creating a distinct and dominant sphere of social life largely devoid of practices.²

Indeed, it is this 'material' history which arguably underpins the explicitly 'philosophical' history presented in *After Virtue*. In particular, what is deemed to be the 'failure of the Enlightenment project' may be seen as the failure of a project itself motivated by the need to re-define the problem of morality in the radically different circumstances of a market society. Likewise, the supposed decline of moral and political philosophy, from its Aristotelian and Thomist high points through to their Kantian, utilitarian and modern liberal successors, mirrors a process of social decline in which practices have been pushed to the margins of modern society.³

Nonetheless, the question with which I am concerned here can be answered largely independently of these historical claims and contrasts. That the market is antithetical to practices does not imply that some historically prior form of production was any the less so; similarly, the marginal position of practices in

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¹ "By a 'practice' I am going to mean any socially established cooperative activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realised in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended." (MacIntyre 1981, p. 175). For an elaboration of this definition see Keat 1991b, section 2.

² On the significance of Polanyi's work for *After Virtue*, see the exchange between MacIntyre (1984) and Wartofsky (1984). The marginality of practices in modern society is also, for MacIntyre, manifested in the non-practice-like character of the household/family and of political life. But in the former case, this is arguably seen as due to the relocation of production outwith the household consequent upon the development of the market (see MacIntyre 1981, p. 211); in the latter, to the spread of market-based conceptions of individual agency (see MacIntyre 1988, ch. XVII). However, I do not wish to imply that, for MacIntyre, the market alone is responsible for the marginal status of practices: there are other features of modern society which are also significant. Consequently, my evaluation of his claims about practices and the market addresses only one element in his overall thesis about practices and modernity, albeit a central one.

³ Most commentators on *After Virtue* have focused on its philosophical claims and 'history'. Amongst the few who have engaged with its socio-economic assumptions, see especially Poole 1991 and McMyllor 1994; also the Introduction to Knight 1998.

modern societies is compatible with their marginality in pre-modern societies also. So even if one agreed with MacIntyre's view of practices and the market, one would not have to endorse his practice-based contrasts between modern and pre-modern societies. 'Things may be bad now, but maybe they always have been' - albeit for different reasons.⁴

But why should it *matter* if the market is practice-antithetical; more generally, why should the marginality or otherwise of practices in any society be so crucial to their critical evaluation? Clearly, MacIntyre regards the currently marginal status of practices as something greatly to be deplored. But one can distinguish two, at least partly independent reasons for this. According to the first, the marginality of practices is responsible for the absence of coherent moral and political discourse in contemporary societies. The argument for this hinges on the claims that a coherent moral discourse depends on the widespread acceptance of a certain conception of the virtues, and that practices - along with traditions and narrative unity - are a necessary condition for the acquisition and exercise of these.

But although this concern with the conditions for coherent moral discourse is clearly central to MacIntyre's overall position in *After Virtue*, there is also a second, and arguably more straightforward reason for deploring the marginality of practices. This is that people's engagement in practices is a significant source of their own well-being.⁵ They develop and learn how to exercise the capacities required of them by the practice's standards; they derive satisfaction from contributing to its activities and the realization of its goals; they appreciate and enjoy its internal goods, and they have a strong sense of sharing all this with others who are similarly motivated and engaged. That in these and related ways the well-being of 'practitioners' is likely to be enhanced seems a plausible claim, whether or not one espouses some essentialist theory of 'the good life for humans'. So if the market denies people such opportunities, at least in the economic domain, this would surely count strongly against it.

Now it might seem quite obvious that the market is incompatible with the conduct of economic production as a practice. For a crucial element in MacIntyre's conception of practices is their central concern with internal goods, which are defined and judged in relation to each practice's specific standards of excellence, as distinct from external goods such as money, power and status. By contrast, it would appear that the market is a paradigmatic example of social activities based exclusively on the use and pursuit of external goods, and is thus entirely at odds with the essential characteristics of a practice.

⁴ For example, even if the market undermines the conduct of production as a practice because it relies on the external good of *money*, perhaps *other* external goods, such as power and status, undermined this in pre-modern societies. Further, if the 'centrality' of practices implies that they play a large part in the lives of most people, is one really to believe that they were central in, for instance, the much celebrated ancient Athens, given the position of slaves and women? For sceptical responses to MacIntyre's view of practices in pre-modern societies, see Miller 1994 and Mason 1996.

⁵ If one 'reads' the discussion of practices in chapters 14-16 of *After Virtue* with this latter concern in mind, the relationship between practices and the virtues - especially those of justice, truthfulness and courage - is the converse of that relevant to the former: instead of practices being valued because they make the virtues possible, the virtues are valued because they make practices possible. In what follows, I leave aside the important question of whether the market is antithetical to the virtues necessary for practices - or indeed, according to some, necessary for the market *itself* to operate effectively: that the market may undermine its own conditions of existence has been a recurrent theme amongst (especially) its conservative critics.

But this brief dismissal of the compatibility of markets and practices cannot be sustained, since it ignores some important claims by MacIntyre about the nature and role of what he calls *institutions*, which are said to be both necessary for the existence of practices and yet themselves based on the use of external goods. Thus:

"Practices must not be confused with institutions. Chess, physics and medicine are practices; chess clubs, laboratories, universities and hospitals are institutions. Institutions are characteristically and necessarily concerned with what I have called external goods. They are involved in acquiring money and other material goods; they are structured in terms of power and status, and they distribute money, power and status as rewards. Nor could they do otherwise if they are to sustain not only themselves, but also the practices of which they are the bearers. For no practice can survive for any length of time unsustained by institutions." (MacIntyre 1981, p. 181).

Ideally, then, the use of external goods in an institutionally organised practice should be such as to enhance its ability to pursue and develop its particular goals, to operate in accordance with its standards, and to generate for its participants the shared appreciation and enjoyment of its internal goods. But in MacIntyre's view this positive role for institutions is difficult to ensure, since external goods always have the potential to undermine the integrity of practices, which are thus dependent on, yet inherently vulnerable to, their institutional organisation:

"... so intimate is the relationship of practices to institutions - and consequently of the goods external to the goods internal to the practice in question - that institutions and practices characteristically form a single causal order in which the ideals and creativity of the practice are always vulnerable to the acquisitiveness of the institution, in which the cooperative care for the common goods of the practice is always vulnerable to the competitiveness of the institution". (*Ibid.*, p. 181).

So if one is to show that the market is inimical to economic production being conducted as a practice, one can appeal neither to the 'mere fact' that a market economy relies on the use of external goods, nor to the 'mere potential' that this implies for practice-antithetical effects, since in both cases this will be true of *any* institutionally organised practice. Rather, one must show that the specific ways in which external goods are deployed in the market is such that they make these damaging effects more or less impossible to avoid. But this, I shall argue, is far from easy to demonstrate.⁶

Before doing so, however, it is important to clarify an ambiguity that may arise in talking about 'the institution(s) of the market'; this will enable the question of whether the market is compatible with production as a practice to be given a more precise formulation. At one level of analysis, one may think of 'the market system as a whole' as a social institution, involving the contractual exchange of goods for money (both between producers and consumers and - in capitalism - between workers and owners); legally

⁶ Notice also that showing the market is an inappropriate institutional form for *some* kinds of practices does not show it is inappropriate for *all* practices. Nor can one assume there is any *single* institutional form appropriate to *every* kind of practice: cf. the discussion of scientific institutions in Essay 5 above.

instituted property rights; competition between autonomous productive enterprises; the determination of prices by supply and demand, and so on.

But at another level analysis, the productive activities which take place within the broad framework provided by *this* social institution are themselves conducted within what are quite different - and, I shall suggest, potentially varying - kinds of 'institution', namely individual *firms* or productive enterprises. It is these which correspond to MacIntyre's examples of 'institutions' in the first of the two passages quoted above, namely chess-clubs, laboratories, hospitals and the like. So the question of whether production in a market economy can possess the characteristics of a practice can be reformulated in the following way: does the *market*, as a macro-level institution, make it (pretty much) impossible for *firms* to possess an institutional form compatible with their conduct of economic production as a practice?

To answer this question, one needs first to explicate more fully the characteristic features of productive activities when conducted as practices. One way of doing this would be to start from the general definition of practices in *After Virtue* and work out what this would imply for the nature of productive practices. But in a more recent paper, MacIntyre has himself provided an illuminating account of what these would be like, and I shall focus mainly on this.⁷

2 Two ways of fishing

MacIntyre proceeds here by contrasting two different kinds of fishing crews, which I shall call the 'practice crew' and the 'non-practice crew'. He depicts the non-practice crew in the following terms:

"A fishing crew may be organized and understood as a purely technical and economic means to a productive end, whose aim is only or over-ridingly to satisfy as profitably as possible some market's demand for fish. Just as those managing its organization aim at a high level of profits, so also the individual crew members aim at a high level of reward. Not only the skills, but also the qualities of character valued by those who manage the organization, will be those well designed to achieve a high level of profitability. And each individual at work as a member of such a fishing crew will value those qualities of character in her or himself or in others which are apt to produce a high level of reward for her or himself." (MacIntyre 1994, pp. 284-5).

He goes on to represent the practice crew in the following way:

"Consider by contrast a crew whose members may well have initially joined for the sake of their wage or other share of the catch, but who have acquired from the rest of the crew an understanding of and devotion to excellence in fishing and to excellence in playing one's part as a member of such a crew. Excellence of the requisite kind is a matter of skills and qualities of character required both for the fishing

⁷ See MacIntyre 1994, especially pp. 284-6. In what follows I occasionally supplement this account with other features of practices noted in chapters 14-16 of *After Virtue*, and with some of the reasons MacIntyre presents there for regarding the market as incompatible with practices (see especially pp. 210-13). However, I exclude consideration of his related critique of 'the manager' (see chs 7 and 8): MacIntyre may be right to argue that the claims to scientific expertise he attributes to managers are unfounded, but I do not believe that managers need make such claims in order to legitimate their role, nor that they typically do so.

and for achievement of the goods of the common life of such a crew. The dependence of each member on the qualities of character and skills of others will be accompanied by recognition that from time to time one's own life will be in danger and that whether one drowns or not may depend on someone else's courage. And the consequent concern of each member of the crew for others, if it is to have the stamp of genuine concern, will characteristically have to extend to those for whom those others care: the members of their immediate families... and perhaps beyond them to the whole society of a fishing village. When someone dies at sea, fellow crew members, their families and the rest of the fishing community will share a common affliction and common responsibilities." (*Ibid.*, p. 285).

Further, because of these differences of attitude and motivation between the members of the two crews, they will respond differently to situations in which the continuation of their activities becomes less attractive in financial terms. In the case of the non-practice crew:

"When... the level of reward is insufficiently high... the individual whose motivations are of this kind will have from her or his point of view the best of reasons for leaving this particular crew or even taking to another trade. And when the level of profitability is insufficiently high, relative to comparative returns on investment elsewhere, management will from its point of view have no good reason not to fire crew members, and owners will have no good reason not to invest their money elsewhere." (*Ibid.*, p. 285)

By contrast, for members of the practice crew:

"... the goods to be achieved in attaining excellence in the activities of fishing and in one's role within the crew will, for as long as possible, outweigh the economic hardships of low wages and periods of bad catches or low prices for fish. Of course no fishing crew can ever completely ignore the economic dimensions of their enterprise. But we have enough experience of members of crews preferring to endure the hardships of economic bad times in their trade, when they could have earned far higher wages elsewhere, for us to know that the subordination of economic goods to the goods of practice can be a rewarding reality. For members of such crews, continuing allegiance to one's fellow crew members and to the way of life of a fishing community will therefore not be conditional upon the economic rewards being such as to enable one to satisfy one's individual antecedent desires, those that one brought with one when first initiated into the life of a fishing crew."⁸

Clearly, MacIntyre's depiction of the non-practice crew is intended not only to provide a contrast with what it would be like for productive activity to be conducted as a practice, but also to suggest that this is just how one can generally expect such activities to be conducted in a market economy.⁹ Indeed, so

⁸ MacIntyre 1994, pp. 285-6. As the phrase "a rewarding reality" indicates, MacIntyre regards the practice crew's willingness to 'carry on despite economic hardship' as something which *benefits* its members: it is not a matter of their sacrificing their own well-being for the sake of other members of their local community, since an essential element of their own well-being consists in their belonging to that community and sharing in its collective life. Correspondingly, the non-practice crew's willingness to 'pull out' indicates the comparative poverty of their lives in this respect.

⁹ MacIntyre would also regard centralised economic planning as inimical to production as a practice, but I shall ignore this here: his non-practice crew is clearly intended to illustrate the nature of productive activities in market economies. For reasons explained in the Introduction to this volume (pp. xx-yy above), I shall also ignore those elements in his depiction of the non-practice crew which imply a distinctively *capitalist* form of the market, though it could plausibly be

immediately recognisable is this as a picture of the typical market enterprise that it may be tempting to think there is no need for any further argument here - that the market's incompatibility with production as a practice is already established. But this would be too hasty a conclusion to draw, since the sense of familiarity which it relies on may itself be seriously misleading.

More specifically, it might be suggested that this sense of familiarity is due, not to the fact that this is what firms in a market economy are actually like, but instead to their typically being represented in this way by orthodox economic theorists, despite the fact that *actual* firms are *not* like this. On this view, MacIntyre could be criticised for taking at face-value what are theoretical *misrepresentations* of 'the firm in a market economy'. Further, it might then be argued that a more realistic account of such firms - one that is both empirically grounded and properly 'social' and 'institutional' in its theoretical approach - will lead one to see them as a good deal closer to his picture of production as a practice.¹⁰

But although there is much to be said for this kind of critical response to MacIntyre, it should not be taken too far, since it seems hard to deny that the sense of familiarity generated by his account of the non-practice crew is partly grounded in the actual character of at least many firms in a market economy. What might then be suggested, instead, is that there is a significant degree of (actual and potential) *variability* in the extent to which firms may possess such characteristics, and likewise in their possession of practice-like ones. On this view, what is wrong with their standard theoretical depiction is not that this bears *no* relation to reality, but that it misrepresents as universal, unvarying and necessary what may in fact be specific, variable and contingent.

It is this suggestion that I shall now explore. I shall begin by considering the kinds of motivations, attitudes and relationships that may obtain amongst those working in a market enterprise. I shall then go on to consider the nature of the competitive relationships between such enterprises. In each case I shall argue that the market is not inherently incompatible with at least many of the characteristics of (appropriately institutionalised) productive practices; rather, it is compatible both with these and their non-practice-like counterparts.

3 'Market' motives and relationships

Let us assume, for the moment, that a market system requires firms to adopt as their exclusive goal the maximisation of profits, so that they are necessarily engaged in the self-interested pursuit of this particular external good. I shall later question this assumption. But it is important to recognise that it does not, in any case, imply that the *members* of such firms must likewise be oriented exclusively to their own interests, specified in terms of external goods. For firms are collective entities, and from the fact that a collective entity possesses a certain attribute, it does not follow that all or any of its constituent elements must

argued that this is more likely to be inimical to production as a practice than a non-capitalist market economy. For an argument to this effect in the case of cooperative enterprises in a market socialist system, see Mason 1996; see also the discussion of this issue in Section 2 of Essay 7 below.

¹⁰ See Hodgson 1988 for a sustained institutionalist critique of neo-classical economics; also Holton 1992 on the contribution to such a critique from economic sociology. As Hodgson implies in a later paper (Hodgson 1993), the kind of 'institutionalist' approach he favours is to be distinguished from the 'new' institutionalism associated with theorists such as Williamson (1975, 1985).

likewise possess this.¹¹ The attribute may instead be an 'emergent property' of the collective entity, and the relevant attributes of its constituent elements may be quite different from this.

This point is a purely formal one, but its potential significance in substantive terms can be seen if one considers MacIntyre's depiction of the non-practice fishing crew. Its members are said to regard and act towards one another in purely self-interested, instrumental terms: each is concerned with others only to the extent that this may aid them in pursuing their own external rewards, and the virtues of justice, courage and honesty are wholly absent. But it is far from clear that a productive enterprise engaged in the self-interested pursuit of its own financial success in a market economy would be best served by its members displaying such attributes.

Indeed, MacIntyre's non-practice crew members might well be seen as a manager's nightmare: their single-minded pursuit of their own (material) interests will play havoc in any organization requiring high degrees of cooperation, mutual respect and commitment to its collective goals. So if, as MacIntyre puts it, "the qualities of character valued by those who manage the organization will be those well designed to achieve a high level of profitability" (1994, p. 285), it is hard to see why they would not instead value, and hence prefer to cultivate, the qualities displayed by members of the practice crew. For they see themselves as engaging in a common enterprise; they admire and recognise each other's contributions to this, and the skills and virtues of character they bring to bear upon it; they act courageously even when this puts their own lives at risk, and so on.¹²

Of course, the fact that this might be preferable does not show that it is possible to achieve. Indeed some would argue that something *like* the situation facing the manager of the non-practice crew is unavoidable, given 'the truth about humans' represented by the model of *homo economicus*. But although this model continues to inform the work of many economists, including those concerned with the analysis of social relationships within market enterprises, there are good grounds for doubting both its general veracity and its specific application in that context. A more plausible view would be to regard both the extent to which individuals operate in self-interested rather than cooperative ways, and the particular 'content' of those interests, as influenced strongly both by specific and variable features of a firm's internal organisation and by wider cultural factors.¹³

¹¹ This point is often obscured by the tendency to treat firms as if they were individuals. But at some levels of analysis the relevant economic agents are firms, not individuals, and the question of what the former's pursuit of their own interests requires or allows on the part of the latter should not be answered by mistakenly identifying the two. Relatedly, considerable difficulties have been encountered by neo-classical theorists in explaining why firms exist at all in market systems: for critical discussion of various attempts to do so, see Perrow 1986, ch. 7, Hodgson 1988, ch. 9, and Best 1990, ch. 4.

¹² MacIntyre implies that such willingness to risk one's life when a fellow crew-member falls overboard would not be displayed by the non-practice, market crew. I doubt whether this is so, empirically. However, I also doubt whether much can be inferred from this, since the attitudes towards one another of those whose work constantly puts them at the mercy of natural forces are arguably *sui generis*.

¹³ For criticism of the neo-classical model of *homo economicus*, see Sen 1977, Hodgson 1988, Part Two and Holton 1992, ch. 4. 'Principal-agent' theorists such as Alchian and Demsetz (1972; see also Fama 1980) have attempted to analyse intra-firm relationships on this basis: see Perrow 1986, ch. 7 for a critical response, including discussion of how different organizational forms affect the extent to which people operate as self-interested individuals rather than cooperative team-members. The key neo-classical assumptions about individual motivation are preserved in Williamson's (1975) path-breaking development of 'transactions-costs' analysis to remedy the neo-classicists' failure to understand firms: for criticisms from various perspectives see Ouchi 1980, Granovetter 1985, Perrow 1986, ch. 7, and

In referring here to the 'content' of individuals' interests, I have in mind that what is problematic may be not so much the neo-classical assumption of 'self-interest', but the unduly narrow conception of this as the maximisation of income. This is how MacIntyre represents the members of the non-practice crew, who are presumed therefore to have no reason to stay if there are better prospects for acquiring this external good elsewhere. But there is plenty of evidence that income acquisition is not the only significant motive of those working in market enterprises. This is not because they are motivated instead by altruism, but because there are many other interests which they may wish to satisfy - and to varying extents, succeed in satisfying - through their work.¹⁴ Nor, conversely, is a concern for external goods altogether absent amongst the members of MacIntyre's practice-crew: even for them, there will be a point at which their incomes are insufficient to 'allow' them to continue.

The points made so far go some way to challenge MacIntyre's picture of the motivations, attitudes and relationships to be expected of those working in market enterprises. However, they do not show that what may be present instead will possess the characteristics associated with engagement in a genuine productive practice. This is so for at least two reasons.

First, what replaces or qualifies the exclusive pursuit and enjoyment of external goods will not necessarily be that of the internal goods of a practice. For these are available only if the productive activities concerned have their own 'standards of excellence', by reference to which the meaning and value of what can be achieved through these activities is defined and judged. Without such standards, there will be no internal goods for the participants to experience. They may enjoy, for example, the development and exercise of their technical skills and abilities, or their social relations with one another; but this is not sufficient for them to be involved in a genuine practice.

Second, the kinds of loyalty and cooperation which may be displayed by people working in a market enterprise are not necessarily those of participants in a productive practice. This is especially so if the former are based primarily on commitment to the success of the particular enterprise concerned. For it is a requirement of any activity's being a genuine practice that its participants, despite often belonging to distinct groups or organisations - to different firms, laboratories, clubs etc - have a clear sense of engagement in a shared activity, with common goals and standards of excellence.¹⁵ But this will be lacking

Lazonick 1991. Lazonick might be seen as arguing that neo-classical analysis is only applicable to the kinds of firms which have tended to predominate in the Anglo-American variant of capitalism, which he claims is inferior to others in its comparative lack of dynamism, performance in product innovation and so on. Starting with Dore's (1973) classic study, a huge literature has developed on the differences between Anglo-American and Japanese capitalism, much of its focussing on the latter's less individualistic character and the connections of this with broader 'cultural' differences between the two; more generally, see Hampden-Turner and Trompenar 1993 on different capitalisms and their respective cultures. On related issues about the nature and role of *trust* in market economies, see Fukuyama 1995 and Dore 1998.

¹⁴ Likewise, although labour contracts make the performance of work conditional on the receipt of pay, this does not imply that only the latter motivates the former. On 'non-economic' motives for work, see Scitovsky 1986d and Lane 1991, Part VI; but see also the discussion of Lane in Essay 7 below, especially his claim that the market generally fails to provide workers with such non-economic satisfactions. For criticism of the narrow conception of (self-)interest in public choice theory, see O'Neill 1998, ch. 12.

¹⁵ So in MacIntyre's example, the relevant practice is *fishing*, not 'fishing by this crew'; indeed the participants in this practice should presumably include the members of *all* fishing crews, not just those from the local community.

when the sense of commonality is restricted to members of a single such organisation, who share a commitment only to *it*, and not to the practice more generally.¹⁶

Indeed, it might be argued that the market is inherently incompatible with this feature of practices, given the essentially *competitive* character of the relationships between firms in a market economy. Far from viewing each other as participating in a shared activity, admiring one another's displays of excellence and so on, the respective members of competing market enterprises must instead regard one another with attitudes of rivalry or hostility, seeing each other's success as antithetical to their own, and exploiting one another's weaknesses to their own advantage.

But this would be too hasty a conclusion to draw from the 'competitive' nature of market systems. For although MacIntyre talks of practices as *cooperative* activities, he also accepts the possibility of *competition* between participants in a practice, including competition between different (institutionally organised) groups of practitioners.¹⁷ However, he clearly regards the specific kind of competition involved in practices, which he terms *emulation*, as differing from that to be found in the market. I shall now consider how far this contrast can be sustained.

4 Emulation, competition and exclusivity

The best way of understanding emulation, I suggest, is to see it as based on the more fundamental desire to 'excel': in this context, to perform the activities of a practice to the highest level, as judged by its standards. Given this desire, it may well make sense to 'compete' with other practitioners, in the sense simply of aiming to do better than - or as well as - them. This is especially so when one's competitors are already recognised for the excellence of their performance, since this provides one with concrete exemplifications of such excellence. To better - or equal - their performance is then a clear indication of one's own achievement of excellence. Thus one will respect and admire competitors for possessing those qualities that make them worthy of emulation. Nor would there be any point in competitive 'success' unless this is achieved consistently with the standards of the practice concerned and their related virtues; otherwise one would merely have 'defeated one's opponents', but not excelled.

So what would emulative competition be like, in the case of productive practices? Crucially, the focus of each enterprise would be on producing the best goods and services, judged in terms of the standards of excellence shared by others engaged in the same productive practice. Each enterprise would compete with others by attempting to match or outperform them in this respect: trying to improve the quality of existing products, to develop new ones and better methods of production, and so on. They would admire one

Likewise, those who work in a particular laboratory are engaged in the practice of (some specific area of) scientific research, along with those working in other such laboratories.

¹⁶ So the well-known figure of 'company man' is quite different from that of 'practitioner', despite neither of them conforming to that of *homo economicus*. Correspondingly, one can expect to find commitment to practices rather than to firms in those areas where there are strong forms of professional and/or occupational organisation and loyalty. See Ouchi 1981 on how workers in Japanese firms seem mainly to display firm-related rather than professional or practice-related commitments.

¹⁷ See MacIntyre 1981, ch. 14. Indeed, given that he includes competitive sports and games as (potentially) *bona fide* practices, it cannot be a requirement of practices that cooperation straightforwardly obtains between all participants in the 'shared' activity.

another's success in achieving these aims, regarding this as a spur to further efforts on their own part and as contributing to the overall development of the productive practice to which they all belong. And the financial benefits consequent upon such success would be seen as merited by demonstrated excellence in the practice.

But can the kind of competition which takes place in a market economy possess this emulative character? The most obvious reason for denying this would be to claim that market competition is based, not on the aim of 'excelling' in the production of goods judged by the standards of a practice, but on that of maximising profits - that is, of external goods. For the emulative competitor, external goods are simply a resource, something which must be acquired to make excellent production possible; for market competitors, this relationship of means to ends is reversed, so that production takes place in order that external goods can be acquired. Hence there can be no commitment to the shared standards of a practice which would not be over-ridden by the prospect of greater profits being achieved by other means.

But although there is something right about this argument, the contrast it implies between emulative and market competition is overdrawn, and fails to recognise the actual and potential variability of its degree and significance.¹⁸ First, it may be argued that many firms in market economies operate in fact as profit-*satisficers* rather than *maximisers*.¹⁹ They are concerned to ensure that they earn sufficient profits 'to stay in business', but they do not constantly seek out opportunities for ever greater returns, especially when to do so would require them to abandon their 'core activities'. Within the constraints of sufficiency, they may then focus on the kinds of concerns more recognisably those of emulative practitioners - who themselves, after all, need to ensure sufficient resources to succeed in *their* aims.²⁰

Second, even when firms do pursue the maximisation of profits as their over-riding goal, it may turn out that adopting the kinds of attitudes and commitments displayed by those engaged in emulative competition is the best means by which this can be achieved. So although profit-maximisation is the underlying rationale for their behaviour, acting (and thinking) as if they were engaged in emulative competition may provide them with a more effective strategy for achieving this - or at least, it will make sense for them to encourage or allow this 'emulative attitude' amongst many of those who work for them.²¹

Further, the idea of profit-maximisation is itself subject to notorious indeterminacy in its temporal reference: over what period of time are profits to be maximised? There is nothing about the market as

¹⁸ For a generally benign view of market competition and its ethics, see Acton 1971, ch. 3; he distinguishes, for example, between competition and *rivalry* - as does Lane (1991, pp. 317-323). But Lane argues that the market tends to encourage the latter, despite its often being dysfunctional as a personal characteristic.

¹⁹ See Hodgson 1988, ch. 4 for discussion of the extensive debates about 'the maximisation hypothesis', including both conceptual issues and empirical studies of firms' behaviour, such as Cyert and March 1963.

²⁰ Again, the issue of 'different capitalisms' may be relevant here (see Note 13 above). For example, Michel Albert argues that Anglo-American and 'Rhenish' capitalism differ fundamentally in the significance attributed to profits: he quotes Michel Serres's (somewhat rhetorical) remark that "[i]n America, money is the *goal* and things are the means to achieve it, while in Europe our goal is to achieve things, with money as the *means*" (Albert 1993, p. 75).

²¹ More generally, one cannot infer from the fact that a range of entities is subject to selection by reference to some particular criterion - in this case, the ability to maximise profits - that those selected on this basis will not also tend to possess certain *other* characteristics - in this case, the emulative orientation of a practice. Indeed, it may be that it is their possession of these which enables them to meet this criterion, so that the characteristics which the market actually 'selects' are distinct from those which directly meet the criterion of selection.

such which determines this; correspondingly, there are considerable differences both within and between actual market economies in this respect. These difference are significant because the shorter the time-scale, the less likely it is that firms pursuing this goal will engage in the kinds of activities typical of emulative competition: they will be less inclined to devote resources to product development and innovation, preferring instead to reduce costs and compete in terms of price rather than product²²; in response to short-term difficulties, they will be more inclined to re-direct their financial resources to other uses, rather than attempting to 'weather the storm' and retain their core commitments; they will be more attracted to opportunistic strategies which bring quick returns, despite the damage this does to the long-term development of productive capacity and collective learning processes.²³

However, it might be objected that these attempts on my part to 'narrow the gap' between competition in a market economy and emulative 'competition' within practices must ultimately fail, since they ignore a crucial difference between the two. This consists in the *non-exclusive* character of the internal goods with which practices are concerned, by contrast with the *exclusive* nature of the external goods involved in market activities. Thus the profits generated by market enterprises belong to them, and not to their competitors; likewise, the goods they produce belong first to them and then to their purchasers. By contrast, MacIntyre claims:

"Internal goods are indeed the outcome of competition to excel, but it is characteristic of them that their achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice. So when Turner transformed the seascape in painting or W.G.Grace advanced the art of batting in cricket in a quite new way their achievement enriched the whole relevant community". (MacIntyre 1981, p. 178).

But this contrast is not altogether convincing. On the one hand, although Grace's innovations in batting advanced the game of cricket as a whole, and in the long term provided other batsmen with new and superior ways of performing their craft, the runs which he himself thereby scored 'belonged exclusively' to the team for which he played, and conferred upon it a short term competitive advantage over others. On the other hand, the advances made by firms in a market economy through product innovation not only increase their own profits in the short term, but also make it possible for other firms to follow suit, thereby contributing both to an overall advancement of the productive 'practice' concerned and to the enhanced well-being of all those who purchase and utilise these products. Thus why should not one also say: 'when Apple Macintosh transformed the operating system in computer software, or when Wedgwood advanced the art of making pottery in a quite new way, their achievements enriched the whole relevant community'?²⁴

²² On the difference between price and product competition, see Best 1990; more generally, his account of what he calls 'the new competition' provides a good example of how production in a market economy can, in certain circumstances, display many of the characteristics of productive practices.

²³ Amongst the many factors which determine whether market enterprises pursue satisficing rather than maximising goals, long-term rather than short-term profits, product rather than price competition and so on, the specific form of ownership, and hence the relationship between firms and those who provide them with financial resources and benefit from their profitability, arguably have considerable significance. On these and related issues see Albert 1993 and Hutton 1995.

²⁴ Hence also the significance of 'industry awards', which are intended to mark the contribution made by particular firms or individuals to the overall development of an industry, and which would seem to imply some sense of a 'shared

5 The requirement of 'community'

I have argued so far that there is a good deal of actual and potential variability in the extent to which production in a market economy displays the characteristics of a practice. But in doing so I have ignored an important element in MacIntyre's own account of productive practices, which must now be considered. This is his apparent 'insistence' that these should form an integral part of the way of life of a local *community*, with their participants consequently regarding their own good as inherently related to that of its other members, and vice versa.

My response to this feature of MacIntyre's position will be quite different to what I have argued up till now. I shall accept that market economies make this 'community requirement' very difficult to satisfy. But I will argue that this requirement should itself be rejected, since it derives from a normatively questionable endorsement of certain aspects of pre-modern societies as against their modern counterparts.²⁵ Before doing so, however, I shall suggest that even for MacIntyre this requirement might be somewhat problematic, since he himself seems willing to accept, as a genuine practice, at least one kind of activity which may plausibly be argued not to meet it.

The activity I have in mind is that of modern *science*.²⁶ As I have argued in Essay 5 above, this is an institutionally organised social activity which clearly displays many practice-like features. Yet the strong commitment to 'universalism' in modern science makes it difficult to see how the members of any particular scientific institution - a laboratory, university department or the like - could regard themselves primarily as contributing to the common good of their local communities, or view their activities as forming an integral part of its shared way of life. Instead, the relevant 'community' for them is that of other scientists, wherever they are located; and correspondingly, the benefits of scientific knowledge will be seen as accruing, in diffuse and indirect ways, to a multitude of 'anonymous others', rather than the 'concrete others' of a bounded community.

Of course, even if these claims about modern science are correct, they do not demonstrate that MacIntyre is wrong to adopt the community requirement for practices: at most they would imply some inconsistency on his part, which could be removed simply by abandoning the claim that science is a genuine practice.

activity' and its standards of excellence. Further, it should be noted that market competition is not a simple zero-sum game: there can be innovation and growth across whole sectors of production, with all firms potentially benefiting from this. Of course, all this takes place within a system of private property rights: cf. the discussion of scientific 'property' in Essay 5 above.

²⁵ So I accept that, on MacIntyre's definition of practices, the market is incompatible with them. But since this is so only with respect to an element of the definition which - unlike the others - does not represent something ethically desirable, this incompatibility has no critical implications for the market.

²⁶ In *After Virtue* MacIntyre includes "the enquiries of physics, chemistry and biology" as examples of practices (MacIntyre 1981, p. 175); he goes on to say that they, along with the arts and games, have been "removed to the margins of social and cultural life" in modern societies, being "taken to be *work* only for a minority of specialists" (*ibid.* p. 211). But one might argue that science is so central and characteristic a feature of modern society that there must be something wrong in his regarding modernity and practices as antithetical. It might be responded (see Essay 5 above) that it is only what Ravetz terms 'academic science' that is a properly institutionalised practice, and that his account of the damaging effects of 'industrialised science' shows modernity in its true colours, undermining the practice-like character of what had survived till then as an essentially pre-modern craft activity. But although Ravetz himself emphasises the 'craft' nature of academic science, he also insists on its 'modernity', by contrast with pre-modern appeals to authority, tradition and so on: see Ravetz 1971, p. 247.

However, the fact that it is possible for a certain kind of social activity to display what are otherwise recognisably practice-like features without also meeting the community requirement - that this element of the definition is both conceptually and causally independent of the others - brings into sharper focus the question of just why one should wish to insist on this. What I shall now suggest is that, in MacIntyre's case at least, what motivates this requirement, with its critical implications for the market's compatibility with practices, is his adoption of a particular (and particularly negative) view of the displacement of pre-modern by modern societies, and of the role of the market in this process.

As I noted at the outset of this essay, MacIntyre's view of modernity is strongly influenced by Polanyi's account of the historical emergence of the market as a 'self-regulating' economic system, in which productive activities became 'disembedded' from the network of social relationships and norms within which they had previously been conducted. Thus the rise of the market is not to be conceived as an organizational change taking place within an already existent sphere of 'the economy'; rather, it was only through the emergence of the market that a separate sphere of this kind was itself established. Prior to this, 'economic' activities had been conducted as an integral part of the overall social life of communities, and governed by their religious, cultural and ethical norms.²⁷

Thus MacIntyre's community requirement may be understood as ruling out, as practices, productive activities conducted within the separate sphere of 'the economy' characteristic of modern societies. Indeed from this perspective, the market would be seen not only as inimical to productive activities meeting this requirement, but also as historically complicit in the very process of differentiation that has rendered practices increasingly marginal in *every* such sphere. Thus 'economic' activities could only be genuine practices if they were not 'economic', in this modern (market-generated) sense, and one would nowadays expect to find instances of them only in those pockets of modern societies which have, for various reasons, escaped or countered the process of differentiation.

As an example of these one might consider the Israeli *kibbutzim*, about which the following comments by Philip Selznick are especially relevant here:

"... kibbutzim have a special character. The enterprises they operate are not autonomous systems divorced from family, child care, education, ritual, and ideology. On the contrary, a salient feature of kibbutzim is the continuity of enterprise and community. Participation in decision-making is nurtured by the experience of living in a tightly knit community whose members share a vital stake in its fate and affairs.... Even in Israel, however, kibbutzim account for only 6% of industrial production.... It is hardly plausible that that this model could sustain, in any major way, the life of a large and complex industrial society. If nothing else, we must acknowledge that the close integration of natural community and economic enterprise is not

²⁷ See Polanyi 1957. The 'disembedding' thesis is by no means uncontentious. For example (see Whitebrook 1978), it has been criticised on the grounds that the operation of the market is itself dependent on specific social norms - including, as Durkheim insisted, those involved in contractual exchange (see Durkheim 1957, and Hodgson 1988, ch. 7) - and is hence not to be seen as 'radically disembedded' in the manner Polanyi implies. From this perspective, the 'differentiation' of the economy as a distinct yet nonetheless *social* sphere is to be distinguished from its being 'disembedded', if the latter is taken to imply the absence from it of recognisable forms of sociality. For discussion of theories of economy-society differentiation, including Granovetter's important contribution (Granovetter 1985), see Holton 1992, Part I; for their specific bearing on MacIntyre's position, see McMylor 1994, ch. 3.

likely to be a reliable source of institutional well-being. That strategy is fundamentally premodern and therefore requires special circumstances or improbable effort".²⁸

Of course, the mere fact that this community requirement effectively rules out the possibility of production as a practice in modern societies is not, as such, a reason for rejecting the requirement: after all, MacIntyre is a *critic* of modernity, and indeed one who seems not to accept that a necessary condition for critique is the realistic possibility of a preferable future. One might, however, wish to challenge the normative basis for MacIntyre's apparent 'preference' for the conditions of pre-modernity, which provides the rationale for this requirement; and if, as I have already suggested, this requirement is separable from the other defining features of a practice, there should be no reason to fear that by doing so, what is ethically attractive about those other features will be undermined.

I shall proceed very schematically here. For MacIntyre, there are at least two closely related features of modernity which make both coherent moral discourse and the living a good life for humans more or less impossible to achieve. First, there is the process of institutional differentiation or separation to which I have already referred, and hence the creation of a number of distinct spheres in which different forms of social activity are conducted without any sense of their respective positions either in the shared life of a community or in the individual lives of its members. Associated with this is the indiscriminating acceptance of a plurality of conceptions of the good, between which the members of modern societies are expected to 'choose' - but in an essentially arbitrary and hence incoherent manner, since none can be deemed objectively superior or inferior to others.²⁹

But one need not interpret and judge the implications of modern differentiation in this negative way. The plurality of conceptions of the good is not necessarily tied to the arbitrary preferences of ethical subjectivism; it may instead be viewed as reflecting 'objectively' the richness, complexity and open-endedness of human existence, explored and experienced in different ways in the lives of different individuals and groups.³⁰ Correspondingly, the recognition and acceptance of such diversity may be seen as a welcome contrast to more restrictive understandings of what it is to be human, and their tendency to fear or dismiss whatever seems strange or alien. Nor does the absence of a single, over-arching conception of 'the good for humans' mean that people are unable to deal with the competing demands of their various roles and the need to evaluate incommensurable goods. Rather, they may come to appreciate the different

²⁸ Selznick 1992, pp. 316-7. But Selznick does not reject the possibility of modern economic institutions being subject to ethical norms, including 'responsibility to the community' (see pp. 345-54). Rather, he develops a distinctively 'modern' conception of community as part of a broader interpretation of modernity and its institutional possibilities, one which I find both more attractive, ethically, and more plausible, sociologically, than MacIntyre's. Selznick's highly nuanced discussion of 'The Moral Institution' in Part III of *The Moral Commonwealth* provides a major challenge both to pre-modernist and post-modernist critics of modern institutions.

²⁹ See MacIntyre 1988, ch. XVII, where these aspects of modernity are related to liberal understandings of the state and its required 'neutrality' with respect to the substantive merits or defects of conceptions of the good: for discussion of liberal neutrality, see Essay 8, section 4 below. However, my remarks here are not intended to do exegetical justice to MacIntyre's position, but only to point to certain broader issues about the interpretation and evaluation of modern societies.

³⁰ Cf. O'Neill 1998, ch. 2, where it is argued persuasively that an Aristotelian, 'perfectionist' account of the good life for humans is not, as its critics often claim, incompatible with recognising a plurality of human goods and ways of living well.

contexts in which different dimensions of their lives can be realised, and to develop and exercise their capacity for practical judgment in making difficult choices.

The second problematic feature of modern society, for MacIntyre, is that each of its members conceive of themselves as possessing an identity quite separate from that of others, and hence also regard their own good as distinct from, and always potentially in conflict with, that of others. Thus he talks of the emergence of "that newly invented social institution, the individual", for whom it is no longer true that "my good as a man is one and the same as the good of others with whom I am bound up in human community", and who consequently does not accept that "there is no way of my pursuing my good which is necessarily antagonistic to you pursuing yours because *the* good is neither mine peculiarly nor yours peculiarly - goods are not private property" (MacIntyre 1981, pp. 212-13). In a society populated by such individuals, the purpose of morality is seen as to deal with the problem of egoism: to prevent or limit the damaging effects of each individual's pursuit of their own interest on the interests of others. But all attempts to do this, both in theory and in practice, inevitably fail: once the identities and interests of individuals are conceived in this distinctively modern, 'separate' way, there is no possibility of 're-socialising' them through morality.³¹

But as with the 'separation of spheres', there are other and more positive ways of interpreting and evaluating the 'separation of individuals' in modern society. In particular, one might view these separate identities as conditions of individual autonomy, and hence also as associated with the possibility of more reflective and critical modes of judgment on the part of individuals. What is then distinctive about modern morality is not so much its attempted solution to the 'new' problem of egoism, but its insistence that rules of conduct and principles of social action should commend themselves to critical judgment. From this perspective, solutions which rely on pre-individualised forms of identity are themselves morally unattractive. Nor, in any case, are they altogether 'effective'. For egoism can be expressed just as much in the conduct of collectivities as in that of individuals, and since shared identities are typically local and particular, they do nothing to solve the problem of conflictual relationships between distinct, self-interested collectivities.³²

6 Purposive practices and the goods of consumption

I have argued that although the organisation of economic production through the market makes it unlikely that MacIntyre's community requirement for productive practices can be met, this requirement should in

³¹ See Poole 1991 for an extensive and, by comparison with MacIntyre, more sociologically and historically elaborated discussion of these issues about morality and modernity.

³² More generally I have little sympathy with the view that 'separate identities' are the great problem of modernity, being inclined instead to regard such separation as a necessary condition for, rather than an obstacle to, genuine relationships of mutual concern, affection and so on. In thinking about these issues I have found especially helpful Jerry Cohen's explication of the Hegelian 'dialectic' of undifferentiated unity, differentiated disunity and differentiated unity (Cohen 1974); in Keat 1981 I try to use this as a way of distinguishing modern (socialist) from pre-modern (conservative) conceptions of community. Amongst contemporary 'communitarian' critics of (liberal) modernity, Charles Taylor's work stands out for its more balanced and appreciative evaluation of modern individualism (Taylor 1990).

any case be rejected since it depends on a highly questionable evaluation of modern societies by comparison with their pre-modern counterparts. I have also argued that in other respects, the market is not inherently incompatible with the practice-like character of productive activities. I shall conclude by returning to a question posed near the outset of this essay, namely why it should *matter* whether this is so.

I suggested then that this question may be answered in terms of the potential contribution of practices to human well-being, independently of MacIntyre's own concern with the coherence of moral discourse and the role therein of the virtues. But this answer naturally invites a further question: just *whose* well-being is enhanced by the existence and flourishing of such practices? More specifically, in the case of productive practices, is it the well-being of practitioners, of those involved in production; or is it also that of the users or consumers of what they produce?³³

The significance of this further question is suggested by the fact that many who defend the market see as its chief merit its ability to generate goods which enhance the well-being of consumers. From this standpoint, even if it could be shown that the market was practice-antithetical, this would not provide sufficient grounds for rejecting it, since productive practices might be inferior to market enterprises in the benefits they bring for consumers. Further, even if - as I have argued - there are conditions under which the market *is* compatible with production as a practice, these may not be the conditions under which the market will operate most beneficially for consumers.

That MacIntyre's conception of practices may be unduly oriented towards the interests of practitioners is implied by an objection to this conception presented by David Miller. Miller argues that a distinction needs to be drawn between two kinds of practices: those "whose *raison d'être* consists entirely in the internal goods achieved by participants and the contemplation of those achievements by others", and those "which exist to serve social ends beyond themselves."³⁴ Paradigmatic examples of the former kind, which he terms *self-enclosed* practices, are sports and games; of the latter, which he terms *purposive* practices, activities such as farming and architecture, along with medicine, scientific enquiry and so on.

Miller criticises MacIntyre for implicitly treating all practices as if they were self-contained, thereby failing to recognise that purposive practices, unlike self-contained ones, may properly be evaluated by reference to the ends they are intended to serve. When they are thus evaluated, it may well turn out that they fail to achieve these purposes, despite otherwise displaying the characteristics of flourishing - in effect, self-enclosed - practices. For example, a particular medical practice may develop in such a way that it fails to deal adequately with the sufferings of those who are treated. Its participants may be excellent doctors in terms of the practice's standards, contributing to and enjoying its internal goods. But unfortunately for their patients, these standards by no means ensure the effective treatment of their illnesses or injuries. Thus one cannot leave it to the practitioners alone to define what is to count as a good doctor or proper

³³ This way of putting the question implies that consumers and producers are two distinct social groups, which is not (on the whole) true, since it is (largely) the same people who both produce and consume. But I do not think that reformulating the question to meet this point would materially affect the discussion which follows.

³⁴ See Miller 1994, p. 250. MacIntyre's account of 'the two fishing crews', which I have drawn on throughout this essay, forms part of his response to these criticisms by Miller: see MacIntyre 1994, pp. 284-6.

treatment, since medical practices should (also) be judged in terms of their social purpose - of their success in securing the well-being of patients.

Although Miller does not do so here, one might then go on to consider what sorts of institutional arrangements would be most effective in ensuring that various kinds of purposive practices achieved their specific goals. One such arrangement might be the market. But suppose now that, through the introduction of market procedures, the conduct of medical activity were altered in such a way that the well-being of patients was greatly improved, but the activity itself became significantly less practice-like in character, so that participants no longer experienced their previous enjoyment of its internal goods. It would surely be difficult to defend the view that this was *simply* a change for the worse: even if one gave some weight to the loss of practitioner well-being in one's overall judgment of this institutional reform, it would be unacceptable to ignore altogether the corresponding improvement in that of patients. Unless it can be shown that medical practices secure the well-being of patients, the fact that they otherwise qualify as practices cannot be a sufficient justification for them.³⁵

These remarks are not intended to imply that the market is in fact the most effective way of ensuring that medical activities are patient-beneficial; indeed, I think there are good reasons for doubting this. They are intended only to suggest that wherever it *can* be shown that the market is the most effective way of ensuring that certain purposive activities achieve their aim, then this must count - though not necessarily over-ridingly - in its favour, even if it is antithetical to their character as practices and hence reduces the benefits for practitioners. Thus suppose that of MacIntyre's two fishing crews, the (market-governed) non-practice crew is able to catch more and better fish than the practice crew, and thus contributes more to the well-being of consumers. To deny that this counts in its favour would seem to imply that it is only the practice-based well-being of producers that matters, and it is hard to see how such a view could be defended.

In his response to Miller, MacIntyre insists that when productive activities are conducted in the form of a practice, it is never their exclusive aim "to catch fish, or to produce beef and milk, or to build houses". Rather, it is to do so "in a manner consonant with the excellences of the craft, so that not only is there a good product, but the craftsperson is perfected through and in his or her activity" (MacIntyre 1994, p. 284). But this fails to address the problem which Miller has identified.³⁶ For unless one accepts that what counts as 'a good product' is to be determined by practitioners alone - which is just what Miller has

³⁵ Of course, not every kind of change which improved the well-being of patients need be expected to be antithetical to the practice-like character of the new form of medical activity; instead, this may turn out to be a (somewhat) *different* practice to its predecessor, with different standards of excellence and different internal goods.

³⁶ Miller does not, in any case, claim that purposive practices should be evaluated *solely* in terms of their ability to generate outcomes which achieve their social purposes, but only that this is one relevant criterion. MacIntyre goes on to say that he must reject Miller's claim "...that practices are to be valued for their external products. When they are so valued, we are always dealing with a type of activity at once alien and antagonistic to practices and very much at home in modern economic orders." (MacIntyre 1994, p. 286). Thus MacIntyre believes that if productive activities are subjected to the kind of evaluation which Miller regards as appropriate for purposive practices, it is impossible or at least unlikely that they can (also) display the characteristics of practices. For reasons indicated in Note 20 above, I think this is implausible; it would be better to say that, taken by itself, the 'fact' of such evaluation leaves open whether these characteristics will be displayed.

questioned - it remains unclear just how, on MacIntyre's account of productive practices, the generation of good products, and hence the well-being of their users, is to be ensured.

This is not to suggest that MacIntyre believes that productive practices need only benefit practitioners, since his 'community requirement' clearly implies that such practices must contribute to the life of the whole community and the well-being of its members - indeed, MacIntyre notes that their sense of doing this itself contributes to the well-being of practitioners; and it seems reasonable to assume that this contribution includes the provision of 'good products'. That he is nonetheless apparently unconcerned with just how this beneficial provision is to be ensured is best explained, I suggest, by attributing to him the (not unreasonable) belief that this problem does not generally arise in the kind of pre-modern community he mainly has in mind when thinking about productive practices.

In such communities, it might be claimed, custom and tradition largely determine what is produced and the manner of its production; the needs and desires thereby met are mainly of a fixed and unchanging nature, and the small-scale, face-to-face character of social interaction favours the use of 'voice' rather than 'exit' to express dissatisfaction. In these circumstances one might expect to find a relatively unproblematic congruence between productive practices, the goods which they provide and the satisfaction of their users' needs.³⁷ No doubt this is too rosy a picture to be altogether plausible. But in any case, these 'traditional' means of ensuring that productive activities achieve their social purpose are neither available nor appropriate in modern societies. Nor are they compatible with the dynamic and innovative character of production in a market economy. They therefore come at what, from a 'modern' standpoint, is likely to be seen as a serious cost.

To deny that this is so would only make sense if one judged the kinds of well-being supposedly made available through consumption in a market economy as of little if any value.³⁸ But if instead one regards the consumer 'goods' generated through the market as at least often meriting this description, then any conflict that may arise between the well-being of practitioner-producers, and that of the consumers of what they produce, must be seen as potentially justifying some sacrifice of the former in the interests of the latter - for this is a conflict *between goods*, and not between genuine goods and mere simulacra. Admittedly, I have argued that such conflicts are less likely to occur than MacIntyre's position would imply, by questioning his view that the market is inherently practice-antithetical. But this is not to claim that there is

³⁷ For a useful comparison between tradition and the market as bases for economic activity, see Heilbroner 1989, chs 1 and 2; also the papers by Karl Polanyi collected in Dalton 1957. On Aristotle's related contrast between household production and the market, including the 'fixed needs' characteristic of the former, see O'Neill 1998, ch. 2; on the exit-voice distinction, Hirschman 1969.

³⁸ That MacIntyre takes precisely this view is suggested, for example, by his negative depiction of 'the aesthete' in *After Virtue* (MacIntyre 1981, chs 3-6), which may be read as at least partly a depiction of the modern consumer. I take it also that for MacIntyre, modern consumption is inherently linked to subjectivism, and hence to the antithesis of a practice-based, objectivist view of human goods. In Essay 7 below I try to present a more attractive view of consumption and its potential for well-being; for a very different view, but equally at odds with MacIntyre's, see Campbell's (1987) striking analysis of what he calls 'the spirit of modern consumersim'. More generally, I find it hard to believe that what Marx recognised as the massive increase in 'human productive powers' made possible by the (capitalist) market has not contributed significantly to human well-being. Can one really deny that modern industry has been an important means through which, as MacIntyre puts it in the case of practices, "[h]uman powers to achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended" (MacIntyre 1981, p. 175)?

some necessary harmony between the two, and hence that the problem of dealing with such conflicts will rarely if ever arise.

This, I suggest, is a problem that would have to be addressed by the citizens of a modern democratic society who have collectively decided to utilise the market as the main device through which the material well-being of its members will be enhanced - as the institutional means through which this agreed social purpose of production is to be achieved. To the extent that they value also the (quite different) kinds of well-being provided by the enjoyment of a practice's internal goods, they will wish to design this institution, and the conditions under which it operates, in such a way that it is also conducive to productive activities being conducted in a practice-like manner. But they will recognise that this may not be altogether possible. They will thus have to make hard decisions about how this 'conflict of ends' is to be resolved.³⁹

In presenting the problem in these terms my intention is not to suggest how it might in fact be resolved. Rather, it is to suggest that the problem should indeed be seen in terms of the collective choices made by members of a modern political community on the basis of shared conceptions of the good. I would therefore wish to question what is implied by the following passage from *After Virtue*:

"One of the key moments in the creation of modernity occurs when production moves outside the household. *So long as* productive work occurs within the structure of households, it is easy and right to understand that work as part of the sustaining of the community of the household and those wider forms of community which the household in turn sustains." (1981, p. 211; italics added).

I take it that the italicized phrase is intended to mean '*only* so long as', and hence that it is only in the conditions typical of pre-modern societies that such an 'understanding' is regarded by MacIntyre as possible. What I am suggesting instead is that something analogous to this understanding of the household, in pre-modern societies, may also be possible in the case of the market, in modern societies. It is only 'analogous', since modern forms of community must differ significantly from pre-modern ones. And it is only possible if members of 'the political community' regard the market, not primarily as an arena for the exercise of liberal freedom, but as an institution serving the common good.⁴⁰

Bibliography [includes all items from *Cultural Goods and the Limits of the Market*]

³⁹ For a similar point about the conflicting goods of consumption and the environment, see Essay 3 above.

⁴⁰ As I argue it can and should be, in Essay 8, section 5 below. What I am suggesting here runs counter to Hayek's insistence on a fundamental distinction between market and household (Hayek 1976: for discussion of this, see O'Neill 1998, ch. 2). It implies, rather, the adoption of a societal-level 'household-like' view of the market and its social purpose: see Plant 1983, ch. IX, on Hegel's partly similar view of how the market *might* be 'understood'. It implies also that one should be wary of understanding either the market or modernity through exclusively liberal categories, as MacIntyre himself arguably does.

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