

Can Business Managers be Virtuous?: Comments on Gregory Beabout's *The Manager, the Everyday Plain Person, and the Philosopher*

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Greg's description of MacIntyre's reconception of the philosopher, while condensed, is quite good. However, I would like to raise one concern about Greg's hopes to reconceive what it means to be a manager. Part of what I take MacIntyre to be doing in his reconception of philosophy is actually reclaiming what it meant to be a philosopher in the classical and medieval tradition, a tradition that has been largely abandoned by contemporary philosophers. However, this means that MacIntyre is able to reconceive what it means to be a philosopher only because he can reach back into the previous tradition, which was in a comparatively better working order. In this tradition, the role of the philosopher, his virtues, were connected to a genuine practice, aimed at the human good. Within this vein I would characterize MacIntyre's reconception of philosophy more as a reclamation of the tradition in order to inform us about how to practice philosophy now. Indeed, I agree with Greg that MacIntyre is perhaps one of the only major philosophers living who actually embodies this practice.

However, these observations lead me to a rather more skeptical first glance at the project of reconceiving what it means to be a manager, although I certainly sympathize with Greg's desire to do so. In the case of the manager today, as Greg aptly describes, it is not clear that there is anything to reclaim that is analogous to the manner in which MacIntyre reclaims philosophy, or at least perhaps in any manner that would satisfy MacIntyre. Why do I say this?

The most troubling features of the managerial character today is that the mask it wears has decidedly positivistic function—it is a role that has a history and a narrative identity – but one that is uniquely both informed by and embedded in the larger development of advanced capitalism. The modern manager is a child of that tradition. However, as we are well aware, MacIntyre has thrown serious doubts on whether “business,” broadly or narrowly conceived, is in fact even a practice in an Aristotelian sense. This leads me to wonder what, if anything that is genuinely virtuous there is to reclaim, in regard to the role of the manager, in order to reconceive what it means to be a manager, albeit in smaller communities. Could such a manager ever emerge in an advanced capitalist society, as long as this form remains the dominant engine of our culture and its activities? Perhaps in monastic orders, and cooperatives, we might come closer to the vision of a community in which Greg’s new manager might emerge, but even today, such communities subsist largely by intersecting and doing business within the larger economy, an economy that is now global in scope. Where are we to run? Like Greg, I often despair as to how realistic MacIntyre’s prescription, to retreat into smaller communities, really is. So, as Greg points out, we are stuck with managers – but could this role ever develop and change in the positive direction that we hope for, even in smaller communities, provided that such communities continue to operate within the larger context of capitalism?

While I am skeptical at first glance, I hope and pray that I am wrong and that my pessimism is misplaced. I, too, look for a new Benedict. Thus, I look forward to reading Greg’s forthcoming book when it is published.