

Meaningful Work, Post-Work, and Contemporary Aristotelianism

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Abstract. The paper explores the relation between a contemporary Aristotelian conception of human flourishing and two critical perspectives on work. The meaningful work perspective inquires what kind of work would be meaningful, by arguing that meaningful work is essential for human flourishing. The post-work perspective argues that good life lies outside work and workplaces and calls to eliminate work as much as possible. The paper suggests that it is possible to acknowledge the insights of both perspectives via contemporary Aristotelian notions of practice and human flourishing. The notion of practice incorporates the conception of meaningful work, yet it applies to nonwork activities as well. Conceptualization of human well-being via the notion of practice also responds to the post-work challenge of conceiving human flourishing without prioritizing work over other meaningful activities. In this way, a contemporary Aristotelian conception of human flourishing supports both the need for better work and less work.

Keywords: meaningful work, post-work, human flourishing, practices, contemporary Aristotelianism

Prasmingas darbas, postdarbas ir šiuolaikinis aristotelizmas

Santrauka. Straipsnyje tyrinėjamas santykis tarp šiuolaikinio aristotelizmo žmogiškojo klestėjimo sampratos ir dviejų kritinių perspektyvų apie darbą. Prasmingo darbo perspektyva klausia, koks darbas būtų prasmingas, teigdama, kad toks darbas yra būtinas žmonių gerovei. Postdarbo perspektyva teigia, kad geras gyvenimas slypi už darbo ribų ir kad turime siekti darbą ne reformuoti, bet kiek įmanoma labiau išnaikinti. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad šiuolaikinė aristoteliška praktikų ir gero gyvenimo samprata leidžia atsižvelgti į abiejų perspektyvų įžvalgas. Praktikų samprata inkorporuoja prasmingo darbo sampratą, tačiau apima ir įvairias nedarbines veiklas, o, konceptualizuojant gerą gyvenimą kaip praktikų gyvenimą, atsižvelgiama į postdarbo perspektyvos iššūkį konceptualizuoti žmogiškąjį klestėjimą neteikiant prioriteto darbui. Taip šiuolaikinio aristotelizmo gero gyvenimo samprata leidžia reikalauti ir geresnio darbo, ir mažesnio darbo kiekio.

Pagrindiniai žodžiai: prasmingas darbas, postdarbas, žmogiškasis klestėjimas, praktikos, šiuolaikinis aristotelizmas

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Introduction

Recent challenges in employment structures, such as Artificial Intelligence driven automation and its threat of unemployment (Frey 2019), new forms of platform work and micro-work and the exploitation they engender (Jones 2021), or the changes in the work culture which resulted from the COVID-19 pandemic when so many people abandoned their workplaces to work from home, give new relevance to two types of critical enquiry about work and human well-being that ask how the existing structures of work should be transformed in order to create better conditions for human flourishing. The first line of enquiry argues that meaningful work is an essential part of a flourishing life and investigates what precisely makes work meaningful. As David Graeber showed in *Bullshit Jobs* (2018), many people do not find meaning and fulfilment in their work, which gives additional impetus to ask what kind of work would be desirable. The conception of meaningful work then provides a normative standard for a social reform.

An alternative line of enquiry questions the value of work, even of meaningful work, for a flourishing life. From this perspective, meaningful life lies outside workplaces and work-relationships. Work, therefore, should not be celebrated – but eliminated as much as possible instead. Post-work arguments take many forms, ranging from recent discussions on fully automated post-work societies (Srnicsek and Williams 2016; Bastani 2019; Danaher 2019), to the anarchist tradition of refusing work (Lafargue 2022 [1883]; Black 1991; Shukaitis 2014), to Marxist-feminist arguments (Weeks 2011).

While I present the meaningful work and the post-work arguments as forming two different enquiries, they often overlap in their judgements about the contemporary structures of employment as well as share some political demands, for example, the demand for a shorter working week. It is their conceptions of flourishing human life where they differ most. In this paper, I encourage us to look for a way to integrate the insight of both lines of enquiry, by suggesting that the neo-Aristotelian conception of human flourishing can contribute to the task. Contemporary debates on meaningful work often refer to Aristotle to conceptualize what kind of life is worth living. This might seem quite unexpected given that Aristotle denied the claim that people who needed to work in order to earn a living could lead flourishing lives. For him, the best life lies outside work. Therefore, it seems that the post-work perspective has a stronger claim to the Aristotelian conception of good life. Yet, recent post-work discussions rarely, if ever, invoke Aristotle. Starting from this paradoxical relation to Aristotle, I will proceed to argue that, nevertheless, the Aristotelian, yet *reformed Aristotelian*, conception of human flourishing provides a perspective to appreciate the insights of both lines of enquiry. A contemporary Aristotelian conception of human flourishing, at the center of which is the notion of practices, encourages us to demand less work and better work, without overemphasizing the place of work for human flourishing.

First, I will shortly introduce the arguments of the meaningful work and the post-work perspectives, by focusing on them as traditions of critique. Next, I will discuss Aristotle's arguments about the place of work in the good life, by showing how the meaningful work perspective questions Aristotle's reasoning, while yet retaining Aristotle's fundamental idea

of the good life as a life in which various human powers and capabilities are cultivated. In the last section of the paper, I will introduce a neo-Aristotelian conception of practice as a way to respond to the concerns of both the meaningful work and the post-work perspectives. I will argue that the contemporary Aristotelian notion of human flourishing, based on the conception of practice, allows to conceptualize meaningful work, and at the same time acknowledges the post-work argument about the necessity to reinvent forms of life that are not structured primarily around work.

Meaningful work and human flourishing

An enquiry into what makes work *meaningful* (or *good*, as others name it) serves as one way of questioning contemporary structures of work. Such critiques are often grounded in a conception of human flourishing which argues that meaningful work is an essential part of a flourishing life. For example, Ruth Yeoman argues that meaningfulness is a fundamental human need, and that people could not experience their lives as truly meaningful if their work lacks meaningfulness (2014: 8). Andrea Veltman argues that good work is integral to, yet not sufficient for, human well-being (2016: 12). According to Veltman, good life contains much more than just good work, yet it would be difficult to lead a flourishing life without engaging in some kind of meaningful work. A life spent without doing any meaningful work could hardly be a satisfactory life. In fact, Veltman says there is only “a slim possibility that a person can live well without meaningful work” (*ibid.*: 182). Therefore, she rejects any idea that a good life can consist only of leisurely activities. That being said, Veltman also warns that work, although essential for good life, should not monopolize our lives too much, as it is only a part of meaningful life, not all of it. Veltman states that: “in a well-ordered community, a few hours a day, or a few days a week, may suffice to meet social and personal needs for work” (2016: 99).

Contemporary scholarship on meaningful work often emphasizes that meaningful work cannot be given a single definition. Instead, meaningful work is understood as a multidimensional category. Veltman gives four dimensions. Work is meaningful when: 1) it allows “developing and exercising worker’s human capabilities”; 2) supports “virtues including self-respect, honor, integrity, dignity, or pride”; 3) has a purpose, either for a worker or is serving a “genuinely useful purpose for others”. This category also stresses that such purposeful work should produce something of value; 4) is integrated with the worker’s personal relationships and values (*ibid.*: 117). This multidimensionality means that, in order to count as meaningful, a specific job does not need to embrace all four dimensions. So, for example, a person might be said to be engaged in a meaningful work if it contributes to sustaining the community in which the worker lives and cares for deeply, even if it remains unpleasant and cannot be said to express many human capabilities of the worker. Therefore, we can talk of degrees of meaningfulness, depending on how many of the dimensions of meaningfulness a given job satisfies.

Many other scholars follow Veltman’s direction in conceiving meaningful work as a multidimensional category. Martela and Pessi (2018), after a detailed overview of existing

literature, distil three dominant dimensions: meaningful work is a type of work which has personal significance for the worker, which serves a broader purpose, and which fosters a worker's self-realization. Smids et al. (2020) propose that work is meaningful if it: 1) is recognized as having a meaningful purpose; 2) fosters social relationships; 3) allows exercising various skills and encourages self-development; 4) is a source of self-esteem and social recognition; 5) respects the worker's autonomy. Unlike Veltman, the authors do not discuss whether all five dimensions must be present to make work meaningful, or only a combination of some would be enough. Bankins and Formosa (2023) discuss five dimensions of meaningful work: task integrity, skill cultivation and use, task significance, autonomy, and sense of belongingness. Ugar (2023) puts more stress on relationship building, by arguing that workplaces are primarily environments for interpersonal relationships. The dimensions highlighted by different authors largely overlap; thus it is reasonable to say that there exists a large consensus on the fundamental aspects of meaningful work. Work which only includes endless repetition of the same task, in which people feel alienated from their fellow workers, and which serves no meaningful social purpose would not count as meaningful work.

The conception of meaningful work can provide a critical perspective to judge contemporary work structures and to demand social change. The notion of meaningful work grounds proposals to transform workplaces as well as to eradicate some forms of work. In addition to workplace transformation, Veltman (2016) also stresses the need for shorter working hours and a strong social security system, and even the need for a universal basic income. Shorter hours would allow more time for workers to invest in other activities, while a universal basic income would lower the pressures to work and would empower workers to refuse unfulfilling forms of employment. Yeoman (2014) takes a more politically radical position and argues that workplaces should be democratized to create better conditions for meaningful work. Yeoman also argues that providing meaningful work is a matter of politics, and that states should guarantee meaningful work to all. Veltman remains skeptical about the proposal of guaranteeing good work for all, by arguing that it is not possible to make all forms of work meaningful and fulfilling, and, therefore, it is only realistic to assume that there will always be people who do not do meaningful work. Despite these differences, Veltman and Yeoman agree that extensive social reforms are needed to ensure meaningful work to as many people as possible.

Post-work arguments

An alternative perspective of social critique remains skeptical about the discussions on meaningful work. The post-work perspective argues that we should be more critical about the idea that work is integral to a meaningful life, and we should focus instead on various activities outside what modern societies understand as work as more essential to human well-being. While the authors discussed in the previous section argue that meaningful life cannot be conceived without meaningful work, the authors of the post-work perspective instead insist that good life lies outside work.

The critiques of the good work discourse come from several directions. One source of the critique is found in recent literature on the promise of contemporary technologies to create post-work societies. For Srnicek and Williams (2016), contemporary progressive forces should embrace the demand for full automation and seek to create a post-work society. Together with various other demands, such as a universal basic income and shorter working hours, the authors emphasize the necessity of cultural change to reject ethics centered on work. They criticize what they perceive as a strong tendency in various political movements “to place value upon work, concrete labour and craftwork” (*ibid.*: 135). For them, valuing work and understanding meaningful life as centred around meaningful work is not a matter of human condition, but rather a result of historical development that subjected people to the imperatives of production. Work should not be celebrated as fundamental to human flourishing; instead, “work must be refused and reduced” (*ibid.*).

A more radical tradition of the critique of work comes from the anarchist tradition of refusing work. Bob Black opens his famous essay *The Abolition of Work* with a statement that “work is the source of nearly all the misery in the world” (1991: 17). Black criticises all existing economic regimes, whether capitalist or socialist, for their focus on work, and, by invoking Paul Lafargue’s classical text *The Right to be Lazy* (Lafargue 2022 [1883]), calls for work to be replaced with “multitude of new kinds of free activities” (Black 1991: 28). Black seeks to abolish the distinctions between work and play, between work and leisure, and proposes that the opposite of work is not idleness, but the free expression of creativity. He calls to automate as much work as possible, and, while acknowledging that some necessary work will have to be performed even in a post-work society, he envisions that it can be transformed “into a pleasing variety of game-like and craft-like pastimes, indistinguishable from other pleasurable pastimes, except that they happen to yield useful end-products” (*ibid.*).

More recently, Stephen Shukaitis, writing in the same tradition, suggested that the slogan of refusing work should be reformulated into a more positive one of “learning not to labour” (2014: 194). Upon surveying various forms of refusal of work, he acknowledges their “concrete utopian desire to reduce and if possible eliminate the influence of work over social life.” The slogan of learning not to labor invites us to invent new forms of life and social coexistence structured around freedom and various forms of creative social practice. By emphasizing the positive content of learning not to labor, Shukaitis argues for “re-fusing of common life and energy back through the social” (*ibid.*: 197), that is, creating and experimenting with alternative forms of social organization and collectivity not centered around what we now understand as work. While this perspective calls to reinvent new forms of creative nonwork activities, the nature of such activities remains, however, untheorized.

Kathi Weeks’ (2011) critique of what she identifies as ‘work ethic’ incorporates insights from a variety of traditions, especially autonomist Marxist and feminist traditions. Work ethic is understood as any ethic which places value on work as a source of individual moral development. Weeks acknowledges that emphasizing the importance of work for human well-being and demanding meaningful work can form a critical perspective to

judge the contemporary societies and has indeed often inspired both working-class and feminist struggles. Yet, she takes issue with valuing work on both ethical and political grounds. Ethically, Weeks argues that “even the best job is a problem when it monopolizes so much of life” (2011: 1). Furthermore, instilling value in work, argues Weeks, tends to devalue “all other past times and practices” (*ibid.*: 6). While Veltman would not object to the first statement, yet, as discussed above, she does indeed conceive work as having more ethical value than pastime activities. Therefore, Weeks’ emphasis on refusal of work serves to remind us that there are many ways to find meaning in life, many of which might lie outside work.

Politically, Weeks argues that emphasizing meaningful work, even if it comes from Marxist and feminist perspectives, leads only to incremental changes to the currently existing capitalist work structures, instead of abolishing them and realizing more radical conceptions of the good life. Therefore, she emphasizes the demand for less work instead of the demand for good work. Although Weeks acknowledges that these demands are not necessarily contradictory, she insists that it is better to argue for *less* work instead of *better* work, because the demand for good work can be easily coopted by the conservative position. A demand for less work, on the contrary, puts a more radical challenge, in economic, political, as well as cultural terms, to the contemporary societies.

While post-work authors criticize those who seek social change guided by the concept of meaningful work, yet the political demands of the post-work and the meaningful work perspectives are often similar: shorter working hours, a universal basic income, automation to eliminate dangerous and unpleasant forms of work – these are among the demands mentioned in the literature from both perspectives. Yet the greatest difference is their conception of the good life: whether work has a special importance for a flourishing life, or whether meaningful life lies outside work, and therefore work should not be made more meaningful, but – instead – eliminated as much as possible? While the post-work perspective mostly refuses to engage with the question of meaningful work, this refusal should be questioned. Even in a society where most of work is automated, some productive and reproductive work will still need to be done; therefore, it makes sense to ask how that work should be organized so as to be as meaningful and fulfilling as possible. On the other hand, the post-work perspective challenges us to question the established social norms about the value of work and to demand for more radical social change. Can we find a way to appreciate and integrate, at least in part, the insights of both perspectives? Is there a way to combine the insights of the meaningful work and the post-work perspectives, without reintroducing a conception of human well-being centered around work, a conception to which the post-work tradition so strongly objects? In the two sections below, I will argue that a path towards this integration is opened via Aristotle.

Aristotle on work and the good life

To conceptualize meaningful work, Veltman often invokes contemporary Aristotelian discussions on the human good, especially their emphasis on the development of various

human capabilities and moral virtues (Veltman 2016: 36ff). On the other hand, the post-work authors almost never engage with the Aristotelian tradition. Yet, it might seem that Aristotle would be a more appropriate ally for the post-work perspective, given Aristotle's claims about the incompatibility of working life and human flourishing, which I will examine in this section. Yet, the post-work authors generally do not approach Aristotle. Although Lafargue did emphasize the ancient philosophers' contempt for manual labor, while naming Aristotle and many others (Lafargue 2022 [1883]), the later authors of the post-work tradition do not engage with Aristotle's arguments. Black references Socrates, Plato, Xenophon, and Cicero, yet, curiously, not Aristotle (Black 1991: 23). Shukaitis and Weeks do not mention Aristotle at all. This section will examine Aristotle's arguments and how they are approached by the meaningful work perspective, while the next section will discuss the neo-Aristotelian conception of practices to show how it can integrate some concerns of the post-work perspective.

For Aristotle, the good life is practical life in which various human moral, aesthetic, rational powers are exercised through a variety of practices. However, Aristotle has a hierarchical conception of various human powers, which leads to a hierarchy of practices and to a corresponding social hierarchy. Aristotle's hierarchy is grounded on several distinctions. He distinguishes productive activities which produce objects from the non-productive practices that cultivate moral virtue. The value of productive activity, as Aristotle argues, lies in its product, and not in the activity itself. Therefore, productive activities, according to Aristotle, do not cultivate good character, as that is not their end (*The Nicomachean Ethics* 1105a35–1105b1). Only free activities which end in themselves cultivate good human beings. Aristotle draws a radical distinction between manual work and virtue: “for it is quite impossible, while living the life of a mechanic or a hireling, to occupy oneself as virtue demands” (*Politics* 1278a20–21). Furthermore, for Aristotle, the cultivation of the powers of reason distinguishes humans from other animals; therefore, the life of reason is the best (*The Nicomachean Ethics* 1098a2–8). The value of different activities depends on how much they allow the cultivation of the powers of reason and of moral virtue. Thus, at the lower end, there are those activities that allow only very limited reasoning, which, for Aristotle, include all productive work, while those non-productive activities that allow the cultivation of moral virtue are higher, and the contemplating activity of philosophy is the highest of all (for a reconstruction of Aristotelian hierarchy of work, see Angier (2016)).

Yet, while conflating activities and people who perform them, Aristotle also defends the social hierarchy which puts working people on a lower scale than property owning aristocrats (Meiksins Wood and Wood 1978: 223). In Book 7 of *Politics*, he also states that all those who work for a living, a category into which he includes all craftsmen, tradesmen, farmers, hired unskilled laborers, should not be citizens in the best *polis* which cultivates the best possible life (1328b36–1329a1). Even though the workers produce various necessities to sustain the life of the *polis*, yet they are excluded from that life, and only the citizens, who are owners of property and do not need to engage in productive activities, can dedicate their lives to virtue, politics, and philosophical contemplation. In justifying

the political exclusion of the working classes, Aristotle also argues that engaging in truly virtuous practices requires one to be free from material concerns, while those who need to work simply do not have enough leisure to take part in activities that constitute a good and flourishing life (1337b10–17). The good life must be free from material concerns, it must be the life of leisure, in order to cultivate excellence. While he acknowledges that societies could be arranged more democratically to allow working people to participate in the political life of the polis (1328b23–28), yet he rejects such proposals due to his strong belief that all manual work damages human rationality. Productive work, according to Aristotle, subjugates the mind to practical concerns, and make it “unable to rise above lowly things” (1337b12), thus making workers less able to reason in terms of human good in general, whereas it is the disinterested reasoning, that should guide the life of ideal citizens (Kraut 2002: 215–217). It should also be noted that Aristotle’s arguments do not express some general cultural devaluation of work. In fact, Aristotle was arguing against the dominant culture of democratic Athens which highly valued the skills and knowledge of artisans and productive activities in general (Lis and Soly 2012, Chapter One).

Given Aristotle’s position on work and human flourishing, those who conceptualize meaningful work by using Aristotelian arguments face a challenge of overcoming Aristotle’s division between good life and the life of work. However, this division has often been challenged by the followers of Aristotle: Cary J. Nederman (2008) directs attention to those Medieval Aristotelians who argued against Aristotle that work involves making practical judgements and contributes to the common good of the community, and therefore workers should be allowed to participate in the political life. More recently, Tom Angier also attempted to defend the rational core of Aristotle’s hierarchy of work, rescuing it from Aristotle’s “harsh and unwarranted” (Angier 2016: 444) exclusions of workers from the good life and the claims that all productive work has no moral value. The basic assumption that there are degrees as to how various forms of work allow the cultivation of human rational and moral powers is sound and can inform concerns for social change. Furthermore, contemporary Aristotelians tend to provide a more inclusive conception of human good which lessens the hierarchy of various activities and conceives human good in terms of a variety of activities and the development of multiple human capabilities (Kraut 2002). Therefore, the conceptualizations of meaningful work provide an important correction to Aristotle’s own views on work.

Veltman, when building her argument about meaningful work and its place in the flourishing life, states plainly that Aristotle is “fundamentally wrong” on the value of work (Veltman 2016: 17). While observing a general neglect among the contemporary Aristotelian theorists of human good on the question of work (*ibid.*: 45), Veltman argues that, nevertheless, the Aristotelian conception of human good gives a criterion of what kind of work is meaningful work. As she argues: “Work provides ways for individuals to contribute capabilities to communities and acquire a range of goods that are integral to well-being, including knowledge, intelligence, autonomy, self-respect, recognition, social esteem, and self-esteem” (*ibid.*: 41). It is not work as such that is inimical to human well-being, but only bad work. Meaningful work, so far as it allows the expression

of various human powers and capabilities, is part of the human good. Aristotle, it seems, had a very diminished conception of work. Therefore, the Aristotelian notion of human well-being encompasses if not all work, then meaningful work. While bad work damages body and mind, meaningful work provides opportunities to develop human excellence and promote well-being.

Contemporary Aristotelianism: practices and the good life

The good work perspective corrected Aristotle by claiming that we can conceive meaningful work that is not inimical to human flourishing. Yet, this also came at a price of lessening Aristotle's insistence that the best life lies outside productive activities. If taken without Aristotle's ideological prejudices about the moral and intellectual capabilities of those who work, the claim that eliminating the need to work is essential for human well-being would support post-work arguments of the need to reinvent social coexistence not centered on work. This section will argue that the Aristotelian tradition also has resources of responding to the challenge of the post-work authors.

Weeks hinted that there is a conceptual problem in the post-work perspective, and suggested that "we need to replace the category of nonwork with a range of distinctions" (Weeks 2011: 172). But maybe the real challenge is to overcome the simplistic distinction between 'work' and 'nonwork' in order to conceptualize the variety of meaningful activities comprising human flourishing? In this section, I propose that a neo-Aristotelian conception of practices could respond to this challenge. With the concept of practice, it becomes possible to describe human well-being as consisting of a variety of practices which express human powers and capabilities. The conception of practice, as it will be argued below, includes meaningful work, yet it is not limited to it. Conceiving human flourishing in terms of practice allows to avoid giving work any special normative privilege among many other practices, and thus responding to the post-work challenge to reconceive human well-being without privileging work.

A practice, according to the Aristotelian philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, is any socially established cooperative activity that has its own internal standards of excellence, and by participating in which we extend various human powers and capabilities (MacIntyre 2007: 187). Some examples of practices that MacIntyre gives include farming, painting, medicine, music composition, architecture, poetry, football, and the like. Practice is not an action done with skill (although it does incorporate these), but rather a complex cooperative activity which extends various human moral, aesthetic, rational and other powers and capabilities. Through practices, we develop as human beings. Genuine practices, as MacIntyre argues, are being pursued for the internal goods that they provide, and not primarily for some external reasons. In other words, good musicians play because they enjoy playing, or good doctors cure for the sake of curing, and not just because it pays well. MacIntyre allows that external goods (such as money) are genuine goods, yet it is the internal goods of practices that should provide motivation for the agent if the practice is to flourish.

There exists a large and continuously growing literature on the concept which found its application in a variety of fields, but, for the purposes of this paper, the important question is how practice relates to productive activities, or work. Clearly, some forms of productive and reproductive activities are included in what MacIntyre calls ‘practices’. Furthermore, MacIntyre proposed that work in workplaces which encourage workers’ autonomy, and their various intellectual, moral, aesthetic and other powers and capabilities, can be understood as approaching the standards of genuine practice (MacIntyre 2016: 131). Some MacIntyrean scholars also argued that the notion of practice should be employed in the research on meaningful work (Beadle and Knight 2012).

The notion of practice also opens a critical perspective to judge contemporary work relations. Keith Breen argues that the notion of practice allows us to conceive “a defensible alternative to managerially determined divisions of labour” (2007: 392). The concept of practice describes what good work should look like, and therefore calls to transform the division of labor, structures of work, and the power relations in the workplace. Especially important is Breen’s connection of the notion of practice with the critique of managerialism, which insists that practice-based workplaces are workplaces where workers have the power to control how work is performed. Yet there remains one important limitation: Breen connects the notion of practice exclusively with productive practices. However, many activities that are described by the concept of practice clearly lie outside of production.

Matthew Sinnicks (2021) introduced a distinction between community-focused and excellence-focused practices. Community-focused practices are those types of activity that might be tedious and unpleasant, but which are nevertheless productive of important goods for the community. They would comprise many forms of work that might be considered a practice, such as care work. Such activities would be meaningful because they satisfy at least a few of the dimensions of meaningful work: that of purposefulness and a broader significance to the life of community, for example. Yet they remain bound to material necessities and can often be tedious and unpleasant. Excellence-focused practices, as Sinnicks argues, are found in arts, sciences, sports, and various cultural practices. Their appeal is that they offer the best opportunities for the free expression of various human powers and capabilities. Looked at from the perspective of excellence-focused practices, most forms of work are not excellence-focused. Sinnicks argues that we should strive to create opportunities for all people to participate in excellence-focused practices as much as possible. The issue is thus not only to transform workplaces to make work as practice-like as possible, but also to shorten the working time and eliminate many forms of work to allow people to engage in excellence-focused practices.

Therefore, the neo-Aristotelian conception of practice can function as a normative ideal of meaningful work, while also encouraging the elimination of many forms of work that cannot aspire to reach the ideal of a genuine practice. Yet, the notion of practice also responds to the challenge raised by the post-work perspective of conceptualizing human well-being without prioritizing work. The notion of practice embraces many activities, only some of which are productive and reproductive. Others, most of which fall under the category of excellence-focused practices, such as found in arts, sports, as well as other

forms of cultural creation, are activities that we associate with leisure. The category of practice therefore transcends the simple division between productive and nonproductive activities and captures various types of activities under a single concept. The good life, from this neo-Aristotelian perspective, is the life of practices: life invested in activities that cultivate various human powers and capabilities. A life of practices might include work if that work satisfies the criterion of meaningful work, or it might be focused on nonwork activities. Therefore, a neo-Aristotelian conception of the good life, based on the notion of practices, does not judge in advance whether work is part of flourishing life, or whether flourishing life can be found only outside work. Both courses of life could be flourishing from this perspective. The decisive question is whether those activities in which the person is engaged, whether productive or not, can satisfy the criterion of a practice: whether they extend the variety of human powers and capabilities, whether they are undertaken for the internal goods those practices deliver.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have proposed that a contemporary Aristotelian conception of human flourishing which conceives the good life as a life of various practices expressing human powers and capabilities provides a philosophical perspective from which to acknowledge the arguments of what I have identified as two distinct traditions of enquiry relating to work and the good life. The perspective of meaningful work asks how work should be organized so that it can be meaningful and fulfilling for the worker. The perspective of post-work encourages to imagine forms of life that are not centered around work.

The way to acknowledge the importance of both lines of reasoning is opened by introducing the neo-Aristotelian notion of practice. The notion of practice describes various activities through which human powers and capabilities are expressed and developed. The notion of practice embraces both productive activities and activities that we associate with leisure, thus transcending the division between productive and non-productive activities by subsuming both under the same concept. It allows us to conceptualize what meaningful work should look like, thereby encouraging social reforms to make productive activities as practice-like as possible, yet it does not conceive work as having an exclusive place in the good life. Good life consists of practices, yet many practices lie outside productive relations. Therefore, both the demand of the good work perspective for better work and the demand of the post-work perspective for less work are supported by the Aristotelian conception of human flourishing consisting of practices.

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