

# WHAT IS LEISURE?

## A MACINTYRIAN BASED RESPONSE

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Leisure is a primary contributor to human flourishing. Thus, it is imperative for humanity to possess an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon. This article addresses that need by outlining a conceptualization of leisure based on MacIntyre's (2007) seminal work *After Virtue*. This conception, because it is from a historicist perspective, has the ability to evolve so as to continue to infuse people's lives with meaning and enhance their flourishing. These outcomes result from the three core elements of leisure: community, freedom, and virtuous behavior. The article concludes with a brief discussion of implications associated with adopting the presented conceptualization.

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The seemingly straightforward question of what is leisure turns out not to be so easy to answer but this condition should not thwart efforts to ascertain an answer because leisure has been identified by several contemporary authors as a primary contributor to human happiness or flourishing (Anderson & Heyne, 2012; Carruthers & Hood, 2007; Heyne & Anderson, 2012; Hood & Carruthers, 2007; Wise, 2014). Consequently then, in order to promote human flourishing, it is essential to have a clear and in-depth understanding of the concept.

Defining the concept is a logical commencement point. Intuitively, finding a definition seems a simple enough task, and it is if all one is concerned with is a definition. However, if one is searching for *the* definition of leisure the quest quickly becomes bogged down in a quagmire because asking leisure professionals for *the* definition of leisure elicits a wide range of diverse responses. Moving the search to textbooks or professional publications is not any more likely to be fruitful. Rather, the search is apt to turn up a classification system by which the multitude of definitions of leisure can be grouped (e.g., Ellis & Witt, 1991).

To make sense of the difficulty in finding the universal definition of leisure, one ought to turn, at least initially, to philosophy because to answer the question "What is leisure?" requires philosophical inquiry. Hemingway (1993), a philosopher steeped in the study of leisure, described two broad philosophical approaches to understanding leisure: Platonic and historicist. The Platonic tradition postulates the existence of universal truths that are discoverable, although imperfectly, by

human beings. Thus, in the Platonic tradition it makes perfect sense to search for *the* definition and purpose of leisure. Conversely, the historicist tradition views truth as created through human activity and reflective of the corresponding historical context. Truth is dependent upon human activity and the details of the epoch during which the truth was created. Within this tradition, it is assumed leisure's meaning and purpose are constantly being constructed. Therefore, searching for *the* meaning and purpose of leisure is fruitless and inappropriate (Blackshaw, 2010; Rojek, 1995). Instead, the goal is to determine what leisure means for people who inhabit a particular time and place.

This article is a modest attempt, following in the historicist tradition, to describe leisure and its role in human flourishing. The article begins with a brief examination of leisure and its role in human flourishing from the Platonic tradition, specifically examining ideas forwarded by Aristotle, Aquinas, and Pieper. Then, a historicist-based conceptualization of leisure drawing upon the work of MacIntyre (2007) is proposed. Finally, implications for flourishing are presented if the historicist based conception is adopted.

### PLATONIC PERSPECTIVE

The concept of leisure received much attention from Aristotle (2001a, b), who lived in the city-state of Athens during the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. He defined leisure as freedom from obligation and centrally positioned leisure within the framework of a well-lived life. For Aristotle (2001a), the telos or life-goal of a well-lived life was the achievement of eudamonia, often

translated into English as happiness, well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2008; Waterman, 1993), or flourishing (Dunn & Brody, 2008). In his framework, leisure is essential to eudamonia, "And happiness [flourishing] is thought to depend on leisure; for we are busy that we may have leisure" (Aristotle, 2001a, 1177b, 4-6). Leisure "gives pleasure and happiness and enjoyment of life, which are experienced, not by the busy man, but by those who leisure" (Aristotle, 2001b, 1338a, 1-3).

Aristotle is clear about what is to happen during leisure so people can flourish. They are to execute the function unique to humans which is to reason "since reason more than anything else *is* man" (Aristotle, 2001a, 1178a, 7-8). Therefore, "leisure [is to be] spent in intellectual activity" (Aristotle, 2001b, 1338a, 11). The ability to reason enables people to contemplate truths, act virtuously, cultivate friendships, and actively participate in civic life, all uniquely human actions (Hemingway, 1988).

St. Thomas Aquinas (1952), an Aristotelian who lived in the 1200s, held a related view of the relationship among human nature, happiness, contemplation, and leisure. For Aquinas, all human action aimed for one end or telos, happiness, which was inexorably linked to the human capacity to reason. "Happiness is man's supreme perfection" (ST I-II, Q. 3, A. 2) and "consists entirely in contemplation" (ST I-II, Q. 3, A. 5). Leisure is essential because it is a "requisite... for certain operations which belong to human life" (ST I-II, Q.4, A. 7) and "this is clear of contemplative happiness which is lost...by certain occupation, whereby a man is altogether withdrawn from contemplation" (ST I-II, Q.5, A. 4). During leisure, people use their ability to reason to act virtuously and comprehend, as best they could, the nature of God and their place in His world.

More recently, Josef Pieper (1952), a Thomist, articulated a similar relationship among human nature, reasoning, and leisure. Pieper agreed the ability to reason is human nature and he maintained there are two types of reasoning: ratio and intellectus. Ratio refers to using discursive, logical thought to gain understanding about truths. In contrast, understanding via intellectus is gained through intuition; by being still and receptive to truth which "offers itself like a landscape to the eye" (p. 9). Intellectus occurs during leisure which for Pieper is defined by three

components. First, leisure is “an attitude of non-activity, of inward calm, of silence...which is the prerequisite of the apprehension of reality” (pp. 26-27). Second, leisure is celebratory; “man celebrates and gratefully accepts the reality of creation in leisure, and the inner vision that accompanies it” (p. 29). Finally, leisure exists so “that the functionary [man] should continue to be a man – and...that he should continue to be capable of seeing life as a whole and the world as a whole” (p. 31). It is in leisure that people strive to “see” the essence of things and the totality of truth. Human intellect is employed to try and understand, as much as is humanly possible, the world, God’s plan, and humans’ place in the plan. Those who do so are happy.

## A HISTORICIST PERSPECTIVE

In stark opposition to Aristotle, Aquinas, and Pieper, many contemporary philosophers do not believe there is an immutable, universal view of and function for leisure within human lives. Instead, terms such as leisure represent concepts that are characterized as having blurred edges rather than clearly defined, fixed boundaries (Wittgenstein, 2009). According to Wittgenstein, it can be advantageous to keep a blurred photo rather than replace it with a sharper image. Rigidly defining and purposing leisure may unintentionally prohibit some people from experiencing leisure and thus impede their ability to flourish by blocking certain routes to flourishing. A blurred conception of leisure is inherent in the historicist perspective.

A contemporary philosopher whose work provides a useful framework for a historicist interpretation and understanding of leisure is MacIntyre (2007). At the core of his philosophy is the notion of a practice. A practice is defined as

...any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized 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, 2007, p. 187)

Practices include many pursuits commonly considered to be leisure activities such as snow skiing, baseball, and painting as well as the roles people inhabit such as mother, father, teacher, park ranger, recreation programmer, and

therapeutic recreation specialist. A practice requires practitioners to possess more than technical skills; they must act virtuously. Therefore, members of the practice of snow skiing must not only be capable of negotiating various terrains and snow conditions, they must also adhere to the skier responsibility code.

To excel at a practice means to attain standards of performance for technical skills and virtuous behaviors established by practitioners. Members who excel acquire the internal goods of a practice. Internal goods are outcomes resulting from participating in a particular practice and can include satisfaction from performing well, excitement from discovering new ways of performing, and improved physical functioning and health. Internal goods add richness, purpose and meaning to practitioners’ lives.

As people accumulate practice related experiences they weave those experiences into a coherent personal narrative or life story (MacIntyre, 2007). A narrative links discrete events, separated by time and context, together in a meaningful way. When people reflect on or share their narratives they become more aware of who they are, what they like to do, and what matters most to them. This increased awareness leads to the formulation of a telos or life-goal (MacIntyre, 2007). In contrast to Aristotle and Aquinas, the telos for MacIntyre is not predetermined. Rather, it is relative and emerges over time; “the good life for man is the life spent in seeking the good life for man” (p. 219).

Virtues play a critical role in human flourishing. They “enable us to achieve those goods which are internal to practices and the lack of which effectively prevents us from achieving any such goods” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 191) and, as with Aristotle and Aquinas, virtues enable people to progress toward their teloi. At a minimum, three virtues are necessary to excel in any practice, secure internal goods, and progress toward a telos: honesty, justice and courage (MacIntyre, 2007). Members of a practice must be truthful about their performances, fair in their dealings with other participants, and do the right thing even when doing so may lead to physical or existential harm.

Practices are inherently dynamic. In other words, “practices never have a goal or goals fixed for all time” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 193), and practices are partially discerned by a “continuous argument” as to what a practice “is and ought to be” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 222). This argument or ongoing dialogue among members of a practice determines the standards they must adhere to, virtues they must

exercise, content of the virtues, internal goods they can access, and telos of the practice. To add even more complexity, the dialogue is influenced by traditions or extended histories surrounding a practice (MacIntyre, 2007). “A practice is ...embedded in and made intelligible in terms of the larger and longer history of the tradition through which the practice in its present form was conveyed to us” (MacIntyre, 2007, pp. 222-223). “The practice of leisure is and has been impacted by numerous traditions including slavery, capitalism, consumerism, classical leisure, liberal individualism, and the Protestant work ethic” (Sylvester, 2007, p. 210).

The flux nature implies the meaning and purpose of a practice such as leisure is ever evolving. Although there may not be *one* ultimate definition, description, or function of leisure, individual leisure practices share similarities.

I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family – build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, and so on and so forth – overlap and criss-cross in the same way. – And I shall say: [leisure practices] form a family. (Wittgenstein, 2009, p. 36)

Family resemblance is represented by elements or characteristics that are common across individual leisure practices but the elements in themselves are not sufficient to adequately define or describe leisure practices (Campbell, 1965). For example, freedom, virtues, and community are elements common to leisure practices (Sylvester, 2007, 2009) but individual leisure practices are more than the simple conglomeration of these three elements for at least two reasons (Campbell, 1965). First, though an element may be common across practices, the particulars of the element can differ from one leisure practice to another leisure practice. For example, the amount of freedom exercised by artists creating a piece of work is arguably greater than the freedom exercised by chess players whose moves are bound by multiple rules. In another example, the virtues necessary to excel at American football differ from those necessary to excel as a member of a book club. Second, individual leisure practices are composed of additional elements that are important to the identity and understanding of those practices. For example, “team” and “physically demanding” are a pair of elements associated with many practices (e.g., American football, quad rugby, and wheelchair basketball) but not all practices (e.g., book club and

stamp collecting). Two further conditions of these additional elements are that, at a minimum, each element must be associated with at least two practices (overlapping) and two elements cannot appear together across all leisure practices (crisscrossing) in which either one is found (Campbell, 1965; Wittgenstein, 2009). Building upon the previous example, wheelchair basketball and quad rugby are physically demanding, team-based leisure practices (overlapping) while bridge is a team-based card game that is not physically demanding and running marathons is a physically demanding practice where members compete individually (crisscrossing).

## FAMILY RESEMBLANCE

As noted above, the family resemblance among leisure practices includes, at minimum, the internal goods of community and freedom and the concomitant requirement for virtuous behavior (Sylvester, 2007, 2009). Members of a leisure practice compose a community so the terms *leisure practice* and *community* are synonymous. Since “every community is established with a view to some good” (Aristotle, 2001b, 1252a, 1-2), members of a leisure practice are united by their shared interest in the practice’s internal goods and systematic extension of what it means to flourish.

In any genuine community there are shared values: the members are united through the fact that they fix on some object as pre-eminently valuable. And there is a joint effort, involving all members of the community, by which they give overt expression to their mutual regard for that object. (Haworth, 1963, p. 86 as quoted in Pedlar & Haworth, 2006, p. 519)

The joint efforts of the members of a practice contribute to one another’s flourishing through a variety of means. They assist each other to become rational beings, secure individual and common goods, navigate times of dependency inherent in the human condition, and learn how to excel as a practitioner in the practice and as a human being (MacIntyre, 1999). Also within leisure practices (i.e., communities), people learn, cultivate, and display virtues necessary to sustain and enhance those practices/communities (Hemingway, 1988). Another critical function of a community is the on-going deliberation of questions such as: How does one excel in this practice? How does excelling in this practice contribute to my flourishing and the flourishing of others? Should the practice be revised so it contributes even more to flourishing and if

so, how should it be revised? And what does it mean to flourish as a human being? Deliberations are discursive and characterized by members forwarding reasons to support why they answered in the manner they did and evaluating reasons forwarded by others in support or opposition (Hemingway, 1996). As a result, a particular stance may be continued, refined, extensively altered, or completely abandoned. The goals of discussions are enhancement of the practice, a fuller understanding of flourishing, and promotion of flourishing.

Acting virtuously and excelling at a practice contributes to one’s own flourishing, the flourishing of other practitioners, and extends what it means to excel in the practice. So, snowboarders who excel acquire internal goods such as pride and satisfaction from performing well, improved health and functioning, and camaraderie with other snowboarders all of which infuse their lives with meaning and contribute to a personal sense of purpose. As snowboarding equipment and instruction evolves and snowboarders advance their skills, standards become more demanding and what it means to excel at snowboarding is extended. Other snowboarders benefit by being exposed to expanded conceptions of what is possible within the practice. Society also benefits because the lives of snowboarders are more infused with pride, satisfaction, and camaraderie and their health improves. In addition, some of those for whom the practice used to be considered impossible, for instance, people with disabilities, are able to take advantage of the improvements in technological and pedagogy to become members of the practice.

Community, defined and described in this manner, is the antithesis of a lifestyle enclave (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler & Tipton, 1996). A lifestyle enclave consists of people who are socially, economically and culturally similar. They are united through their participation in the same leisure practices. However, rather than being open to and supportive of diverse people joining the practice members of an enclave largely ignore those who are not similar or share their leisure lifestyle. Additionally, members of an enclave are not concerned with extending leisure practices or enhancing the flourishing of its members or society at large.

In contrast, MacIntyre (1999) argued that the degree to which an entire community flourishes is indicated by the degree to which people who have been traditionally ignored are actively involved in deliberations and actually do flourish. A community’s flourishing is enhanced when

every person in that community including those with disabilities partake in the deliberations (Hutchison & McGill, 1998) because every member of a community has something to teach about human flourishing and sometimes it is only from disenfranchised people that we can learn about a particular aspect of flourishing (MacIntyre, 1999). In an illustration of how people with disabilities contribute to practices in a meaningful but unconventional manner, a caregiver recounted that she learned how complex the notion of freedom is from the woman (Mary) she serves who is nonverbal and has multiple disabilities including Alzheimer’s disease.

Mary is one of the freest people I know.... She finds ways to live life fully without having the means most of us rely on, since her vision and language are severely limited.... Mary’s freedom is striking but it also paradoxical. She has a real autonomy to follow her desires and insists that assistants help her to meet them, while simultaneously being totally dependent in terms of personal and home care. (Cushing & Lewis, 2002, p. 184)

When the input of people who are traditionally marginalized is sought after and respectfully considered, the scope of human capacities widens because “the human conceptions of the ends and goods involved, are systematically extended” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 187). As a consequence, members of the community experience greater freedom through the explicit acknowledgement and support of multiple ways of excelling and flourishing, and recognition that flourishing is an interdependent endeavor.

Freedom is related to community in other ways. Members of a community collaborate to define what is good and bad and right and wrong. Because the definitions are not imposed by a deity or predetermined and immutable, people are free to determine what is best for them *qua* participants in a practice and human beings through reasoned dialogue. Engaging in these discursive dialogues also leads to participants increasing their level of self-knowledge (i.e., values, beliefs, abilities, and goals) freeing them to actively pursue excellence in commensurate leisure practices which in turn contributes to their flourishing as community members and human beings.

Freedom is critical to virtues, and virtues are critical to practices. “Freedom is the presupposition of the exercise of the virtues” (MacIntyre, 2007, p. 159) and practices require the development and exercise of virtues. Sylvester (2007, 2009) proposed four virtues beyond the three

identified by MacIntyre (2007) as necessary to excel in leisure practices. Though the list is incomplete it does provide a starting point. One virtue is respect for living things and the environment. The second virtue is disinterestedness which means to participate in a leisure practice for the internal goods associated with that practice and not for external goods. External goods, of which money, fame, and power are examples, are not dependent upon excelling in a practice and thus can be obtained by those who perform poorly and/or exhibit vices. The third virtue is playfulness. Sylvester (2007) described playfulness as a mix of "the seriousness one had as a child, at play" (Nietzsche, 1989, p. 83) and eutrapelia. Eutrapelia is revitalizing the soul through play (Aquinas, 1952). The soul, like the body, becomes tired with work which for the soul is reasoning. The pleasure generated by play refreshes the soul. The fourth virtue listed by Sylvester is phronesis or practical reasoning. Phronesis is a considered a meta-virtue because it entails selecting and applying the most appropriate virtue to a specific situation.

Let's view the four virtues as applied to the leisure practice of mountain biking. Mountain biking involves riding on narrow, natural surfaced trails usually in relatively secluded settings such as mountains, wooded areas, open grassy areas, or deserts. Mountain bikers who excel are primarily motivated to ride because doing so enables them to access internal goods such as the camaraderie of fellow riders and satisfaction from successfully negotiating demanding obstacles. While negotiating these obstacles they become totally immersed in the moment, concentrating solely on the upcoming terrain. The pleasurable experience of total absorption revitalizes them and prepares them to tackle everyday problems. Because most biking takes place in natural settings, riders frequently encounter wildlife and when these encounters occur, riders give animals a wide berth so as to minimize the intrusion. However, respecting an animal may require acting in a manner that is normally forbade. For example, coming upon a rattlesnake sunning or skunk standing firm in the middle of the trail may necessitate leaving the trail and bushwhacking or going the wrong way a short distance on a single track trail in order to bypass the animal. Riders must consider the entire situation and determine the best action to perform in that situation at that time while doing their best to respect fauna, flora, and safety rules. Sometimes the best action entails violating one or more virtues so as to follow the most important virtue for a given situation. The

ability to judge the best course of action to follow in a particular situation is developed over time and with application.

## HOW THE TERM "LEISURE" IS USED

Aristotle (2001a) may have anticipated the emergence of the historicist tradition when, in *Ethics*, he said the level of specificity to seek when analyzing subjects depends on the nature of the subjects. Leisure, as with human happiness, should not be investigated with the same expectations for precision associated with the study of natural phenomena. Natural phenomena such as the laws of motion, gravity, and thermodynamics lend themselves to scientific analysis because science is concerned with uncovering and understanding absolute and universal structures and processes. However, leisure is not a natural, independent, physical object; rather, it is a product of social life (Aristotle, 2001b; Sylvester, 1991). Due to this feature, the meaning of leisure is dynamic, continually being negotiated and revised through discussions. Thus, the propensity of contemporary leisure scholars to discover what leisure "really is" through the application of sophisticated, scientific methods is a misguided approach (Sylvester, 1991).

Instead of employing precise measuring instruments of the kind used by scientists who study physical phenomena, we could learn much by employing philosophical methods and playing closer attention to how the term leisure is used (Wittgenstein, 2009). One reason why terms such as leisure have blurred edges is because the meaning and purpose of those terms are, at least partially, dependent upon how they are used and the contexts in which they appear. Take fishing as an example. Depending on how it is used, fishing can mean a leisure practice, a work practice, or something else. When fishing represents the actions of those who find enjoyment in casting a line from a shore or boat after work or on the weekends most people recognize the term as being used to indicate a leisure practice. However, when fishing represents the actions of those whose livelihood consists of catching and selling fish for monetary gain most people recognize the term as being used to indicate a work practice. Finally, fishing can be used metaphorically as in "He went fishing for compliments." This third use of the term fishing only resembles the first two uses in a general, abstract manner.

With respect to the topic of the present article, leisure may be defined

similarly by two authors but how the authors use the term leads to dissimilar meanings and purposes. To illustrate, take leisure during the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. in Greece and in America during the late 1800s. Authors of the respective periods, Aristotle (2001b) and Veblen (2007), defined leisure as freedom from obligation to perform utilitarian tasks. For both men, leisure is a requisite for the good life which is pursued by members of the leisure class. At this point, the meaning and purpose of leisure begin a radical divergence. For Aristotle (2001a, b), leisure is when people realize their nature and become fully human by exercising their ability to reason. They seek knowledge and truth and act virtuously while doing so. They pursue practices such as science, philosophy, politics, and the arts. Conversely, members of Veblen's leisure class publically flaunt their freedom from work. This is accomplished through involvement in activities that "waste" time. In other words, leisure activities are nonproductive endeavors; they must not serve any useful or utilitarian purpose or contribute to the advancement of human life. Examples include playing games and sports and learning dead languages (e.g., Latin, Old English). Another signature activity for Veblen's leisure class is the pursuit of classics such as philosophy in institutions of higher learning.

Indeed, there can be little doubt that it is their [classics] utility of evidence of wasted time and effort, and hence of the pecuniary strength necessary in order to afford this waste, that has secured to the classics their position of prerogative in the scheme of the higher learning, and has led to their being esteemed the most honorific of all learning. (Veblen, 2007, p. 257)

Aristotle and Veblen defined leisure similarly but it is unlikely the two of them could have engaged in a smooth flowing conversation on the topic because of the conflicting meanings and purposes they ascribed to the term. To comprehend why there can be multiple meanings of the same term it is important to realize the meaning of leisure is influenced by the surrounding historical context including knowledge, language, and cultural practices. The historical context each author was embedded in so profoundly impacted his thoughts on leisure that if the two were to trade places, each would find his ideas on leisure out of place in and foreign to inhabitants of the new society to which he was transplanted. Aristotle lived in a society that did not have access to technological and scientific developments available to Veblen and Americans in the late 1800s. But Aristotle did have a

vocabulary that distinctively defined work in terms of leisure (ascholia) while, conversely, Americans defined leisure in terms of work. For the Greeks work was the absence of leisure while for Americans leisure was time not spent at work. With respect to cultural practices, both men encountered slavery. The formation of the Greeks' leisure class was possible due to the practice of slavery, and slaves were believed to be less than fully human. Americans, who had recently finished fighting a civil war to abolish slavery, were witnessing how the Industrial Revolution used machines to replace human labor and create a wealthy, leisure class.

From a historicist perspective, the lack of concurrence of meaning and purpose between Aristotle's and Veblen's leisure does not necessarily imply one conception of leisure is more valid than the other. Rather, the variations are manifestations of the corresponding distinctive historical contexts and therefore valid within those contexts. So, it stands to reason if leisure can be defined in multiple ways and possess numerous meanings and purposes, instead of trying to find *the* definition or meaning or purpose of leisure, the goal should be to come up with better ways of thinking about leisure and its place in current day life (Sylvester, 1991).

## CONCLUSION

A better way of thinking about leisure involves the adoption of a historicist perspective because such a perspective holds great promise for human beings. The promise is in the continual refinement of a conceptualization that imbues leisure with more and more meaning, causing leisure to play a more critical and positive role in enhancing the flourishing of *all* human beings. This promise is echoed in the belief that in contemporary society, "leisure performs a key function, then: the function of rendering meaning" to people's lives (Blackshaw, 2010, p. 141). Blackshaw goes on to say leisure is positioned to become "the principal driving force underpinning the human goal of satisfying our hunger for meaning and our thirst for giving our lives a purpose. This is the job leisure was always cut out for" (p. 120).

This article described a conceptualization of leisure in-line with Blackshaw's vision. A MacIntyrian based conception of leisure, based on virtuous behavior, active inclusivity of diverse peoples, and the internal goods of community and freedom is likely to broaden the range and increase the number of leisure practices in which people can excel. A wider and more

plentiful scope, in turn, helps ensure there are multiple routes people with different interests, abilities, and skills can travel to flourish. And because leisure practices are dynamic and extended through discursive dialogue they can and do evolve, building upon discoveries and advances in our understanding of leisure, human beings, the world, and what it means to flourish.

Though the MacIntyrian based conceptualization of leisure holds great potential for human flourishing, this potential will only be realized through recognition of and action upon several key points. One point is that leisure is woven throughout people's lives influencing and being influenced by several other constructs. Thus, leisure is not to be treated as an independent, isolated entity but as one component of a rich network of contributors to the fabric of human lives. Additionally, the interrelationships among these constructs necessitate explicit identification and study. Therefore, comprehending leisure to the greatest extent possible involves learning about, at a minimum, philosophy, history, language, and cultural studies. Furthermore, people must understand there is no universal, immutable answer to the question of what is leisure. In fact, due to its ever evolving nature, the socially constructed phenomenon is continuously undergoing revisions that reflect advances in our knowledge and understanding of the subject matter. Though possibly diverse and even incompatible, revisions are bounded by at least four conditions which preclude an "anything goes" mentality. First, virtuous behavior is an integral aspect of leisure practices. Second, objective standards of excellence are established by and guide the actions of practitioners. Third, for one person to flourish other people have to flourish so leisure practices must be structured so as to contribute to the flourishing of all practitioners. Finally, and related to the first three conditions, practitioners and society constantly review the ability of leisure practices to promote flourishing and make changes as necessary to enhance that ability.

A blurred rather than sharp conception of leisure may best serve humanity. However, this characteristic places a responsibility upon us as human beings to continually refine the conceptualization of leisure so that it performs the job it "was always cut out for," infusing people's lives with meaning (Blackshaw, 2010, p. 120).

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