

EDITED BY
KEITH BREEN AND JEAN-PHILIPPE DERANTY

THE POLITICS AND ETHICS OF CONTEMPORARY WORK

Whither Work?

“Work is too important a topic to leave it to economists alone—and the repercussions of the Corona crisis show that countries have choices to make with regard to how work is organized and regulated. Hence, it’s wonderful to see that philosophers and social scientists are returning to the topic of work. This volume, with its excellent range of contributors, is an important contribution to discussions that we urgently need to have.”

Lisa Herzog, *University of Groningen, Netherlands*

“Addressing several of the most pressing issues today in the world of work, this is a timely and much needed volume that should be widely read.”

Andrew Schaap, *University of Exeter, UK*

“How should we understand work currently? What responses can we muster to confront the difficulties and uncertainties presented by work for human flourishing, freedom, and justice? Bringing together several respected authors in political and social theory, this book tackles these questions and many more in incisive and revealing ways.”

Allyn Fives, *National University of Ireland, Galway*



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THE POLITICS AND ETHICS OF CONTEMPORARY WORK

Bringing together leading international scholars within the fields of social and political theory and philosophy, this book explores how we should understand work and its role(s) in our lives and wider society.

What challenges are posed by work in our changing economy and the new economic forms that are beginning to emerge, and how can we best address these challenges? In what ways do patterns of working, as well as work technologies, shape people's lives within and outside work, in particular their life opportunities and their social and natural environment? How might we organize—or seek to reorganize—workplaces so that the experience of work better reflects our shared ethical ideals and normative principles? This volume examines these vital questions in a comprehensive and systematic manner in order to provide much needed theoretical insight and practical guidance in reflecting on the nature, problems, and possibilities of work currently.

This book will be of interest to undergraduate and postgraduate students and established academics in the areas of contemporary political theory and philosophy, social theory, legal philosophy, labour studies, the sociology of work, practical ethics, critical theory, and political activism.

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Whither Work?

*Edited by
Keith Breen and Jean-Philippe Deranty*

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Dedicated to Russell Keat.

Emeritus Professor in the School of Social and Political Science,
University of Edinburgh.

An inspirational thinker on the politics and ethics of work, and on
the limits of capitalism.



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1

WHITHER WORK? THE POLITICS AND ETHICS OF CONTEMPORARY WORK

Jean-Philippe Deranty and Keith Breen

1 Introduction

The environmental threats induced by climate change, the major social and economic disruptions they are bound to trigger in the very near future, and today the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic—all these substantial challenges facing contemporary societies demand that new ways of organizing society and living together be invented. In particular, these crises bring to a head a number of challenges in the world of work, from the way work is distributed across the different groups making up societies, and how the goods and harms that stem from work are allocated amongst them, to how we conceive of what counts as work and how we esteem different kinds of work contribution. The challenges of our time thus demand more specifically that we seek answers to the many issues entailed in the simple question: ‘Whither work?’

When we consider issues facing work today, one solution seems to suggest itself, namely, simply to abandon the central roles it plays in the organization of modern societies and in the lives of modern individuals. One possible answer to the question ‘Whither work?’ seems to be: ‘Nowhere fast’. This is because the central roles played by work, culturally, through the work ethic, and in the institutional make-up of modern societies, can be viewed as together a key contributing factor to the crises we face today. Equally, some of the crisis tendencies of our time could appear to make work obsolete as a relevant institution.

The authors gathered in this volume all suggest a different route. They all believe that the political and ethical issues of work continue to be meaningful questions to explore because work will remain a central form of experience, and will drive many institutional and organizational responses, in the solutions humanity will need to develop to address its problems. For these authors, it still makes sense to ask ‘Whither work?’ and to try and address precisely the many aspects that this simple question entails.

Before we briefly highlight the direction taken by the authors in the volume, let us draw a rough sketch of the contemporary situation and how issues of work arise in it. For each one of these issues, a major fork in the road of possible policy solutions exists between the rejection of work and the definition of a new, humanistic work ethic.

2 Contemporary challenges of work

2.1 *Work in a post-growth world*

The systemic environmental crisis looming as a result of global warming and other major disruptions of natural cycles poses the first and most urgent question of work, that of productivism. Modern society is founded on the idea that constant growth in the production and consumption of an increasing number of manufactured commodities is one of the key conditions of ‘development’ (Arndt, 1987; Barry, 2012). Work is a central factor in this vision, not just as a basic functional condition, but more deeply as a central value. The modern work ethic, and its promotion of personal attributes and forms of activity driven by the goals of increasing wealth, efficiency, and productivity, can be seen as the cultural underpinning of the economic ‘success’ of modern societies (Congleton, 1991; Weber, 1992 [1930]). Productivism is an abbreviation for this very modern understanding where producing commodities and working for economic benefits become so functionally important, they turn into ends in themselves. Yet productivism can be identified as one of the main ideological pillars underpinning the mode of social organization that has produced catastrophic climate change. As a result, if alternative, ‘post-growth’ models of economic organization are to be developed to address the threat of climate change and environmental destruction, then it seems work is also directly implicated. To move beyond productivism seems to imply shedding the work ethic, abandoning the obsession with work, and adopting new individual and social values that would put more emphasis on non-extractive, non-invasive ways of being with others and in the world (Weeks, 2011), ways of being that would reconsider the value of leisure and even idleness, for instance (O’Connor, 2018).

But is such a link so clear? Does the rejection of productivism necessarily entail the downplaying of work? Is a ‘post-growth’ world also necessarily a post-work one? In fact, a post-growth world might entail different ways of working, and of envisaging work, not simply abandoning work values. It might involve a different work ethic, not abandoning all ethics of work.

One major problem with modern work is the way in which it is valued in the capitalistic economic spirit. In modern societies, the driver of economic organization is the efficient creation of exchange value, where use value has relevance only to the extent that it ensures a demand will be there for exchange to occur. Production in this mode of economic organization ignores negative externalities, or ensures, through organizational accounting, valuation, and legislation,

that the economic agents producing those externalities do not have to remedy them (Herzog, 2018). The problem here is that the organizational valuation that underpins the productive system focuses on individual units without a holistic account of the total social and environmental costs. But this is a problem with a particular mode of organizational valuation and understanding of work, not with all work. A different mode of economic organization and of economic thinking that would take into account all of the costs involved in production would not necessarily have to shed all production—far from it. Particular kinds of consumption would still have to be catered for, typically consumption that would be less destructive of the environment or, indeed, of social bonds and of fundamental cultural and psychological realities. Such an alternative economic organization and the theory underpinning it would, therefore, not abandon work, but would rather reframe it to make it better fit its own core normative and functional parameters (Jackson, 2009; Kallis, 2018; Méda, 2016).

Along similar lines, if the contemporary valuation of productive activities is challenged and a new understanding of economics is developed, as just suggested, this will put the focus on activities that involve working but have so far remained largely invisible as such, in particular activities of ‘social reproduction’ involving the work of care but also of socialization and enculturation (Fraser, 2014; Schor, 2011). Even in a post-growth world, all that work of social reproduction will continue to remain essential.

Furthermore, even though capitalism has been adept at creating value from innumerable activities, always finding new ways to monetize new aspects of individual and social life (Haber, 2013), its obsession with creating surplus value means that it consistently favours particular types of productive activity that have to be driven by particular modes of consumption. Capitalism’s search for constantly renewed sources of profit means that it has to constantly create new types of demand and to satisfy these in a way that keeps the productive cycle going, or even accelerating where possible. In turn, this means that in such a system any pattern of consumption and production that slows down the turnover of commodities is anti-economic in essence. All activities that aim to maintain existing objects, or repair or recycle them, any attempt to limit consumption, cannot be integrated in the economic cycle. But these are precisely the kind of activities and modes of consumption that would take precedence in a post-growth world (Barry, 2012; Spelman, 2002). Once again, moving to a post-growth world is not necessarily synonymous with moving to a post-work world. Maintaining, repairing, and recycling would be core activities in a post-growth society. These are all kinds of working, just not work that produces commodities or services with in-built obsolescence, the purpose of which is to satisfy fleeting preferences for conspicuous consumption and artificially created needs.

Finally, sustainable modes of production that attend to real needs, avoid the multiplication of false needs, and take negative externalities into account will require the redesign of the distributive networks underpinning production and consumption. Currently, production in many sectors of the economy is

globalized because the capitalistic drive for constant reduction of costs seeks out and indeed creates complex value chains. These, however, are a major source of pollution and of the curtailment of worker rights. Thus, there is very good cause to think that sustainable production needs to be drastically relocalized and self-production by communities revitalized. This ideal was consistently promoted by Gorz in all of his writings decades ago (see, for instance, Gorz, 1989, 1999), and is today at the heart of the ethos of hacker communities and ‘fab labs’ (Himanen, 2002; Lallement, 2015). From this perspective, work regains a central place as communities take responsibility for fulfilling more of their own needs. The COVID-19 crisis has brought this realization to a head, with the sudden rupture in supply chains showing just how vulnerable the most ‘developed’ societies have become as a result of globalized production and commerce.

2.2 Financialized capitalism, platforms, automation, and the end of work

Current capitalism has to a significant extent detached the creation of surplus value from the exploitation of labour. In the most recent trends of capitalistic profit-making, work is no longer a central factor, but is relegated to the periphery. In such a context, the answer to the question ‘Whither work?’ seems to be a sceptical one, along the lines of: ‘It’s unclear, and it might not matter so much anymore’.

Key in this is the rise of financialized capitalism. The last two decades have seen an exponential growth of the financial logic, a logic that was at play already in the creation of joint-stock companies in the 19th century, but has become a key sector of profit-making and, indeed, a paradigm of neocapitalism only in recent times. Financialized capitalism denotes not just the increase in the share of profits stemming from the finance sector, but more fundamentally the role played by financial tools and a financial approach to the economy in the overall mode of production (Bryan and Rafferty, 2014; Lapavistas, 2009; Martin, 2002). The central concern for capitalist value creation has become the calculation of risk and exposure to performance. With the tools for calculating and predicting price fluctuations improving exponentially, profit-making is now attached to the management of portfolios. In these portfolios, liquid and illiquid assets are just abstract factors in the maximization of the rate of return. The surplus value created by workers is only one amongst many other factors that portfolios can include, from weather patterns to mortgages, myriad life and other insurances, the varied aspects of sports competitions, et cetera.

Another recent trend is that profits are increasingly extracted from the commodification of psychological and social aspects of human lives, notably through the ‘economy of attention’ (Citton, 2017). This denotes the different ways in which traditional media channels, as well as new media platforms, monetize the immense amounts of data they collect on their users. If platforms become the new paradigm of capitalism (Srnicek, 2017), it will be a paradigm premised

on kinds of work—paying attention, clicking, watching content online, buying stuff, et cetera—far removed from traditional understandings of work that involve the entire human agent making meaningful changes in their natural, social, or psychological context by employing their intelligence, their physical abilities, and their know-how. In data-centred economies, even though a lot of industrial and craft work goes on in the background, what is usually understood by work—namely, the mobilization of the entire person for the production of some outcome—again is no longer the driving factor.

If the central place of work in the capitalist search for profit is lessened in the ways just described, and given that in the foreseeable future the financial and platform sectors are set to expand rather than shrink, does this not make work a less essential entity in contemporary social and political analysis, at least if one attempts to take a realistic view of our world?

Moreover, at the same time as material production is overtaken by new, dematerialized modes of value creation, in the industrial sectors that remain the search for efficiency continues to lead to the pursuit of technological advantage, notably through the development of automated processes and robots. Pessimistic predictions famously anticipate a significant destruction of jobs in developed economies, including jobs traditionally associated with a high status but where artificial intelligence (AI) overtakes the analytical and predictive power of human minds (for example, Ford, 2015). The argument has also been mounted that many jobs have been created and maintained for no real economic or social value and have no meaning for the individuals performing them. Critical theorists who make these claims argue that capitalism has an interest in maintaining the illusion of the centrality of work. The latter serves to prevent people from embracing the possibility of a world with less or indeed no work (Gorz, 1989, 1999). And this is partly so because capitalist classes like nothing better than having armies of servants around them, as in feudal times (Graeber, 2018). If these analyses are accurate, it would seem asking the question ‘Whither work?’ no longer captures a significant concern of our time.

However, if one draws this conclusion from the state of contemporary capitalism, then it also means one takes the latter as a *fait accompli*. Paradoxically, this is what critical theorists do when they argue that we should take as fact the demise of work in current capitalism and seek emancipation through acceleration of the powers of machines (see, for instance, Bastani, 2017; Srnicek and Williams, 2015). Another option would be to denounce the situation as unjust and pathological, and, on the basis of such a negative assessment, to seek an alternative mode of social organization. In this alternative arrangement, it is far from obvious that work in some form will not continue to have very significant roles to play. The COVID-19 crisis has brought to public attention with great acuity the importance of human labour for the fulfilment of essential needs. Many of the workers who have been called ‘essential’, and have therefore been asked to continue working whilst the rest of society shut down, perform jobs that we would not want machines, robots, or algorithms to perform, most obviously

care work. If the fulfilment of real individual and collective needs becomes the purpose of economic organization, and this organization also respects its environmental, social, and cultural contexts, then it is highly likely that human work will still be required and such possibly in new forms of work. Asking the question of what these might be, and what moral, social, and political questions arise from them, will therefore become particularly urgent in our changing world.

2.3 Precarization and the work ethic

Another important issue of contemporary work concerns the steady degradation of the social provisions traditionally attached to employment in industrial societies, such as a sense of existential security over time and important material goods such as income and access to healthcare and retirement schemes. Indeed, contemporary work is marked by an increase in precariousness not just in relation to the social provisions just mentioned, but also in areas directly related to terms of employment and the performance of work activity. Some work contracts now specify no amount of hours; in many jurisdictions, the prerogatives of managers extend further and further into people's lives, both at work and outside of work; external surveillance of workers and evaluation of performance keep increasing and refining, unsettling the confidence of even the most experienced; and so on (Dejours et al., 2018; Maltby, 2009; Standing, 2011). In the face of these problematic developments, a number of authors criticize the dogma of the centrality of work and reject the work ethic. Why continue to maintain the moral compulsion to work when work is a medium of servitude and existential vulnerability, and when the rise of automated machines and processes leads us to think it is no longer possible to find work for everyone (Chamberlain, 2018; Cholbi, 2018)?

In this case as well, however, opposite arguments from similar premises can be made. Rather than abandoning work and the work ethic, it might well be that the most urgent thing to do is to reform work. Rather than abandoning work because in its current organization it creates increased vulnerabilities for an increasing number of people, the agenda might be to give back to workers the rights that were taken away from them in the workplace, in the very activity of work, and in the contracts binding them to employers. It might be a very good idea to move away from the old model developed during Fordist times that attached social provisions to permanent, full-time employment. But this does not necessarily entail pushing work in the background. The COVID-19 crisis has forced several governments to provide everyone with the means to sustain themselves through a guaranteed basic minimum, as in the United Kingdom's furlough scheme. Indeed, many governments have introduced measures that look very much like potential first steps towards a full universal basic income (UBI). Such minimum income schemes could also be linked to socially useful activities, which would need to be provided in times of recession through a jobs-guarantee scheme (Tcherneva, 2020). These options, UBI and jobs guarantee, are not exclusive of each other. It might be possible to recognize the importance

of working, both on a social and individual level, yet detach financial security and social provisions, to a smaller or greater extent, from individual productive contribution. This would be important in a post-growth world, where social value is not easily measurable in rates of return and productivity increase. One might well argue that a UBI would be socially fair, and yet that work should continue to remain a central concern for individuals and collectives.

The key idea in countering the abandonment of work on the ground of the precariousness of current work is that precariousness is not a necessary feature of work, not even of wage work. Once again, abandoning the work ethic that has underpinned capitalism to date does not mean we could not or should not promote a new ethic of work, one that would be sustainable for human communities and their environments.

As mentioned above, the COVID-19 crisis has highlighted the importance of work simply thought of as socially necessary activity, as in the case of cleaners, health workers, transport workers, and so forth. The crisis has made visible the generally valid rule that many occupations that are indispensable attract low remunerations, whilst many occupations attracting high rewards are central to capitalism—advertising, public relations activities of all kinds, tax-law consultancy, et cetera—but would be a lot less useful in a post-growth world. This contrast vividly underlines the social usefulness of many types of occupation. Some might potentially be automated in the not too distant future, like transport, but others, like professional care, are far from this. Indeed, care activities provide telling and powerful objections to the vision of a fully automated society. But what does this all signify? What the issues raised in this sub-section and the previous one point to is the need for a new work ethic, an ethic of work conceived as cooperative activity, where cooperation has not just the technical, ergonomic sense of joint activity, but also the social sense of collective collaboration that serves to fulfil everyone's needs.

2.4 Freedom and necessity in times of crisis

One other key issue facing the world of work today and in the near future, an issue that affects work specifically but is also raised in other areas of social life, is the issue of freedom and its availability in times of crisis.

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic can be seen as a foreshadowing of when the anticipated effects of the climate crisis begin to really bite. As the pandemic started to unfold across the globe, governments were forced to take drastic measures to avoid massive loss of life. As they did this, a number of executive and administrative shortcuts were taken to reorganize society at all kinds of level. Few spheres of society were left untouched by this emergency reorganization. Often these interventions occurred through a suspension of normal democratic practices and established bureaucratic rules. Such suspension of normal consultative practices was replicated in workplaces. In Australia, for instance, legislation on enterprise agreements was amended without consultation

of Parliament to allow business owners to alter the agreements with only one day's notice for employees' acceptance (Patty, 2020).

This example provided by the COVID-19 pandemic raises fundamental questions about freedom and necessity in times of crisis. On the one hand, moral and political philosophers in the last few decades have mounted a strong case for the value of work in helping modern citizens achieve full autonomy (Roessler, 2012; Schwartz, 1982), and for the importance of freedom in one's work in all of the main senses of freedom: as self-realization, as self-determination, and as freedom from domination (Breen, 2019). This central importance of work for freedom and of freedom for work connects in many ways with other writings in moral and political philosophy that have demonstrated the goods attached to work (see, for instance, Gheaus and Herzog, 2016; Hsieh, 2008; Walsh, 1994) and, consequently, argued that a key dimension of justice is making it possible for all to enjoy those goods (Veltman, 2016; Yeoman, 2014).

Yet, as made clear above, the crises we are living through cast a dark shadow over these arguments defending the normative importance of work, notably its links to freedom. One might make the point that in times of crisis, work returns to its status as 'realm of necessity', in such a way that 'necessity' means not just the necessity to engage in the production of means to fulfil socially defined needs, but because it is part of an emergency response to an overwhelming threat. Hard-nosed economists and business leaders might then argue that full productive and financial efficiency requires a curtailing of freedoms at work. In times of crisis, they might argue, freedom must make room for economic efficiency at the macro-level of the national product and at the micro-level of the firm's productivity. Furthermore, environmental concerns might also be thought of as reasons why some of the freedoms identified by moral and political philosophers are just a luxury we cannot afford.

In this case once more, however, different normative conclusions might be drawn from the same empirical starting point. Nothing a priori makes freedom in production an antithesis to efficiency, even though the issue is highly debated. Indeed, it is easy to think of arguments that would make freedom itself an efficiency-enhancing tool, not just a demand of justice, such that one would associate free workers with more productive workers and democratic workplaces with more efficient ones (Bowles and Gintis, 1993a, 1993b; Dow, 2003). A style of management that sought, for instance, the advice of on-the-ground workers for technical decisions might well be just as or even more efficient than an authoritarian one. The argument might be true at the macro-level of society as well: a well-functioning parliament might well be the most efficient institution to reorganize society in response to emergencies.

The efficiency concern is premised on the assumption that economic and organizational goals can be defined independently of the reasoned participation of the individuals affected in decision-making processes, at the level of the polity or at the level of a firm. This efficiency/freedom dichotomy is eminently debatable. In truth, times of crisis require democratic approval more than ever, one might

argue. Precisely when difficult choices are required, democratic approval at the level of society or in the productive unit is arguably the precondition for these choices being made as justly as is possible in the circumstances. This is true in a ‘positive’ sense, say with regard to the choice of goods to produce and consume, the means by which they should be produced, how scarce resources should be used and allocated for this production, et cetera. And it is true in a ‘negative’ sense, when decisions have to be made about the burdens to be borne by some parts of the community, which therefore need to be allocated, and how those who bear them might be compensated. In brief, times of crisis do not necessarily make freedom a less compelling demand when it comes to our work.

3 Outline of the book

The essays contained here address various aspects of the challenges just reviewed. The first three ask how we should view work as part of human life, and how changes in socio-economic conditions and the different understandings of working activity embraced over time aid or hinder the enjoyment of freedom, the sense of leading meaningful lives, and the realization of uniquely human capacities and powers. In his contribution, Nicholas H. Smith inquires whether work and the social roles attaching to it can embody what he, following Axel Honneth, calls ‘social freedom’. A richly intersubjective conception, social freedom obtains when people can identify with their social roles, cooperate with one another in ways contributing to each other’s self-realization, and have an effective say over the performance of their shared activity. From this emancipatory perspective, work in the contemporary capitalist economy and labour market is distinctly ambiguous, on the one hand promising mutual recognition through participation in cooperative activities, and on the other hand defined by the pursuit of self-interest and individual gain, with workers enjoying little discretion over their working lives. But Smith nonetheless argues that we can view work as a real realm of social freedom once we understand, contra Honneth, the locus of normative attention as less the labour market, which rests on instrumental exchange relations, and more the workplace or firm. He concludes by considering various transformations that might help realize freedom in workplaces, including introducing a UBI.

The possibility of finding meaning in one’s work in our rapidly changing societies is the subject of Ruth Yeoman’s and Sean Sayers’s chapters. Yeoman’s driving concerns are the widespread anxiety and feelings of alienation occasioned by advances in work technologies, from big data and robotics through to accelerating automation and AI. These advances promise ever greater efficiency but bring with them a loss of our being at home in our work, of our having control over or a voice in what we do daily. To recover a sense of meaningful work, Yeoman urges a reassessment of ethically desirable work in an age of intensified human–machine interactions, arguing that these interactions are welcome only when they enable us to experience meaningfulness and to properly care for

ourselves and other persons, as well as our built and natural environments. Such requires, she contends, innovations at the levels of the workplace and wider society that empower workers and enhance inclusive social cooperation. Echoing Smith's and Yeoman's call for a revised work ethic, Sayers returns to Hegel and Marx to contest what he sees as the dominant understanding of work within our neoliberal, capitalist economies. This understanding rests on a hedonist vision of human nature that reduces work to a burdensome means for securing an income and conceives work relations in wholly instrumental, competitive terms. Hegel and Marx, in contrast, understand human beings as productive beings and work as an activity through which, when properly arranged, they can actualize uniquely human capacities and powers. Coupled with Marx's concept of alienation, this alternative vision of human nature both rebuts the dominant hedonist vision and yields a vital standard for critiquing the degraded forms of work many currently endure and indeed capitalist society as a whole.

The next two chapters consider work in relation to leisure and consumption. Andrea Veltman concurs with Sayers in thinking work an integral part of living well, but she also sees leisure as fundamental to good human lives and the development of people's abilities. A glaring problem, however, is that the opportunity for leisure is unequally apportioned, with a privileged minority enjoying discretionary time and the educational means for self-development on the backs of many workers condemned by circumstances to work long, exhausting workdays. For Veltman, this is ethically intolerable on Kantian grounds for denying these workers equal respect and on Aristotelian grounds for denying them the chance to flourish, to realize their capacities and intellectual potential. Addressing this injustice requires a general shortening of the workweek, but also a thoroughgoing reorganization of our educational systems and, in particular, equal access to university education.

In his chapter, Samuel Arnold adds to Veltman's argument in examining the flip-side of modern productivism, namely consumerism and the consumerist work-spend dynamic. Consumerism has been relatively neglected by liberal egalitarian theorists, perhaps due to it being thought a matter of individual ethics and not of justice. Against this, Arnold claims that liberal egalitarians ought to be deeply concerned with consumerism precisely because it undermines justice in depriving future generations of the resources to fulfil basic needs, weakening the provision of public goods and services, and undercutting fair equality of opportunity for all. Just as troublesome, our consumerist culture feeds a destructive work ethic wherein people work ever more hours to earn the money they require to buy things they do not really need. The result is that the leisure necessary for social reproduction—for participating within and contributing to our families, neighbourhoods, and communities—is inexorably eroded.

The following chapter by Iñigo González-Ricoy and Jahel Queralt revisits the issue of jobs, employment, and precarity with a normative exploration of self-employment. This topic is mostly ignored by social and political theorists, despite the fact that self-employment has grown in developed economies and amounts

to half of the workforce in developing ones. González-Ricoy and Queralt ask whether there are good grounds for governments to promote self-employment over employee work and review the main arguments for thinking that governments should—that self-employment creates jobs, leads to greater job satisfaction, ensures independence from bosses, upholds occupational freedom, or may be the only alternative to crippling poverty in non-ideal contexts. Some of these arguments are only partially convincing, with a lot hanging on empirical factors, while others are more compelling. González-Ricoy and Queralt therefore conclude that governments do have pro tanto reasons to promote self-employment, especially in the non-ideal circumstances of developing economies.

Katharina Nieswandt's contribution also concentrates on employment, yet focusing on the oft advanced contention that because automation will develop to such a degree that much current work will be rendered superfluous, we will necessarily have to introduce a UBI financed by the productivity gains arising from fully automated production systems to protect former workers from destitution and permit them to pursue non-work social activities. Nieswandt is highly sceptical of this 'UBI-after-work argument', deeming it empirically and theoretically flawed. Her main points are that automation has not led to mass unemployment in the past but instead to new occupations, and that the logic of competitive market capitalism does not itself tend towards reductions in work hours. The argument for UBI based on technologically induced mass unemployment thus rings hollow. Nieswandt concludes that if greater leisure and more egalitarian distributions of wealth are our goals, these will be secured by political struggles and decisions, not by technological advancements.

In an essay revisiting Arnold's liberal concerns, Lucas Stanczyk contends our political imagination is warped by a series of errors he terms 'marginal liberalism'. By this he means that liberals are committed to everyone enjoying the same basic rights and freedoms and yet accept as normal work practices that severely undercut the equal enjoyment of those basic rights and freedoms. Thus, many liberals display a marginal commitment to their own orientating values, something we can see most starkly as regards the unequal authority relationships within contemporary workplaces. These relationships are thought acceptable by liberals, and yet they originate from gross inequalities generated by the capitalist market and state-sanctioned employment law that enable a privileged few to lord over the many, thereby contravening equal freedom for all. The only way to achieve such freedom and a truly liberal society, Stanczyk counsels, is to staunch the wellsprings of unjust privilege and equalize participation in socially cooperative activities.

The next three chapters consider what republican political theory has to say about work and workplace relations. Keith Breen and Onni Hirvonen examine the case for democratic worker voice based on the republican ideal of freedom as non-domination. While not unconvincing, this case is primarily consequentialist in character and therefore open to significant empirical disagreement. Indeed, together with republican arguments for democratic worker voice, there are

republican arguments for worker voice that reject workplace democracy, republican arguments that see state regulation plus a UBI as sufficient for minimizing workplace domination, and republican arguments that focus exclusively on exit rights and are hostile to augmenting workers' voice. Breen and Hirvonen claim this policy indeterminacy stems from a restriction by republicans of the ideal of freedom to the dimension of non-domination alone. If we expand our understanding of freedom to include worker autonomy—a dimension of freedom underpinning the 'expressive egalitarianism' definitive of republican citizenship, properly understood—we can arrive at a more robust freedom-based case for workplace democracy. Jean-Philippe Deranty and Emmanuel Renault, by contrast, take a more critical stance on republicanism's potential for democratizing work relations. Their complaint is that republicans have so far failed to address two pivotal aspects of work activity—namely, the experiences arising from the cooperative performance of work tasks and the socio-political significance of work collectives—and have thus provided an incomplete rationale for workplace democratization. Contra republicans, democratic work requires not only institutional and legal transformations, but also a vision of democracy defined, in Deweyan terms, as the cultivation of democratic habits or a 'way of life'. Instead, then, of a republican conception of democratic voice as simply control of enterprises via representative deliberative procedures, this switch of emphasis to democracy as a way of life and to work experiences and collectives gives rise to a participatory model of workplace democracy calling for the democratization of productive activities in their entirety. The advantage of this model, Deranty and Renault contend, is that it is more attuned than republicanism to the myriad forms of dominating hierarchy inimical to worker freedom.

In his essay, John Barry returns to the dangerous orthodox fallacy of limitless economic growth and the need to think through the contours of a future 'post-growth' world. He sees a strong symbiosis between the demands of green political economy, republican-inspired arguments for workplace democratization, and critiques of the hedonist, instrumental view of work as a 'disutility'. This is so because the foremost excuse for authoritarian managerialism and for blocking democracy in the workplace is efficiency and output maximization, that is, the productivist mantra of limitless growth directed towards consumption and profit rather than need. Against this, Barry argues that democratizing workplaces and production could, in facilitating the fulfilment of various internal goods of work (including cooperation, creativeness, personal autonomy, and democratic decision-making), counter ecologically damaging economic growth by fostering sustainable modes of human flourishing. Fostering sustainable modes of human flourishing also requires re-orienting debate away from understanding work solely in terms of formal employment and towards attention to the broader forms of unremunerated work that are vital to our social lives and ecology.

Continuing Barry's line of analysis, Alexis Cukier in his chapter asks us to reflect on the role work and workplace organization could play in democratizing society generally. His claim is a straightforward one: if we desire a properly

democratic society, we must prioritize democratizing work, given the centrality of work in our social and political experiences. This claim is defensible on empirical and theoretical grounds. Empirically, there is a wealth of evidence revealing that workers yearn for greater freedom in their work, and experiments in workplace organization show that this yearning is realizable. Theoretically, a combination of the class-struggle and industrial-democracy paradigms, in conjunction with lessons from feminism and political ecology, reveals the project of democratizing work and the economy more broadly to be normatively desirable and practically conceivable. Cukier ends his discussion with a consideration of the rights and institutions that would facilitate the democratization of work and the economy, including the conferral of a new ‘worker-citizen’ status on all and the foundation of a multilevel council democracy.

In the penultimate chapter, Paul Gomberg assesses the necessary preconditions of genuine workplace democracy and offers a critique of those who believe such can be accomplished in a market economy. The mistake John Rawls and market socialists make is to neglect the truth that the competitive discipline dictated by market exchange relentlessly limits workers’ scope of action, resulting in workplace egalitarianism being undercut, workers being subordinated to managerial elites, and workplace democracy becoming merely a sham. To address that mistake, Gomberg turns to historical examples of workers’ movements and democratic power in planned economies, specifically the experiments in worker self-determination undertaken in the late-1920s and early-1930s Soviet Union. Although these experiments were eventually stymied by developments, in particular the rise of privileged elites, they reveal that true workplace democracy depends upon relations of communist equality in which production and its organization benefit all in a similar manner. If such equality is not in place, we cannot really speak of democratic work, of cooperative worker power, or even of a shared common purpose.

Concluding the book, James A. Chamberlain departs from several of the other contributors in espousing a ‘post-work’ perspective that contests the legitimacy of the work society and disputes work’s centrality to our individual and shared life. The post-work project remains inchoate, however, without consideration of the role of borders in maintaining the unfreedoms and inequalities characteristic of the work society. This is so because, first, existing work and migration policies are intricately interwoven, and, second, these work and migration policies are open to critique for similar reasons, to wit, that they unduly inhibit freedom, entrench inequality, and reinforce exclusion. Chamberlain therefore contends that advocates of a post-work politics must also commit themselves to a ‘fully open border’ politics in which migration is unlimited and citizenship rights grounded simply on residence. For this politics to succeed and for it to serve progressive ends, a global UBI would need to be established, amongst other measures. Although certainly challenging to introduce, this proposal is neither fanciful nor unrealistic but actually achievable under current conditions with the right will and political imagination.

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2

WORK AS A REALM OF SOCIAL FREEDOM

Nicholas H. Smith

1 Introduction: realms of necessity and freedom

Many progressives about work have been oriented in their thinking by the distinction, famously made by Marx in Volume Three of *Capital*, between ‘the realm of necessity’ and ‘the true realm of freedom’.¹ The point of the distinction, at least as interpreted by many of Marx’s readers, is to get a clearer picture of the relationship between hopes that attach to work and hopes that attach to other forms of human activity. The distinction does this first by way of a reminder of the fundamental context in which work occurs: the need for human beings to produce the stuff that keeps them alive. Subjection to that need, and to the laws that govern the metabolism between ‘man’ and ‘nature’, is the unavoidable, universal condition of human life. Human beings can make their metabolism with nature more effective; they can reach a better understanding of the laws of nature and thereby gain more control over it; and they can organize themselves so as to exercise this control for collective human purposes and the common good. In these three respects, there is room for freedom in the realm of necessity and a basis for hope in the realization of human potential through work. But this potential is limited by ‘external’ constraints imposed by nature—what Marx also calls ‘natural necessity’. The potential for human self-realization is *unlimited*, however, in that realm of action in which the development of human powers is pursued ‘as an end in itself’. The development of human capacities for its own sake, as an end-in-itself, is different, in Marx’s view, from their development in the course of pursuing some other ‘external’ end, such as the maintenance and reproduction of life, the end pursued in the realm of necessity. Only action directed at the former end belongs to the ‘true realm of freedom’ as Marx defines it here. We should not think of work, or ‘material production proper’, as the kind of action that is apt for the true realm of freedom; on the contrary, as Marx

concludes the passage by stating, ‘the reduction of the working day is the basic prerequisite’. By metabolizing with nature (through labour) more effectively, by understanding nature better, and by organizing themselves in relation to it for the common good, human beings can hope to realize this prerequisite more adequately. The true realm of freedom, enacted through non-work, thus has the partial freedom available in the realm of necessity, enacted through work, ‘as its basis’.² Though the hopes we attach to work should be distinguished from the hopes we attach to non-work, they are ultimately bound up with each other, and we should have both in view (Marx is urging) when attempting to think progressively about work.

The view Marx actually expresses here can be contrasted with two views that subsequently became known as ‘Marxist’.³ One is that it is *only through labour*, understood as participation in the process of material production, that human beings realize their essential nature and attain ‘true’ freedom. Such labour essentialism, if we may call it that, has been used ideologically to justify some of the most brutal forms of oppression in human history, as if labour under no matter what conditions sufficed to make human beings free; or as if those not directly involved in material production, no matter what else they did, were lacking in the essential human quality. This no doubt helps to explain the low regard in which labour essentialism is usually held nowadays. But even if labour essentialism is considered independently of its ideological abuse, and is taken to assert that it is only labour-under-certain-conditions—for example, democratically organized labour—that constitutes the human essence, it is still the wrong way to think progressively about work, in Marx’s view, because it fails to capture the essentially limited character of the freedom available through labour. The other mistaken view—let’s call it labour libertarianism—is that labour is a contingent, not a natural, necessity, and that human beings will only be able to realize themselves fully once the need for labour has disappeared. On this view, there is no real sense in which freedom *of any sort* is at stake in the sphere of production qua realm of necessity: so long as human beings have to work, freedom will elude them. Our social hopes should therefore be shaped by an ideal of self-organizing productive processes, processes that can basically look after themselves while the people do as they choose. Only a realm in which human beings are not constrained in how they spend their time, in which they are free above all from the compulsion to labour, constitutes the true realm of freedom in the labour-libertarian view. We then have on our horizon, as an orienting hope, not so much the reduction as the abolition of the working day. But this is not how Marx suggests we should orient ourselves in relation to work, at least not when he invokes the distinction between the realm of necessity and the true realm of freedom. For it is a crucial feature of that distinction that some freedom is available through work, and that the freedom available through non-work supervenes on that lower-level freedom.

Marx’s articulation of social hopes around work, as formulated in the distinction between the realm of necessity and the true realm of freedom, is at

once more nuanced and more realistic than both labour essentialism and labour libertarianism, the close association of those views with Marxist doctrine notwithstanding. It is more nuanced because it allows for degrees of freedom in both work and non-work. It is more realistic because it conceives those freedoms as interrelated, as grounded in the provision of material necessity without being reduceable to activity responsible for that provision. But while the distinction between the realm of necessity and the true realm of freedom, as formulated by Marx, has these advantages, it might also seem to have less welcome consequences. For example, what are we to make of work whose purpose, on the face of it, has little to do with the satisfaction of material needs? On the face of it, what Marx calls ‘material production proper’, or production aimed at the maintenance and reproduction of life, corresponds only to certain sectors of the division of labour: primary production, obviously, and some elements of manufacture, but in what sense is the work activity of a teacher, hairdresser, taxi-driver, or a whole swathe of service-providers aimed at meeting the necessities of life? In what sense are workers in the research-communications industry, including many of the readers and writers of this book, engaged in a metabolism with nature when they work—any more so than when they do not work? Of course, the modern worker needs the wages or payments exchanged for their labour in order to meet life’s necessities—food, energy sources, medicines, et cetera. But only a small minority are directly involved in the production of that stuff, and thus in what Marx calls ‘material production proper’. And of those engaged in labour that is non-productive in this sense, many do so for wages in excess of the level required to keep them and their dependants alive.⁴ If we also take into account the availability of benefits to protect against hunger and disease, the sense in which work in general represents a realm of necessity, a realm of *natural* necessity, in the modern world becomes unclear.

We can look at this from two perspectives. First, there are needs that are satisfied, either directly through some labour or indirectly through payment received for it, that don’t seem to be determined by natural necessity. I arrive home from a day’s teaching and notice that I need a haircut. I satisfy that need by going to the hairdresser, whose need for a taxi home that night is met with the money earned from cutting my hair. The taxi-driver is doing a late shift to help pay for her daughter’s tuition fees, and so on. The needs at stake here, those met by the activities of teaching, hairdressing, and taxi-driving, are all real enough. But they do not on that account draw us into the realm of necessity in Marx’s sense: they are not literally matters of life and death. It seems clear that a lot of work has this character and is likely to continue to have it in the future. If we are to envisage this as a ‘realm’, then, it does indeed look like a realm of need, but not obviously one of natural necessity. The second, more abstract perspective concerns the necessity of the function served by work. Part of the appeal of Marx’s distinction is its sober acknowledgement of the functional constraints on social life. Whatever else human beings do, they first have to produce the material means of their existence through work of various forms. Provision of the material means of existence

is an indispensable social function, and in this sense, a realm of necessity. But it is not the only function that a viable society must fulfil; it is not the only condition that must be met before other 'higher level' ends can be pursued. For example, any viable society must be able to integrate its members, it must have adequate socialization mechanisms in place for inducting individuals into a shared form of life. A society that lacks such mechanisms is as defective from a functional point of view as one that is unable to produce enough food. A viable human society must also have its own individuation processes; through socialization, individuals must also be able to acquire a sense of self or ego-identity. To the extent that we are talking about indispensable social functions here, we are also talking about distinct realms of necessity. Any society must somehow, no matter what else it goes on to do, socialize, integrate, and differentiate its members, just as it must feed and clothe them. It must be functional with respect to social integration and differentiation, as well as material reproduction (Habermas, 1987). And in being subject to such functional constraints as these, a human society can be said to comprise various realms of necessity.

The two perspectives converge on the thought that need and necessity, considered as 'realms' that map onto the sphere of work, may have a social as much as a natural meaning. There are needs that must be satisfied on account of the position one finds oneself in society, no less than the relation one has to nature as a living organism. It is the fate of each individual human being to have to fit into a society somehow, to find some place in it, just as it is their lot to maintain an effective metabolism with nature. The tasks of fitting in, of establishing and maintaining relationships with others, are no more optional for human beings, and in that sense no less necessary, than those of extracting nourishment and energy from the earth and the sun. But they are social rather than natural necessities, and as such have a different 'logic' to them. We can take social as distinct from natural necessity to attach itself to *social roles*, and these are 'always already' normatively shaped, that is, shaped by expectations of what is socially acceptable and unacceptable in the fulfilment of the role. In any given society there are social roles to be performed, and each individual member of the society, in *becoming* a member, comes to some understanding of their normative shape and feel of their normative force. We can say that all human beings are subject to social necessity in this sense: they are constrained in their actions by the norms governing the roles that must be performed in the societies of which they have become members.

What would it take for *this* realm of necessity, the realm of *social* necessity constituted by given social roles, to become a 'realm of freedom', a realm of *social* freedom? Or to put the question slightly differently, how is freedom to be obtained *in relation to* social roles that must be performed—the realm of social necessity that exists—in any given society? More specifically, what would it take for the social roles performed in *the activity of work* to become part of a realm of social freedom? Or to pose this question slightly differently, how is freedom to be obtained in relation to social roles that, in contemporary societies at least, must be fulfilled through the performance of labour?

It is now widely thought that Hegel might provide a more suitable philosophical framework for addressing such questions than Marx. Hegel has been credited with the conceptual breakthrough that makes social freedom the organizing idea of social philosophy (Neuhouser, 2000), and Axel Honneth (2014, 2017) has proposed a systematic reorientation of critical theory around the idea of social freedom as first articulated in Hegel's *Philosophy of Right* (1991 [1820]). Honneth's account is the most systematic attempt to date to analyse and critically evaluate contemporary societies from the perspective of the social freedom they make available. It is the most systematic attempt, in other words, at a critique of society from the perspective of the freedom that is available through the performance of social roles. As we would expect, work features prominently in this account, for it is by working that many people play their part in modern society, fit into it and stand out, while conversely the lack of opportunity to work is a major source of social exclusion—of being left without a role at all. But before turning to Honneth's proposals for answering the questions just posed, we need some clarification of the idea of social freedom.

2 The idea of social freedom

I've said that social freedom is freedom in the performance of social roles. But what kind of freedom is this? It is the freedom one has *in fulfilling* a certain role; *in being* a parent, friend, worker, consumer, citizen, or member of the public, to mention the key social roles whose history over the past two centuries or so Honneth 'normatively reconstructs' in *Freedom's Right* (2014). Another way of putting this is to say it is the kind of freedom exercised by participating in certain kinds of social relationship, such as the relationship that exists (or is expected to exist) between family members, friends, colleagues, buyers and sellers, and so on. The idea is that one can be more or less free in the *enactment* of such relationships, not just in the *assumption* of them. So, the freedom at stake involves more than, say, having the choice to marry this or that person, to have children or not, or to work for this or that company. It also involves living the relationship out in a certain way, actually *doing* the things that a spouse or a colleague does (or is expected to do), and hence fulfilling specific 'role-obligations' (Hardimon, 1994a). The extent to which a particular role—or to use Honneth's terminology, 'action sphere'—admits of social freedom, or for that matter whether it admits of social freedom at all, will depend on how or whether it meets the following criteria.⁵

First, the role must be apt for subjective 'appropriation'. This means that the occupant of the role must be able to give herself over to it, or, to use Hegel's expression, feel 'at home' in the role. We could rephrase this by saying that the occupant of a role that admits of social freedom is able to 'identify' with it, but we should do so cautiously. Appropriation does not entail that the individual defines herself through the role or that she sufficiently expresses her identity through performing the role. Appropriation must also be distinguished from

liking the role. One can appropriate a role while wishing to be doing something or being somewhere else. The curtailment of negative freedoms in the performance of a role does not prevent it from being a site of social freedom. What social freedom does exclude, though, is *alienation* (Jaeggi, 2014). Indeed, to say that a social role must be apt for subjective appropriation in order to count as a site of social freedom is just another way of saying that a role that admits of social freedom does not alienate the person who performs it.

Second, the role or relationship must make it possible for the occupants or relata to ‘complete’ each other. The performers of roles or participants in relationships that are sites of social freedom contribute to each other’s self-realization and enable forms of self-realization that would have been impossible without the role or relationship. Social freedom is thus an essentially shared good. It is essentially shared in that it is possible, and only possible, in relationships where each party to the relationship enjoys it, and where the parties know themselves to be serving each other’s good—to be ‘completing’ themselves—through their participation in the relationship. The concept of mutual recognition serves (in this context) to make this idea of agents who know themselves to be realizing each other’s good in the performance of a social role more precise. The claim is that in modern societies, we come to this knowledge and express it in three main ways: through the mutual love we show each other in fulfilling our roles as parents, children, life-partners, and friends; in the mutual respect we show each other in fulfilling our roles as citizens or responsible members of humanity at large; and in the esteem we show to each other for achievements and contributions to communities and forms of life we value. But love, respect, and esteem are not just forms of recognition that happen to attach to certain social roles. They provide norms that ought to be applied to those roles, norms that determine whether a given social role is to count as a site of social freedom or not. If a social role becomes detached from its proper form of recognition—say, if parenting were to be oriented predominantly by a norm of individual right-holding, or citizenship by a norm of optimizing group advantage—the role ceases to function as a source of social freedom. Love, esteem, and respect, understood as norms that sustain mutually completing relationships, can thus also be considered as criteria of social freedom, as providing standards by which to judge whether and the extent to which a role, or a particular institutionalization of it, is a site of social freedom.⁶

Third, the people performing the role must have some say in how the role is to be performed. To count as a site of social freedom, a social role must in some sense, to some degree, be regulated by norms that have been determined by the participants in the roles themselves. More precisely, they must be ‘co-determined’ by them, which is to say determined by them together qua performers of the role or qua relata in the relationship. In acquitting one’s responsibilities as parent, friend, worker, and citizen, one typically does not detach oneself from the parties to the relevant relationships, or at least one will not typically do so in the process of making sound decisions or acquitting those responsibilities well.

Individual self-determination in those contexts is also a matter of collective self-determination or co-determination. Co-determination is a third criterion of social freedom, and the presence of opportunities for taking part in collective decision-making in the performance of a social role is a key indicator of the availability of social freedom there.

Two other points need to be made about social freedom before we look at how and whether work is to be regarded as a realm of social freedom. First, while social freedom is not constituted by the negative freedom to assume a particular social role or not, social freedom does presuppose the subjective freedom to enter relationships that are constitutive of that kind of freedom. Coerced assumption of social roles is thus incompatible with social freedom. Second, when considered from the point of view of the social freedom a role makes available, the role should not be taken in isolation, but in connection with other roles and indeed other goods not connected to social roles at all. The balance between roles, and their integration in a life, must also be taken into account. So, when assessing a role from the perspective of the social freedom available from its performance, one must not only consider the extent to which it satisfies the three criteria just sketched, but also how it fits with other roles and freedoms.

3 Honneth on social freedom and work

Given this understanding of social freedom, what are we to make of the claim that work might represent a sphere of social freedom? What are we to make of the suggestion that the idea of social freedom provides the orientation we need for thinking critically and progressively about work?

For Honneth, these are just the kind of questions we should be asking about work but only under certain methodological constraints. One is that spheres of action be criticized using concepts that are continuous with those that also feature in the best description of those spheres. In particular, the norms that are invoked for the purpose of prescribing how things *ought* to be in a given sphere should also be indispensable for describing how things *are* in that sphere and in how they have *become* what they are. This is a short-hand way of saying that critique, in Honneth's view, should be 'immanent'. Another constraint concerns how the sphere of work is to be conceived. If there are norms in this sphere that are also indispensable for its description, they must be of a very general kind and not linked to a specific mode of activity. Rather, they must apply to the dominant social relationship in which work activity is performed in the modern period, which Honneth takes to be the *market* relationship. This methodological consideration leads Honneth to conceive the sphere of work, understood as a possible realm of social freedom, as the *labour market*. It is as a labour market, Honneth thinks, that the sphere of work might be expected to instantiate norms of social freedom and is apt for investigation in terms of its realization of such norms. That markets do (up to a point) instantiate ethical norms, and must do

so (or appear to do so) in order to function effectively, is an idea Honneth takes to be made plausible by the 'moral economy' tradition. Bringing these methodological convictions together, the question of whether work might represent a sphere of social freedom becomes answerable in terms of the norms that have actually come to hold sway in the modern labour market. We can answer the question affirmatively if we have reason to think that the modern labour market is what it is on account of the social freedom it realizes or plausibly promises to realize, whereas the absence of such normative expectations in this sphere would countenance a negative answer.

In *Freedom's Right*, Honneth's answer to this question seems to oscillate between affirmation and denial. On the one hand, if there really were no ethical basis to the organization of labour under capitalism, and no sense in which social freedom were at stake in the performance of waged labour or the exchange of services in a market economy, there would be no 'normative reconstruction' of this sphere of action to undertake. Honneth does himself entertain this possibility, namely that in the case of the labour market the *material* for a normative reconstruction is lacking, but he puts it to one side and proceeds to narrate a history of the capitalist labour market in terms of gains and losses in social freedom. A positive answer to the question of whether the labour market is a sphere of social freedom thus seems to be implicit in the very execution of the normative reconstruction of this sphere. Furthermore, it is only by adopting the perspective of normative reconstruction on *this* sphere, that is, by viewing the exchange of services and waged labour *as if they together were* a sphere of social freedom, that the very meaning of social freedom comes to light. We come to learn what a gain or loss in social freedom amounts to, what the criteria for social freedom are, by looking at the different phases of the capitalist labour market. Thus, the 'alienation' and 'degradation' of labour under capitalism described by many labour historians (in particular, Braverman, 1974) show us what a loss in social freedom measured by the criterion of 'subjective appropriation' is, while conversely attempts to 'humanize' labour show us how gains might be achieved. The exploitation of labour under capitalism shows us what it means to lose social freedom as measured by the criteria of respect and esteem, while struggles for improved working conditions, better pay (pay commensurate with contribution or service), fairer labour laws, and so on reveal how social freedom can be advanced. And perhaps most decisively, we come to learn what co-determination means concretely, both in the negative through exclusions from decision-making processes and in the positive through various forms of collective self-management in the work context. For these reasons, it seems that Honneth must be committed to the view that work is indeed a realm of social freedom, if we mean by that a site of struggle for social freedom, for freedom in the role of working.

On the other hand, there are times when Honneth seems to concede that work should not be regarded as a realm of such freedom after all. He states

explicitly that the current economic system, certainly in Western countries, is ‘not a sphere of social freedom’ for it

lacks all the necessary characteristics of such a sphere: it is not anchored in role-obligations to which all could agree, and which interweave with each other in a way that could enable subjects to view each other’s freedom as the condition of their own.

(Honneth, 2014, p. 176)

He also concedes that the capitalist market, and by implication the modern labour market, is not even *expected* to deliver social freedom; that social freedom is not even counterfactually presupposed as a pre-contractual norm. For example, he writes that ‘in the moral self-understanding of modernity, it has always been unclear whether the establishment of the market should expand negative freedom or establish social freedom in the sphere of the economy’ (Honneth, 2014, p. 177). In a similar vein, at the end of his normative reconstruction of the labour market, he notes the predominance in recent times of ‘an interpretation of the capitalist market ... according to which the market constitutes a sphere of individual rather than social freedom’ (Honneth, 2014, p. 249), which is to say a sphere for the expression of subjective freedom, the pursuit of self-interest and mere economic gain. Honneth appears to be saying that this is not just the interpretation that neo-classical economists and capitalists now give to it, as they have always done, but that it has become the dominant interpretation of those whose role it is to *work*, to participate in the labour market as producers or exchangers of services. Honneth (2014, p. 250) invokes this ‘shift in the public perception of the market’ to explain a general lack of resistance to developments in the labour market associated with neoliberalism, developments that in nearly all cases involve losses in social freedom. Honneth refers to these as ‘misdevelopments’, but that designation only applies so far as the labour market is expected to realize social freedom in the first place. We could just as well describe them as ‘developments’ of a sphere of action whose normative basis lies in the promotion of individual freedom and self-interest rather than social freedom.

We could make sense of these apparently contradictory responses to the question of whether work, which under Honneth’s methodological strictures means the labour market, represents a realm of social freedom or not by saying that, for Honneth, it *once* did, in the period stretching from the origins of moral economy to the neoliberal transformation of capitalism, but *no longer* does. But that leaves us in a troubling position regarding our critical orientation towards the sphere of work. For if we are also bound by Honneth’s constraint on the *immanence* of critique, it would seem that we no longer have recourse to the norms of social freedom when assessing this sphere. We would no longer have recourse to them because they would be ‘external’ to the object under investigation. The worry can also be put this way: if, as a consequence of accepting Honneth’s methodological constraints, we no longer see work as even *apt* for

social freedom, we deprive ourselves of conceptual resources that enable us to see both what is going wrong in this sphere and what we can legitimately hope from it in the future.

We can avoid this problem if we loosen the hold of Honneth's methodological constraints and interpret work as a realm of social freedom somewhat differently. Above all, the assumption that social freedom in the sphere of work is a matter of the norms implicit in market interaction should be dropped. It is problematic not, as has sometimes been argued (Jütten, 2015), because markets are norm-free, but because the market is not the relevant institution for understanding the normativity of work. Modern workplaces may typically be sites of waged labour, but that doesn't mean that they are bound by norms that attach to the marketization of labour, to labour insofar as it is *exchanged*. There are also norms that attach to the work activity itself, to the cooperation and coordination of tasks involved, to the product made or service rendered, and so on. The workplace itself provides the relevant institutional context for the performance of the work role and the availability of social freedom within that role. This is also why, in the moral economy tradition, it is *firms* rather than *markets* that provide the material for normative reconstruction (Keat, 2000). Firms can be more or less expansive in the opportunities they provide for social freedom, and workers can enjoy social freedom to a greater or lesser degree in their particular place of work. Honneth would have been truer to the moral economy tradition, not to mention his Frankfurt School heritage, if instead of the labour market he had chosen the site of *production itself* as the action sphere apt for social freedom.

4 Towards a social emancipation of work

The fundamental issue at stake for conceiving work as a realm of social freedom is whether, and how, freedom is to be obtained in *the role of producer or provider of services*. In distinguishing between the realm of necessity and the true realm of freedom, Marx allowed for some freedom, albeit of a limited sort, in this role. But by tying the role of producer to natural necessity, the distinction loses traction with the modern realities of work. Honneth's normative reconstruction of the ethical basis of the modern labour market promises to put this right. But by the end of this reconstruction, we are left with a picture of the labour market as shorn of an ethical basis altogether, as no longer intelligible as a realm of social freedom. If we follow Honneth's methodological strictures around immanent or internal critique, this seems to leave us in the uncomfortable position of lacking criteria, such as the idea of social freedom provides, for criticizing how the role of being a producer or provider of services is actually lived out in modern societies. We seem to be left with the somewhat defeatist conclusion, in other words, that the role of producer or provider of services is no longer even *apt* for social freedom. But this position is a step back from the one with which we began, namely Marx's distinction between the realm of necessity and the true realm of freedom. More specifically, it represents a reversion to what I called *labour libertarianism*,

the view that the role of production offers no hope as far as human freedom is concerned and is best left to self-organizing processes.⁷

In the space remaining, I want briefly to consider the kind of transformations that might be needed to turn work into a realm of social freedom, or reforms that would represent gains in social freedom for people in their role as producers or providers of services. I do not have any new strategies or policies to suggest. The point is rather to take a peek at how some widely discussed proposals for transforming or reforming work might measure up to the criteria of social freedom sketched above.

The institution of a universal basic income (UBI) is thought by some to provide the key to the emancipation of work. Indeed, it is regarded by its most sophisticated philosophical proponent, Philippe Van Parijs, as of the same order of emancipatory magnitude as the abolition of slavery and universal suffrage (Van Parijs, 1992, p. 7). Van Parijs's justification for UBI turns on the claim that it will bring 'real freedom for all', in the sense that it will give everyone the basic means to live as they wish ('real' freedom) without having to work (freedom 'for all'—not just those who work, who like working, or who are looking for work) (Van Parijs, 1995). As such, UBI emancipates by way of increasing the individual's negative or subjective freedom. It liberates by removing obstacles to self-realization imposed by the need to work. Clearly, this is a far call from finding freedom in one's role as a producer or provider of services. But UBI might have that effect, too. By providing individuals with more bargaining power in the labour market, UBI might enable them to find occupations they are able to subjectively appropriate, thereby going some way in satisfying the first criterion of social freedom. Moreover, if it enables them to leave jobs that fail to show them adequate respect and esteem, or deters them from accepting such jobs, UBI might force employers to be more ethical and so contribute indirectly to a gain in social freedom measured by its second criterion. The potential of UBI to yield gains in social freedom as specified by the third criterion of collective self-management or co-determination in the work activity is less obvious. Indeed, there is a danger that UBI will weaken work collectives, and therefore social freedom, by the very means by which it strengthens negative freedom: cash payments that individualize bargaining power and facilitate exit from a particular set of role-obligations (Gourevitch, 2016). Co-determination at work requires a commitment to the shared goods at stake in the workplace that UBI might undermine.

If, by the social emancipation of work, we mean gains in the social freedom available through work, UBI is unlikely to be the unambiguous instrument of emancipation its advocates typically depict it to be. But we also saw that in order to count as a realm of social freedom at all, a role must not be assumed under coercion. We saw that social freedom presupposes negative freedom even if it is not constituted by it. And UBI looks like a good candidate for ensuring this condition is met with respect to the role of producer or provider of services. Furthermore, UBI might be one way of enabling an integration of roles, of achieving a better balance between the roles of parenthood, friendship, work,

leisure, political activity, and so forth, and thus of leading a fulfilling, rounded life. In public, as distinct from philosophical, discourse on UBI, the case is often made that UBI would improve ‘work-life’ balance. The foregoing thought suggests that there may be something to this from the perspective of social freedom as well.⁸

Many progressives about work have their eyes set on recent advances in artificial intelligence and have their hopes for the emancipation of work invested in automation technology. The hope of hopes is that robots will do all the unpleasant work, liberating humans from all the arduous labour that seemed until recently to be the eternal curse of their condition. If that were ever to eventuate, as Hannah Arendt once observed, we would certainly face very different circumstances of freedom than we currently do (Arendt, 1958). That in itself should make us hesitant to orient ourselves this way in our thinking about work. Nonetheless, we can ask if steps in this direction, that is to say the increasing automation of work tasks, represent gains in social freedom. If the effect of automation were simply to make life easier, both in work and outside of it, there would be no gain in social freedom as such. Likewise, if the effect were just to free up time, say by shortening the working week, without making opportunities available for engagement in activity that can be subjectively appropriated or that is mutually completing, it would also be neither progressive nor regressive from a social-freedom point of view. Automation of certain tasks might be emancipatory in the relevant sense if it yielded other tasks whose performance engaged and developed technical or practical capacities. On the other hand, technology that short-circuited opportunities for collective self-management in work, or that displaced deliberative mechanisms by automating decision-making processes concerning common goods, would be bad for social freedom, even if it made aspects of life at work easier or less unpleasant.

Workplace democracy is widely advocated by progressives about work and calls for more of it feature increasingly prominently in public discussions. Not only is the principle that the people who perform a task should have some say over how it is performed, the speed it is performed at, the conditions under which it is performed, and so on, almost universally accepted as a norm, but it is also widely accepted that the withering of workplace democracy in recent decades has undermined the integrity of the work role itself. It has been suggested that workplaces have become realms of ‘private government’ that only a re-empowerment of workers through a return of ‘republican freedoms’, including freedoms of exit, the rule of law, constitutional rights, and ‘voice’, can correct (Anderson, 2017, pp. 65–6). To the extent that such measures further workplace democracy, they are unambiguously positive from a social-freedom point of view. More workplace democracy is a sure way, perhaps the only one, to achieve gains in social freedom.

But it is worth noting that social freedom is a more demanding form of freedom than republican advocates of workplace democracy are typically prepared to countenance. Social freedom is not merely freedom from domination; it is not

freedom from being told what to do or the freedom to say no to a boss. It is a richer, more demanding, and more controversial standard of freedom than both the libertarian ideal of negative freedom (Van Parijs, 1995) and the republican ideal of freedom from domination (Pettit, 1997). It is a freedom that requires a capacity for subjective appropriation, mutual completion, and self-determination *across social roles*. Social emancipation, understood as the unleashing of social freedom, is a matter of human beings coming to realize themselves through their key social relationships, relationships we enter in the course of meeting our individual and collective needs. For that reason, it might be more prudent to aim at a legal or political emancipation of work—along the lines suggested by labour libertarianism or republicanism—than a social emancipation. But if we are oriented in our thinking about the emancipation of work by the idea of social freedom, socialism provides the guiding star.⁹

Notes

- 1 Marx (1991 [1894], pp. 958–9). All the phrases in quotation marks in the remainder of this paragraph are from this passage by Marx.
- 2 Exactly what ‘partial’ means here is a matter of scholarly dispute. Is it partial in the sense of an incomplete realization of the same kind of freedom that is available more fully in the ‘true’ realm of freedom? Or is it partial in being a particular kind of freedom, distinct from the latter type? For a systematic recent discussion of this issue, see James (2017).
- 3 The views I go on to outline serve as ‘ideal types’ rather than representations of the explicitly held views of particular theorists. I am less interested in classifying theorists into particular camps than in identifying historically effective theoretical possibilities.
- 4 By ‘non-productive in this sense’, I do not mean ‘unproductive’ in the sense Marx contrasts with ‘productive’ labour (Marx, 1976 [1867]). Likewise, by ‘material production proper’, Marx does mean ‘really productive’ as opposed to apparently productive but ‘really unproductive’ labour. The distinction between the realm of necessity and the true realm of freedom holds independently of the distinction between productive and unproductive labour and serves different purposes. For Marx, the service work of a teacher or a writer may or may not be productive depending on its role in the generation of capital. It is only productive in the strict sense insofar as it generates capital. The utility of the work, or the quality of the actual service provided, or the naturalness of the need met, are irrelevant for determining whether it is ‘productive’ or not. The main reason this distinction matters to Marx is that it helps to keep in view the essential antagonism between labour and capital in the performance of the kind of activity that capitalist society rests upon: *value-creating* work. Marx’s distinction between productive and unproductive labour only has application in that context, and so would lack application in a truly free society (the distinction between the true realm of freedom and the realm of necessity, on the other hand, continues to apply).
- 5 The content of the idea of social freedom is partly a matter of stipulation. The brief analysis that follows draws largely on the accounts of social freedom more or less explicitly developed in Hardimon (1994b), Hegel (1991 [1820]), Honneth (2014), Jaeggi (2014), and Neuhauser (2000).
- 6 Two misunderstandings should be avoided here. First, a role is never governed by just one norm. It is not as if friends and family members, for example, can drop their obligations to respect each other just because of the special love-obligations they have qua friends and family members. Second, norms of recognition are not attached

- arbitrarily to roles, but neither are they confined to them. There is some matching between role or ‘action-sphere’ and norm of recognition, but it is not a simple one-to-one correspondence. See on this Honneth (2003, especially pp. 144–7), where Honneth distances himself from Hegel’s view on these matters.
- 7 The regret Honneth expresses about the influence of the ‘spirit of industrialization’ and the centrality of the producer role in the socialist tradition reinforces this impression (Honneth, 2017, pp. 27–50), even though elsewhere, in *Freedom’s Right* and other works (Honneth, 2012), Honneth does draw—explicitly and with great effect—on the criteria of social freedom and mutual recognition to criticize modern forms of productive action.
 - 8 For further analysis of UBI from the perspective of the social freedom at stake, see Smith (2019).
 - 9 Thanks to Keith Breen and Jean-Philippe Deranty for feedback on an earlier draft of this chapter, and to Matt Sims for helping me to clarify a key point in the argument. Of course, responsibility for the remaining obscurities and weaknesses lies squarely with me.

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3

THE FUTURE OF MEANINGFULNESS IN WORK, ORGANIZATIONS, AND SYSTEMS

Ruth Yeoman

1 Introduction

When faced with global turbulence and system-level challenges, such as climate change, biodiversity collapse, and violent extremism, claims that meaningfulness in life and work ought to be adopted into organizational design or public policy may be considered mistaken, self-indulgent, and overly optimistic. Even so, technological shifts and globalization are fuelling frustrations with the way we live, manifested in a rising sense of alienation—a loss of meaning and purpose in our lives that is strengthening populist tendencies and impacting health and well-being outcomes. Given the empirical connection between meaninglessness and ill-being, I argue that meaningfulness does matter for reasons of social justice and increasing our collective capacity to create life-value. This requires us to take seriously fears that the emerging human-machine world is unevenly distributing benefits and burdens, creating new vulnerable groups as well as reinforcing existing fault lines of inequality. I use technology as the ‘keyhole’ to examine the future of meaningfulness in work, organizations, and life. I show how meaningfulness itself—as a moral value and a subjective experience—may be evolving. This takes us beyond distributive proposals, such as regards a citizen’s income, to an assessment of normatively desirable work, potentially arising from human-machine interactions, that is relational, ethical, complex, and power sharing. However, such work is likely to be created only when we develop inclusive institutions and organizations capable of mobilizing democratic power around anxieties that our lives lack value, dignity, and meaning. This means paying attention to the moral and emotional experience of meaningfulness at an organizational and system level, as a necessary precondition for reconceiving citizenship and the nature of our contribution to social cooperation.¹

I proceed, firstly, by describing meaningfulness as a moral value in practical reasoning that is co-constructed by meaning-makers and can be used in

collective action to solve complex problems. This requires each person to be an equal co-authority in contributing to meaning-making, which is secured by a social architecture of democratic processes, institutions, and diverse sources of meanings (Yeoman, 2020). Secondly, by assessing ethical concerns of technology and the organization of work to which meaningfulness is relevant. Thirdly, by proposing that everyone has access to real-time citizenship as a form of work embedded in organizational work-regimes. Fourthly, by outlining the features of the organizational landscape needed to enrich, activate, and disseminate the sources of meanings that enable people to craft new kinds of meaningful work.

Underpinning my account is the observation that technological civilization increases our dependence upon others, often distantly located and with whom we are indirectly connected in complex systems of collective action, such as globally extended supply chains. Connections of this kind provide for our needs, but they also increase our sense of vulnerability. This leads to heightened anxiety, and hence to demands that states decrease complexity—for example, by pursuing programmes of economic nationalism. To counter these tendencies, I argue that we take seriously the importance that people attach to life and work meaning. We can harness motivations stimulated by the need for meaning by applying the value of meaningfulness to the design of work processes involving human-machine interactions. I propose a concept of real-time citizenship where all those who are affected by an organization's activities have an entitlement to contribute to designing human-machine interactions (including interactions with big data and machine learning) and determining the framing rules governing those interactions. Finally, my account shares Dewey's (1933 [1917], p. 9) view of pragmatic idealism in social progress, of which he says: 'We pride ourselves upon a practical idealism, a lively and easily moved faith in possibilities as yet unrealized, in willingness to make sacrifice for their realization'.

2 The value of meaningfulness in practical reasoning

The search for meaning is a fundamental human drive (Frankl, 2004). However, this dimension of human behaviour has been neglected in economics, politics, and social sciences (see Karlsson et al., 2004). Yet we know from psychological studies of meaning in life that meaningfulness matters to people, and research into meaningful work shows that people will strive to find meaning even in poor quality and precarious work (Yeoman, 2014a). As a form of practical and moral reasoning, the search for personal meaning depends upon intersubjective and relational processes through which people collectively construct sources of meaning and enabling institutions. To varying degrees, the relational conditions of collective action enable or disable the capability of people to craft and evaluate meanings, and to incorporate ethically desirable meanings into their lives and work.

Wallace (2019) has recently argued for a relational morality that addresses our contemporary condition as beings who are directly and indirectly connected to

others through a shared world made up of complex, risk-prone systems. Wallace describes the moral dimensions of relationality using the idea of the moral nexus, or ‘complex of directed obligations and claims’, by which we are connected to ‘each of the persons who might potentially be affected by what we do’ (Wallace, 2019, pp. 1, 97). We affect the lives of people with whom we are indirectly connected through our participation in social processes that may produce injustices, such as exploitation of labour (see Young, 2011). When responding to these injustices, Wallace (2019) says that we need to adopt a conception of other people as equally real and inhabiting lives that are just as important as our own. Seeing others as having lives that matter motivates efforts to distribute the resources people need to craft meaningful lives and work. Persson and Savulescu (2012, p. 110) argue that unequal access to the goods of meaningfulness means that ‘some people’s lives are often less meaningful than the lives of others through no fault or voluntary choice of their own. Under such conditions, it seems unfair or unjust that the former lead less meaningful lives than the latter’. The value of meaningfulness provides a reflective standpoint from which to evaluate social processes and structures that may adversely affect those lives. The poverty of meaning resources for some is particularly acute in technological and economic transitions. Given this, just transitioning involves duties to ‘seek fair terms of cooperation’ (Zwarthoed, 2017, p. 253), including equal participation in creating and maintaining the sources of publicly available meanings that frame legitimate social cooperation. Meaning-making is therefore a public and not simply a private activity. This leads me to argue that equal access to public meaning-making may be facilitated by democratic practices, operating in a multi-level system of democracy through which people wrestle with meanings, bringing these to bear upon complex problem-solving in collective action.

Struggles over meanings, and the interaction between personal and public meanings, influence workers’ prospects for crafting meaningful work. Van den Heuvel et al. (2009, p. 510) define meaning-making as ‘the ability to integrate challenging or ambiguous situations into a framework of personal meaning using conscious, value-based reflection’. In their examination of how sustainability professionals experience their work, Mitra and Buzzanell (2017, p. 613) show that meaningfulness arises from a tension-centred process of everyday negotiation in meaning-making, based on ‘circumstances and factors that were both enabling and constraining, stemming from a variety of organizational, professional and political structures’ (see also Yeoman, 2020, pp. 88–9). Increasingly, these processes are mediated by new technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI) in machine learning and big data, collaborative human–machine interactions, and robotics. Meaning-making shapes technological innovation, dissemination, and adoption through which people grapple with the impact of technology upon the intersubjective experience of self, others, and objects, and with the ways in which the socio-technical practices arising from these struggles alter identities and conceptions of living. With this in mind, Pink and Lanzeni (2018, p. 7) propose embedding an ethics of big data in emergent processes of everyday living as

‘generative sites of meaning’ that require moral evaluation and judgement. This is potentially a new kind of work, where real-time citizenship is instituted as a pathway for the meaning-making required to produce ethically enabled technology. Such work of real-time citizenship involves practical reasoning, where people use meaningfulness as a moral value to judge how meanings influence the ways in which human-machine interactions are applied in work processes.

3 An ethic of care and the value of meaningfulness

I adopt Susan Wolf’s hybrid value of meaningfulness which unites objective valuation with subjective satisfaction, such that ‘meaning arises when subjective attraction meets objective attractiveness’ (Wolf, 2010, p. 9). Wolf distinguishes meaningfulness from happiness (feelings of goodness) and morality (duty), where meaningfulness is ‘a category of value that is not reducible to happiness or morality, and that is realized by loving objects worthy of love and engaging with them in a positive way’ (Wolf, 2010, p. 13). This accounts for the special ties we feel towards our ‘ground projects’, or projects which help us to answer the question ‘what reasons do we have for living?’ (Wolf, 2010, p. 56). The significance for meaningfulness of ground projects comes from how they organize our values and frame our practical identities. Having ground projects provides us with the material for the narrative formation of our lives, directing us to the responsibilities we have to join with others to act appropriately towards the beings and things for the sake of which these projects exist. Thus, meaningfulness does not come from the aggregation of individual goods, but from long-lasting *appropriate orientations* towards particular objects, including persons, animals, or activities, where orientations may be judged to be appropriate when they point us towards the responsibilities we have to further the good of those objects.

Wolf is concerned with personal meaning and the focus of her attention is upon the individual. However, I take meaningfulness to be collectively constructed from the materials of everyday living, and emerging at various levels of social organization, such as families, communities, organizations, and states. To provide valuers with ethical tools for assessing different meaning-systems, I incorporate an ethic of care into the moral value of meaningfulness, arguing that valuers can use this as a standpoint for evaluating the meanings they create through social processes (Yeoman, 2014a, 2014b). This is consistent with Frankl’s proposal that meaningfulness becomes viable when we take up our responsibilities for the meaning-making needed to understand what we ought to do in given situations: ‘Life ultimately means taking the responsibility to find the right answer to its problems and to fulfil the tasks which it constantly sets for each individual’ (Frankl, 2004, p. 85). By acting together on problems or objects of common concern, people create meaningfulness for themselves and others: ‘These tasks, and therefore the meaning of life, differ from man to man, and from moment to moment’ (Frankl, 2004, p. 85). Through interactions between self and other beings and things, meanings are brought into view and reinterpreted, repurposed,

or rejected. We imbue meanings with moral significance when we apply the value of meaningfulness in practical reasoning regarding ‘what we ought to do’. Schnell (2011) shows that life rich in meaning depends upon being able to access a diversity of meaning-sources. She says that meaningfulness is created when a life contains a diversity of meaning-sources, clustered across a density of meaning-domains. Generativity is one of the most important meaning-sources that enables people to integrate different kinds of meanings, where generativity is ‘a concern for guiding, nurturing, and establishing the next generation through an act of care’ (Schnell, 2011, p. 671). Incorporating care into the value of meaningfulness helps valuers to assess how integrations of meanings provide them with the understanding and knowledge they need to look after morally valuable beings and things. This involves valuers in meaning-making processes of reflecting, evaluating, and judging that operate in the interaction between personal and public meanings, and through which valuers bring together the objective and subjective dimensions of meaningfulness. Axtell (2016, pp. 7, 8) argues that objectivity cannot be captured by a ‘single unified or “core” meaning’ and is characterized by ‘irreducible complexity’, whereby objects can be identified by and evaluated against different kinds of objective features that are manifested in varying combinations. Objectivity is a way of thinking about an object that constructs the object through ‘objective world-talk’ and makes the object of such talk part of our world (Axtell, 2016, p. 2). Objective word-talk depends upon sources of meanings being generated through democratic processes that encourage the production of diversity and difference (Yeoman, 2020).

With technological transition in mind, a democratically organized social architecture of meaning-making will attend to how people may be excluded or undermined in the meaning-making processes needed to co-create narratives of technology and work. This social architecture of meaningfulness includes: enjoyment of the equal status and capabilities required to be a valuer in meaning-making; access to and participation in interactive meaning-making processes; immersion in action contexts constituted by diverse meaning-sources and democratic practices; and collective action structured by the goods of meaningfulness, which I identify as a minimum to be freedom, autonomy, and dignity (Yeoman, 2014a). I have described these goods elsewhere as freedom as non-domination, autonomy as non-alienation, and dignity as being recognized as a particular person with a life of one’s own to lead (Yeoman, 2014b).

4 Technology and loss of meaning

The new A/IS (autonomous and intelligent systems) technologies of our invention, including big data, robotics, AI, and genomic engineering (IEEE, 2018), make us uneasy. We fear that technologically induced unemployment will strip our lives of value, meaning, and dignity, leaving us with nothing to do which really matters, whilst living in an incomprehensible world that has escaped our control. Our anxiety is sharpened by the lack of justice in economic and

technological transitions, which ratchets up the harms done to those ‘left behind’ by economic shocks. After the expansion of Chinese imports to the United States (1990–2007), wages and labour force participation remained depressed and unemployment rates elevated for more than a decade, leading to poor health and social ill-being (Autor et al., 2013). Harms extend to what Case and Deaton (2017, p. 398) call ‘deaths of despair’, where a loss of meaning in life renders people vulnerable to poor mental and physical health outcomes. If human work is eliminated, we fear this could become a universal experience, excepting those who own capital.

In the United States and the United Kingdom, Bakhshi et al. (2018) find that, as a consequence of investments in machine learning, one tenth of occupations are likely to grow and one fifth are likely to decline, with high levels of uncertainty regarding the impact on seven out of ten occupations. Rather than substitution of human work by machines, complementarity between human and machine abilities may increase productivity and augment human capabilities. Within occupations, machines may substitute human skills, but enhance human contributions, such as judgement, creativity, and emotional intelligence. However, the extent to which machine learning, robotics, and AI in general are used to enhance human capabilities depends on the underlying work-regimes that structure power, values, and the place of work in a good life. In the United Kingdom, for example, since the 1990s there has been a decline of work practices that promote task discretion, autonomy, and voice (Bakhshi et al., 2018, p. 100). Work-regimes that lack organizational voice systems accelerate tendencies towards precarious and poor quality work. This increases the risks that human-machine work poses to our humanity on two fronts: firstly, increasingly divided work stunts human expressiveness and capability formation; and, secondly, divided work makes us vulnerable to being treated as bundles of behavioural assets from which ‘our personal experiences are scraped and packaged as the means to others’ ends’ (Zuboff, 2019, p. 10). We are familiar with the harms of degraded work from previous cycles of industrialization and mechanization. When instituted into work-regimes characterized by high levels of voicelessness, alienation, and lack of collective decision-making, technology undercuts the human knowledge, skill, and craft needed to form cognitive capabilities—including evaluation, judgment, and decision-making—and even emotional capabilities, such as empathy and social connectedness.

Workers can experience datafication as a reduction of ‘their performance and bodies, to lines of code and flows of data to be scrutinized and manipulated’ (Manokha, 2019). Work of this kind can engender the experience of alienation from our own activity, and from the world we have made. As Jaeggi (2014, p. 12) says, such experience is marked by meaninglessness, understood as the undermining of ‘the ability meaningfully to *identify* with what one does and with those with whom one does it’, and powerlessness, understood as ‘the inability to exert *control* over what one does—that is, the inability to be, individually or collectively, the subject of one’s actions’. Breaking connections between activity,

meaning, and control denies people the resources they need for what Zuboff (2019, p. 11) calls 'effective life', hindering their ability to create meaningfulness for themselves and others, and leading to frustrations that have political and social consequences.

But it is not inevitable that technology's present 'economic orientation' must aid extractive logics such as surveillance capitalism. For instance, Zuboff argues that technology should not be viewed as an end-in-itself, but as an economic means. Under optimistic scenarios, it is claimed that technology will relieve us from dirty, dull, and dangerous work (Dellot and Wallace-Stephens, 2017). By taking on routine codifiable tasks, machines will increase human activities requiring problem-solving, adaptability, learning, judgement, and emotional and social expressiveness (Autor, 2015). Whilst some occupations will decline, others requiring high levels of social skills and cognitive capacities will grow. Bakhshi et al. (2018, p. 21) show that nearly all US job growth since 1980 has been in occupations high in social skills that supply the 'tools for the rich and versatile coordination which supports a productive workplace'. In other words, we have choices regarding how we deploy values, technology, and human capabilities in the organization of work. This makes harnessing new technologies to serve human capabilities a necessary element of just transitioning in contexts of de-industrialization. But given the penetration of machines into human activities, capturing technology for human capability formation is viable only if we invent new forms of work within a reconstituted associational life. I use a social architecture of public meaningfulness to outline the contours of a reconstituted associational life in order to reimagine the connection between work and citizenship.

People burdened with precarious, poor quality work do not abandon the 'existential labour' needed for meaningfulness (Bailey et al., 2016), including forging vibrant connections to technology. By conceiving of technology as malleable and susceptible to values and purposes, people can use meaning-making to smuggle human resistances and aspirations into machine processes. In a BBC report on Kenyan workers generating training data for self-driving cars, Brenda, who lives in the slum of Kibera, said: 'You get to do something unique ... With my work that I'm doing, I believe I'm working for something that is going to help someone in future' (Lee, 2018). Brenda's reflective meaning-making highlights a dynamic interaction between herself, data, and technology. Indeed, ethically reflective meaning-making has the potential to intervene in machine processes that continue to be vulnerable and dependent upon human acts of concern, attention, and improvisation. Pink et al. (2018, p. 2) argue that the incomplete and fractured character of data generates meanings of data as lively, organic, entangled, and susceptible to 'breakage, decay and repair'. To be made and grown, data needs us to engage in processes of meaning-making where data must be 'narrated' to make it serviceable by individuals and communities (Dourish and Gómez Cruz, 2018). Narrating helps stabilize data temporarily for use and development, particularly when meaning-making is incorporated into political practices of 'data activism' (Kennedy, 2018), thereby bringing multiple perspectives to bear

upon claims of justice and recognition with respect to accessing, interpreting, and developing data. Just transitioning for vulnerable communities requires inclusive engagement with technology and data in sites of public meaning-making that are alert to how ‘matter and meaning are mutually articulated’ (Barad, 2007, p. 152). Citizenship can be made part of meaningful work and lives through a social architecture of public meaningfulness that operates at the organizational as well as societal levels. This social architecture proliferates the discursive spaces people need as workers and citizens to explore and negotiate the meanings they ascribe to technology, data, and effective life (Yeoman, 2020, pp. 64–5).

5 Complexity, anxiety, and meaning-making

In organizations and work, public meanings are sourced from the culture and history of the organization, professional and occupational values, sector associations, and trade unions. These provide resources for people to craft personal meaning-systems, narratives, and identities. However, the modern organization of work frequently undercuts workers’ meaning-making capabilities, impoverishes their common-pool sources of positive meanings, and permits some to appropriate meaning-making for their own interests. The lack of voice at work regarding what meanings constitute narratives and ideologies—the cultural pathways by which technology is incorporated into work design—generates mistrust and fear that translate to wider concerns, including resistance to greater interconnectedness. Runciman (2018, p. 113) describes the ‘dread of interconnectedness’ arising from our vulnerability to system-level failures that exceed our powers of control. This includes how we are interrelated by ‘a shared ecosystem, by complex chains of energy supply, by intertwined financial markets that move faster than human beings can think, by transport systems that run at the edge of full capacity all the time’ (Runciman, 2018, p. 114). Sennett (2018, p. 6) counters these fears by associating the ‘virtues of complexity’ with the capacity of open systems to generate enriched experiences of living together, as well as the freedom and power to initiate new social, political, and economic formations. When connected to struggle, resistance, and effort, complexity is developmental, fostering environments that are ‘ever richer in meaning’ (Sennett, 2018, p. 6).

A multi-level system of democracy activates capabilities for meaning-making when discursive practices are designed to proliferate meanings and to make these accessible for crafting meaningful lives and work. Lives rich in sign meanings are also rich in life meaning, and where one lacks ‘the interest, knowledge, or attention necessary to derive meanings from one’s experiences, one is likely to feel estranged from the world’ (Repp, 2018, p. 413). Action contexts that secure our equal status as co-authorities in meaning-making are generative of ethically viable meanings and facilitate real-time citizenship as problem-solving. Arendt (1994 [1954], p. 310) connects understanding and knowledge building to meaning generation: sign meanings translate understanding into knowledge through evaluative judgements that ‘prepare a new resourcefulness of the human mind

and heart'. However, systems such as surveillance capitalism have the ability to distort our capabilities to achieve understanding and knowledge of ourselves and the world in which we live, depriving us of the tools we need to act into the world.² They do so not just by using ideological formations to mould self-understandings, but also by undermining the search for meaning itself, whereby 'our quest for meaning is at the same time prompted and frustrated by our inability to originate meaning' (Arendt, 1994 [1954], p. 313). When meanings are diminished, co-opted, and imposed, meaninglessness ensues, since '[w]ithout our meanings, all is silent and dead' (Hansen, 2004, p. 14; see also Yeoman, 2020, pp. 41–2). I understand this to mean that people can find themselves deprived of access to the full range of meanings, and of the ability to make judgements between morally viable and unviable meanings. Therefore, it is not the technologies per se that constrain meaning, but rather specific social practices and systems, which we have allowed to exploit our mutual interdependence and shared vulnerabilities and to open up democratic voids in our associational life.

6 Evolving meaningfulness—responsibility and lives of ethical care

Evolving meaningfulness is a human task that takes place in multiple domains of acting and being. Here, I am concerned with how organizational and system-level processes of meaning-making may activate latent meanings or generate new meanings that people can use as justifications in struggles to incorporate technology into new forms of work that are consistent with meaningfulness as a moral value. Méda links new work to the objective of 'ecological conversion' and a process of creating jobs without growth that secures fair transitioning 'by pooling the gains and losses and developing real solidarity among all the members of society involved, so that the cost of the transition should be equitably shared by everybody' (Méda, 2016, p. 22). Such a shift of economic values demands that we concentrate upon the quality and durability of products, and not only the distribution of productivity gains. A duty of care requiring production to 'obligatorily *care for and care about* our natural heritage, social cohesiveness and human labour' (Méda, 2016, p. 24) connects citizens to sites of mobilization that help them to care for objects of common concern. In other words, new work must emerge from the multi-level, multi-stakeholder social cooperation needed to bring human, material, and technological resources to bear upon the creation, protection, and enhancement of life-value, which Noonan (2012, p. 8) describes as those facilities we need to 'maintain and develop life and its sentient, cognitive, imaginative, and creative-practical capacities'. Life-value refers to what is needed to develop and maintain valuable beings and things, including their natural and artificial ecosystems. As embedded members of ecosystems made up of other beings and things, we may occupy different roles simultaneously, requiring us to consider a complex web of responsibilities, tensions, and values that may be incommensurable. For example, shifts towards circular and

sustainable economies, enabled by new technology, may make being a consumer a form of work. Thus, the category of work extends to include a range of activities beyond paid employment, and indeed work itself may become less central to what is considered to be a good life.

Caring for ensembles of beings and things is work that creates life-value. To become skilled in the work of life-value creation, we must learn to reframe complex problems, so that they are inclusive of multiple interests and contributions. This extends to deliberating together on *who* must be involved in bringing to light and interpreting the meanings implicated in complex problems. Dewey defines the public as the domain of 'all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for' (Dewey, 2016 [1927], pp. 15–6). Dewey makes public officials the responsible agents, but under conditions of complexity and hybridity the range and number of responsible agents are diversified beyond state officials to the many members of private, public, and civic organizations, as well as affected members of communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and voluntary associations. Hence, caring for consequences is not the sole responsibility of state agents but lies with all of us who, as workers and citizens, are simultaneously the deciders, producers, and users of the goods and services necessary for survival and flourishing. Expanding the circle of responsible agents mobilizes unexpected constituencies of meaning-makers; for example, as a consequence of the school strike movement, new alliances of businesses and activists are emerging in public spaces of protest and social change. Constituencies such as these are repositories of meanings. When harnessed into collective action structured by democratic processes and directed at the moral imperative to care for public things, these meanings can be excavated and made productive for innovation. By bringing the value of meaningfulness into practical reasoning regarding 'what we ought to do' to solve the complex problems of life-value creation that confront us daily, we produce evaluations that challenge the narratives supporting current economic systems. When using the value of meaningfulness in practical reasoning, people unearth morally viable meanings that they employ to construct new norms and principles. For example, Chang (2016) argues that we are seeing the emergence of a strong sustainability norm for 'reciprocity-based corporate sustainability', which directs business, government, and social organizations towards securing multiple environmental, social, and economic objectives. From a pragmatic-idealist perspective, norm changes and related shifts in organizational and economic practices, such as the movement of capital towards sustainability objectives, combine already existing knowledge and practices with an expanded moral imagination of what human beings can be and do.

In a social architecture of public meaningfulness, an ethic of care provides a standpoint for evaluating meanings and assessing our responsibilities towards those beings and things that we have incorporated into the meaningfulness of our lives. The widespread acceptance of a new sustainability norm based upon an ethic of care has the potential to generate new kinds of work and conceptions of living,

and thereby stimulate pathways for people to craft meaningfulness. But to make living a life of ethical care a serviceable route to meaningfulness, we need to bring to public prominence some undervalued and latent sources of meaning, including stewardship, repair, empathy, and love. An ethic of care also helps us to identify limits to meaningfulness. When we incorporate morally valuable persons or other valuable things into the meaningfulness of our lives, this does not mean we can do anything we like to them. Meaningfulness directs valuers to a concern for how well things are going for those valuable objects. Accepting responsibilities to look after valuable beings and things involves evaluating how well we are doing in these caring activities, which gives us important reasons for action. For Frankl,

[h]uman behaviour is really human to the extent to which it means acting into the world. This, in turn, implies being motivated by the world. In fact, the world toward which a human being transcends itself is a world replete with meanings that constitute reasons to act and full as well of other human beings to love.

(Frankl, 1985, p. 269)

This implies a particular kind of responsibility to seek out the problems that trouble the worlds we make and inhabit. The responsibility for identifying and framing problems, thereby rendering them actionable, entails a form of work and a mode of citizenship that necessarily harness technology and human capabilities. By exercising such capabilities, people convert formless complexity anxiety into knowable problems that are thereafter susceptible to resolution via plans, roles, organizations, policies, and practices. This is real-time citizenship that expands our categories of work and is realized through activities of social cooperation taking place in the activities of everyday living. Real-time citizenship is instituted when workers participate in the co-design of work processes, and in the co-determination of the framing rules governing human-machine interactions. Indeed, an entitlement to share in the determination of processes and framings that order the human-machine world extends beyond workers to the multiplicity of those who are affected by the activities of the organization. This generates a demand for contributive connections that expand the range of activities people can claim as work and enrich the meaning-sources available for meaningful work.

7 The purpose of machines in new kinds of work

Jobs are the visible subset of a much larger pool of work. This includes the quantity of work that escapes formal organizing and comes into view only when it is recognized as a new source of public or private value. This dark matter of invisible work creates, repairs, and sustains the human and natural world and is a fertile source of the problem-solving capabilities we need to meet our responsibilities of care. New types of formal jobs are distilled from this dynamically evolving resource of work. Indeed, the future of meaningfulness itself, as a moral

value and subjective experience, will depend upon our being able to actively and consciously craft this dark matter of work so that it generates new sources of positive meanings that we can claim as legitimate for incorporation into our work and lives. This new work includes the work of real-time citizenship; the work of caring for others and for the natural world; the work of repair and cooperation at multiple scales and in multiple domains; and the work upon the self—to develop and care for one’s own human estate. Care extends even to caring for technology. Well ahead of technology becoming sentient or even merely autonomous, we ought to have forged emotional connections to technological entities, giving them presence in the human world through our meaning-making. We can see examples of this already. For instance, Southend-on-Sea’s local council acquired a Pepper robot to help with community engagement and reminiscence activities for older people with dementia and memory loss. Before appearing in public, Pepper was programmed and socialized in the home of the Council’s Equipment Manager, Phil Webster, and his 84-year-old mother—of whom Webster reported ‘she absolutely adores him’ (Purvis, 2017). Such vignettes hint at the work needed to design and socialize machines to be part of the human world, and how our meaning-making brings life to new technologies.

I propose that the general purpose of machines is to help us act together to take care of the life-value of human and non-human beings and the natural world. At first glance, this looks to be an impossibly radical proposal for the ethical purpose of new technologies and the role they play in reordering our economic life. However, care and stewardship are becoming part of the corporate lexicon. For example, Royal Dutch Shell’s 2018 sustainability report makes respecting human rights and caring for people part of their supplier policy (Royal Dutch Shell, 2018). Adopting a pragmatic-idealist perspective, we can recognize the emergence of systemic shifts towards using technology to solve sustainability challenges, whilst acknowledging the difficulties of transforming whole systems at the scale and speed that are needed. To succeed, we must use all our cultural and ethical, as well as technological and organizational, resources, including our desire for meaning in work and in life. Our undervalued need for meaning can motivate the design of just and workable transitions where technology is a mediating factor in developing the capabilities we need to fulfil our responsibilities to care for worthy or valuable objects. The IEEE Global Initiative on Ethics of Autonomous and Intelligent Systems (A/IS) proposes that an ethical purpose for machines can be achieved through ethically informed ‘value-based design methodologies’ and ‘the recognition that machines should serve humans and not the other way around’ (IEEE, 2018, p. 8). I expand this perspective to include the care and flourishing of all kinds of valuable beings and things, orchestrated within a multi-level system of democracy. In light of that, I advance the following statement of ethical intent:

Machines must be designed to help us enhance our ethical, relational, and specialist capabilities so that we are equipped to identify, frame, and respond

to complex moral and practical problems in the human and natural world. The moral object of complex capabilities, afforded by human-machine interactions and learning, is to enable us to fulfil our responsibilities to take care of ourselves, other persons, animals, ecosystems, and other valuable entities. By looking after what really matters, or what has genuine moral and ethical value, we create meaningfulness in our work and lives. To realize our equal need for meaningfulness, each person is entitled to access activities structured by the goods of meaningfulness (freedom, autonomy, and dignity), and to forge contributive connections to associations (preferably democratically organized) directed to the production of life-value.

‘Looking after’ includes all manner of ethically oriented activities that we undertake jointly or individually. New kinds of work must have a core emphasis upon building morally valuable relationships between intelligent and feeling beings who contribute to building the human and natural world. Specifically, this work should include ethical, relational, voice, and complexity work. *Ethical work* translates moral values into practices; *relational work* orchestrates joint efforts by building trusting, mutually interdependent relationships; *voice work* involves all sharing in decision-making power; and *complexity work* uses knowledge and technology to generate innovations in operating practices (Yeoman, 2018).

8 Associational variety and contributive connection

Realizing the ethical purpose of new technologies requires not only technological innovation, but also an associational revolution (see, for example, Smith’s (2017) review of the expansion of voluntary associations during the Industrial Revolution). Keohane and Victor (2011) characterize as a Cambrian explosion the bottom-up initiatives and transnational institutions that constitute the governance system of an emerging sustainability regime. This associational revolution multiplies the variety of organizational forms, stimulates contributive connections, and reconfigures our organizational estate as an interdependent ecosystem of multi-stakeholder, open-source organizations. These open-source organizations can be distinguished from what Watkins and Stark (2018) call ‘the möbius organizational form’, or boundary-less organizations that extract and consume public, private, and civic assets from their environment, including knowledge, information, and data. With this in mind, the direction of openness needs to be reversed. Rather than organizations demanding that society open up to their extraction of resources, organizations must make themselves open to the influence of citizens. This constitutes a type of open-source publicness, where *open-source* refers to the availability of the organization to those who have an interest in its activities, and *publicness* refers to how the means and ends of the organization include and impact valuable beings and things. Organizational development pathways that are high in publicness include organizational forms such as platform cooperatives, social

enterprises, and multi-constituency mutuals.³ Integrating these organizations into collaborative-governance systems enhances the prospects for making life-value creation the target of organizational activity. Associational life can be augmented by inclusive meaning-making when organizations are prompted to recognize how they are made and maintained by many interested parties. An entitlement to contributive connection can be translated into membership options ranging from full responsible member, with decision-making rights and obligations, to observer-advisor status. Multiplying the ways in which people can contribute to the organizations that affect their lives, and which are focussed upon life-value creation, addresses their interest in having something serious to do that matters (Yeoman, 2020, p. 208).

9 Real-time citizenship and problem-solving

I propose to reimagine new technologies as enablers of real-time citizenship that has problem-solving as its target and helps us fulfil our responsibilities to care for valuable objects. Civic, public, and private organizations must collaborate at a system-level if they are to bring ethically enabled technology to bear upon complex challenges. These associational ecosystems require real-time citizenship as a way of conceiving the contributions of diverse, multiple participants who are related, but also separated, by culture, power, and distance (Yeoman and Mueller Santos, 2019). Bringing people into collective action as co-designers of work processes and co-legislators of framing rules counters the unequal impacts of technological transition. To accelerate change at scale, an associational revolution needs to connect informal social movements and economic alternatives with sympathetic interests *already* present in formal organizations, whether these are shareholder, private equity, family, co-owned, public, charitable, or civic. Clegg et al. (2006, p. 389) argue that power structures may be challenged by an ‘insurgent consciousness within the professional niches of the corporation’, generated amongst managers and workers in alliance with new types of professional groups situated inside and outside the organization. As state power acting alone proves insufficient for solving complex problems, we are called upon to make our contributions not only as citizens, but also as specialists, professionals, workers, family and community members, volunteers, investors, and organizational leaders. Many people work interorganizationally in boundary-crossing roles, including cross-sector partnerships or multi-stakeholder initiatives (MSIs)—for example, the Forest Stewardship Council involves NGOs, communities, producers, and suppliers.⁴ Indeed, what might be considered relatively ordinary jobs increasingly require people to work systemically, stitching together disparate entities or assigned to temporary projects—for example, in integrated health and social care initiatives, or managing environmental ecoservices, et cetera. However, to avoid new forms of organizing, such as alliances and MSIs, being co-opted by managers and corporations to serve private power, associational

ecosystems need to be held to public account using mechanisms of collaborative governance. This includes instituting voice as co-legislation and using meaning-making to make visible diverse and plural understandings of the interaction of people with technology.

10 Conclusion: narratives for a human–machine world

We need to create new narratives for the role of technology in the problem-solving needed for sustainable world-building. But the necessary moral imagination is unevenly distributed. When workers are asked about their experience of engaging with new technologies such as collaborative robots, they do not challenge the organization of work, but rather limit their concerns to what tasks the robots can be permitted to do within existing parameters (Maurice et al., 2018). A recent Royal Society study of narratives and technology argues that human behaviour, action, and flourishing are affected by the ‘narrative ecosystem’ of AI, whilst acknowledging that the lived realities of new technologies are difficult to capture in ‘compelling narratives’. This is not helped by how narrative formation is disabled by ‘narrative injustice’, where marginalized groups and individuals are excluded from authoring narratives or having their narratives taken up as the accepted version (Royal Society, 2018, pp. 14–5). Depriving narrative formation of the full spectrum of meaning-makers has real-world effects on the potential of A/IS technologies to contribute to life-value; for example, recruitment AIs are coded to reflect conventional models of success, freezing our world into existing frames of domination and exclusion (Yeoman, 2020, p. 119).

The way forward is ‘the perfecting of the means and ways of communication of meanings so that genuinely shared interest in the consequences of interdependent activities may inform desire and effort and thereby direct action’ (Dewey, 2016 [1927], p. 155). In other words, exercising communicative power must be understood to be a complex capability that requires meaning-rich settings for intersubjective encounters where each person is confident in their status and authority as meaning-makers. In the end, new narratives framing work do not lie in the substitution of humans by robots or even in the complementarity of human–machine learning, but rather in the associational revolution needed to establish meaningful work constituted by shared concern for the knotted problems of sustainability and life-value creation. This will require new organizational entities, social practices, and technological tools to be combined with enhanced human capabilities. A social architecture for public meaningfulness will allow us to share with others an entitlement to jointly determine the design, creation, and care of our shared dwelling, ensuring that this world-building supplies us with the complex capabilities we need for meaningfulness in life and in work, and helping to overcome the alienating feeling that the world is not a home, or that we are not the authors of our actions.

Notes

- 1 This chapter includes material revised from Yeoman (2020) by permission of the Taylor & Francis Group.
- 2 My thanks to the editors for making this point.
- 3 Ethically enabled technologies should help us transition to ecological societies and further the production of life-value. Organizations that do not contribute to life-value should not be afforded a social license to trade. All organizations (public, private, and civic) have a part to play in creating life-value.
- 4 Moog et al. (2015, p. 470) describe the Forest Stewardship Council as ‘a transnational non-profit organization, which runs a globally recognized timber and forest products certification and eco-labelling scheme’.

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4

WORK AND HUMAN NATURE IN HEGEL AND MARX

Sean Sayers

1 Introduction

What is the place of work in human life? What does it tell us about human nature?

When people are asked why they work, the answer that many people give is that they do so in order to earn a living and to meet their basic needs. Work is commonly regarded as a mere means to an end, as an unpleasant activity that we would avoid if only we could.

These views are so widely held that there must be some truth in them—so many people cannot be entirely mistaken. However, when one digs a bit deeper, it soon becomes clear that attitudes to work are more complex and contradictory than these initial responses suggest. As testimony to this, rather than the usual social scientific studies, I will consider a poem by Philip Larkin, ‘Toads’ (Larkin, 2003, pp. 62–3). I know of nothing which puts the matter better.

At the beginning of the poem, Larkin asks himself why anyone would let work determine their lives. He imagines work as a ‘toad’, as something monstrous and alien, an unwanted necessity. And he thinks of driving it off and freeing himself from it. On reflection, however, he realizes that driving it away is not a straightforward matter. This is because that ‘toad’ is in a basic way part of the ‘stuff’ that goes into people’s hopes and ‘dreams’, his own included. That is to say, he recognizes that the motivation to work is not purely alien or external to him; it is internal and a part of him. He spells this out and goes further in a later sequel, ‘Toads Revisited’ (Larkin, 2003, pp. 89–90), written after he retired. Ambling through a park in sunshine and by a lake, he thinks the leisure he has should sit better with him than his erstwhile work, but he is unsure. Thus, he acknowledges that the ‘toad’ work—what he had so often experienced as oppressive—is inseparably part of him, and will always be so.

There is a mass of more ‘objective’ evidence, gathered from innumerable empirical studies of attitudes to work, which confirms that the ambivalent attitudes described so accurately and honestly by Larkin are widely shared (Jahoda, 1982; Kornhauser, 1965; US Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, 1973). Indeed, it may well seem that the question of why people work is straightforwardly an empirical question which should be answered in a social scientific fashion, by psychological and sociological studies. However, the issues upon which I am going to focus in this chapter cannot be resolved by such studies. For these questions are not so much about the role that work *actually* plays in people’s lives; rather, they concern the role that it can *potentially* play and that it *ought* to play. Must work *necessarily* be experienced as unwanted toil and be regarded as a mere means to an end? What does this imply about basic human motivation, about human nature? These questions are not of the kind that can be resolved by empirical studies alone; they are *philosophical* questions. They concern philosophical theories of the role of work in human life.

2 The instrumental view of work

Given what an important place it occupies, there has been remarkably little discussion of the role of work in human life in the history of philosophy. The most familiar and widely held theory in philosophy, as in everyday life, is the instrumental view that work is unpleasant toil, a mere means to an end. This is expressed with particular clarity in the philosophy of hedonism, the philosophy that underlies utilitarianism and classical economics. According to hedonism, we are pleasure-seeking, pain-avoiding creatures; these are the sole motive forces of human life. In Bentham’s words:

Nature has placed mankind under the governance of two sovereign masters, *pain* and *pleasure*. It is for them alone to point out what we ought to do, as well as to determine what we shall do. On the one hand the standard of right and wrong, on the other the chain of causes and effects, are fastened to their throne. They govern us in all we do, in all we say, in all we think.

(Bentham, 1962 [1789], p. 33)

Work is effort and toil. It is never an end in itself, only ever a means; we avoid it insofar as we can. Unfortunately, however, we have needs that we can meet only through work. It follows that if we could find a way to consume without the toil of producing, we would happily do so.

Appealing and plausible as this vision of the ideal life may seem, there are good grounds to question it. The hedonist view gives a false account of human nature, and the instrumental view of work involves a false account of its role in human life. Marx, I will argue, provides a more illuminating and satisfactory alternative.

3 Marx on alienation

It is widely held that Marx's concept of 'alienation' implies the view that work can potentially be a source of human fulfilment. The philosophical ideas underlying this ideal are less well known. 'Alienation' is one of the few Marxist concepts that has entered into ordinary English usage.¹ In everyday speech, it is a loose and vague term that denotes a feeling of meaninglessness, or a general malaise, discontent, or unhappiness, particularly in relation to work. In Marx's writings, by contrast, it is a precise theoretical term with a specific meaning that derives from Hegel and the Hegelian philosophical tradition in which Marx's thought is located.

In this tradition, the term 'alienation' refers to a situation in which we relate to our own product or activity as if it is something independent and hostile. In the specific case of work, my work is alienated when, first, its product appears to be an independent and hostile power working against me, and, second, the labour itself seems to be an external and forced activity, a mere means to an end and not an end in itself.

Alienation in this sense is a very familiar phenomenon. It is the way in which labour is experienced by the great majority of individuals, as illustrated by Larkin's poem considered at the beginning (see also Crawford, 2009; Sennett, 1998). It is also familiar at a social level. A great paradox, noted by Marx and by many other social commentators in the late 18th and 19th centuries (Morris, 1973; Ruskin, 1928 [1892]; Schiller, 1967 [1794]; Smith, 1979 [1776]; et cetera), is that the development of capitalism and large-scale industry has resulted in a gigantic growth of human productive powers, but this is experienced as a loss of power for the producers themselves—it appears to result not in their enrichment but in their impoverishment. As Marx puts it:

There is one great fact, characteristic of this our nineteenth century, a fact which no party dares deny. On the one hand, there have started into life industrial and scientific forces, which no epoch of the former human history had ever suspected. On the other hand, there exist symptoms of decay, far surpassing the horrors recorded of the latter times of the Roman Empire. In our days, everything seems pregnant with its contrary. Machinery, gifted with the wonderful power of shortening and fructifying human labour, we behold starving and overworking it. The new-fangled sources of wealth, by some strange weird spell, are turned into sources of want.

(Marx, 1977 [1856], p. 339)

The exercise of our productive powers is experienced as alien and external. Work is regarded as an unwanted activity that is forced upon us, a mere means to an end.

Implicit in the concept of alienation, however, is the idea that work need not, and should not, be like this. For the concept of alienation carries with it

the implication that work can be *unalienated*. It implies that work—productive activity—can and should be fulfilling, an expression and confirmation of our creative powers, not simply a means to an end but an end in itself.

In this way, Marx interprets the hedonist and instrumental theory that I have just described as itself a symptom and an expression of alienation. And Marx criticizes this theory for mistaking our current, alienated experience of work for the inescapable character of work as such, and, thus, for portraying what is a specific historical condition as the inevitable result of what is supposed to be universal human nature.

4 Work and human nature

Thus, underlying Marx's concept of alienation is the view that work can potentially be a fulfilling activity. This implies an account of human nature and of the role of work in human life very different from the hedonist and instrumental view.

According to Marx, as human beings we are not only creatures of need and desire. We are not purely passive consumers who would ideally like our needs to be met without the necessity to work. Rather, we are active—productive and creative—beings. We get satisfaction from actively exercising our powers, from overcoming obstacles and being productive. In short, human beings are *producers* as well as consumers.

It should be noted that Marx is by no means the only thinker who opposes the hedonist account and puts forward the view that humans are active and creative beings and not just creatures of need. There is another important philosophical tradition, running from Plato to Kant, which sees human beings in this way as well. However, these philosophers tend to see our productivity and creativity as occurring primarily in the realm of thought.² Marx, by contrast, stresses that our productivity and creativity operate also in the material sphere. We are essentially *material* productive beings. This is an original and distinctive feature of Marx's approach.

Concrete, material creative activity is what Marx calls our 'species activity', by which he means our distinctively human activity. He also describes productive activity as 'man's spiritual essence, his human essence' (Marx, 1975b [1844], pp. 328, 329). Unfortunately, Marx does not spell out in much detail what he means by these phrases, and there is little about this in the existing philosophical literature in English on Marx or Marxism. For an explanation of these ideas, it is necessary to go back to their source, which is in Hegel.

Hegel, too, sees work as a distinctively human or, as he says, 'spiritual' activity. He contrasts the human activity of labour with the way in which other animals satisfy their needs (Hegel, 1975b [1830], §24 addition). The latter he characterizes as purely 'natural'. Most other animals are directly driven by their immediate appetites and instincts. They react to the promptings of their appetites by consuming what they can find present in the environment. They satisfy their needs

immediately and directly. In doing so, moreover, they devour and destroy the object.

In work, by contrast, this immediate relationship to nature is broken. Through work we develop a more complex and mediated relation to nature, both to our own natural desires and to the natural environment around us. Thus, work is not the immediate satisfaction of need; it requires that gratification be deferred. Moreover, in work the object is not consumed immediately; it is not simply devoured and destroyed. Rather, it is preserved: it is shaped and formed for later use or consumption. In this way, a mediated and distinctively human relationship to nature is established. And, according to Hegel, it is through this process that the self-conscious and distinctively human self develops.³

Some qualifications need to be made at this point, for the distinction between animal and human ways to satisfy needs is not as clear-cut as Hegel suggests. Many animals ‘work’ in the sense just described: spiders spin webs, birds build nests, squirrels hoard nuts, et cetera. Conversely, some forms of human work satisfy needs relatively directly, with little mediation in Hegel’s sense: for example, collecting fruit and other edible plants and simple hunting and trapping.⁴

Nevertheless, Hegel’s argument expresses an important insight that should not be lost sight of. This can be better expressed by distinguishing between purely natural and specifically human forms of work. This is Marx’s approach. He argues that the labour of animals is driven by immediate need and is purely ‘instinctive’.⁵ And he distinguishes this from ‘labour in a form that stamps it as exclusively human’ as follows:

A spider conducts operations that resemble those of a weaver, and a bee puts to shame many an architect in the construction of her cells. But what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is this, that the architect raises his structure in imagination before he erects it in reality. At the end of every labour-process, we get a result that already existed in the imagination of the labourer at its commencement. He not only effects a change of form in the material on which he works, but he also realizes a purpose of his own that gives the law to his *modus operandi*, and to which he must subordinate his will.

(Marx, 1967 [1867], p. 178)

Moreover, work is not the only respect in which humans and other animals differ. The ability to reason and to use language is also vital to our distinctiveness, as Hegel and Marx are well aware. Many philosophers, however, have concentrated on this almost exclusively. The recognition that material productive activity, work, is fundamental to our human distinctiveness is one of the most important and original contributions of the Hegelian and Marxist philosophical traditions.⁶

In any case—and with these qualifications—work, according to Hegel, is one of the fundamental ways in which human beings break their immersion in nature, separate themselves from the natural world, and develop as separate subjects over against an objective world.

5 Self-realization

This breach with nature is one aspect of work; it is the negative aspect. There is also a positive aspect. For work is also one of the ways through which we overcome this division from nature and re-establish our unity with it. By shaping and forming the object, we transform ourselves, our natural environment, and our relationship to it.

As a self-conscious subject, the self initially finds itself confronted by a world that is separate and strange, alien and foreign. Human development, both individual and social, is a process of reconciliation through which, gradually and by stages, we overcome this estrangement and separation and make ourselves more at home in the world.

In this way, both Hegel and Marx reject the romantic idea that we are 'naturally' and immediately at one with nature, and that our alienation from it is due to the 'corrupting' impact of civilization. Such Rousseauian views have been an influential and popular way of responding to the impact of industrial society from the 18th century right up to the present (Rousseau, 1984 [1755]). Hegel and Marx reject them completely. Our coming to be at home in our world is not our natural and initial condition; rather, it is an *achievement*, a result of human activity and work, both individual and social.

Specifically, according to Hegel, the overcoming of our estrangement from the natural world is achieved partly by theoretical activity, by the work of thought. This certainly plays an important part, as many philosophers have stressed. For by the development of knowledge and understanding, the world is made more comprehensible and familiar to us. And partly the reconciliation is achieved through practical activity, of which working on the world is an important form, as I have been describing. Hegel explains this practical process of reconciliation as follows:

[Through work] the human being imbues [*durchdringt*]⁷ the external world with his will. Thereby he humanizes his environment, by showing how it is capable of satisfying him and how it cannot preserve any power of independence against him. Only by means of this effectual activity is he no longer merely in general, but also in particular and in detail, actually aware of himself and at home in his environment.

(Hegel, 1975a [1835], p. 256)

Marx terms this the process of 'objectification' [*Vergegenständlichung*] (Marx, 1975b [1844], p. 324). There are two aspects to it. First, by 'objectifying' ourselves, by giving a human shape and form to the world through working on it, we embody our powers and capacities in outward things and come to recognize our powers as objective and real.⁸ Thus, we develop a consciousness of ourselves and our powers.

Second, by thus giving things a human form, we overcome our alienation from the natural world and come to feel at home in it and in harmony with it:

Man brings himself before himself by *practical* activity, since he has the impulse, in whatever is directly given to him, in what is present to him externally, to produce himself and therein equally to recognize himself. This aim he achieves by altering external things whereon he impresses the seal of his inner being and in which he now finds again his own characteristics. Man does this in order, as a free subject, to strip the external world of its inflexible foreignness and to enjoy in the shape of things only an external realization of himself.

(Hegel, 1975a [1835], p. 31)

According to Hegel, there is a basic human impulse for objectification and for self-recognition in this way. This impulse is present not just in work in the narrow economic sense, but in all practical activity that has an effect in the world. Hegel gives a graphic example to illustrate this point:

Even a child's first impulse involves this practical alteration of external things; a boy throws stones into the river and now marvels at the circles drawn in the water as an effect in which he gains an intuition of something that is his own doing. This need runs through the most diversiform phenomena up to that mode of self-production in external things which is present in the work of art.

(Hegel, 1975a [1835], p. 31)

In this way, according to Hegel, work is an activity through which we can objectify ourselves in the world and realize ourselves in our product and our activity. Marx follows Hegel in this. Work, as a self-realizing activity of this sort, is not only a means to satisfy our material appetites and needs but an end in itself.⁹ The highest human development of such practical activity is in artistic creation.

6 Alienation and its overcoming

This, at least, is the character that productive activity can *potentially* have according to Hegel and Marx. However, to come back now from the realm of philosophy to the actual world: work in the real world is seldom like this. Work can be, and indeed should be, fulfilling, but too often it is not. Most of the actual work that most people do most of the time is unwanted and unpleasant toil. For the most part, work is simply a means to an end of meeting needs and making a living.

So, people are not wrong to say that this is why they work. What is wrong, however, is the philosophical theory of hedonism, which holds that work must necessarily be like this because we are mere consumers by nature, and that the

very idea of satisfying work is contrary to human nature. This philosophy portrays the present, alienated form of work as its inevitable and necessary character.¹⁰ Whereas for Marx and Hegel, work—productive, creative activity—even when it involves effort and difficulty, can be a source of satisfaction and fulfilment.

This thought is at the basis of Marx's critique of present-day capitalist society. It is a great indictment of contemporary conditions, he argues, that our productive and creative activity, our 'essential' activity, which is what most people do for most of their time, instead of being a source of fulfilment is experienced as hated toil (Marx, 1975c [1844]).

This criticism applies not only at the individual level, but at the social level as well. Modern technology and industry constitute enormous developments of our productive and creative capabilities. These are human social powers and great human achievements. We should be able to recognize them as such, to affirm them as our powers and achievements, and to find realization in and through them; but for the most part, we cannot and do not do so.

Marx uses a graphic image to describe this situation:

Modern bourgeois society, with its relations of production, of exchange and of property, a society that has conjured up such gigantic means of production and of exchange, is like the sorcerer who is no longer able to control the powers of the nether world whom he has called up by his spells.

(Marx and Engels, 1977 [1848], p. 226)

In other words, the industry and technology that we ourselves have created have become powers that threaten to consume and destroy us, and indeed to poison and destroy the whole planet.

This need not and should not be the way in which we relate to our own powers and products, Marx argues. It is neither necessary nor inevitable that they should be experienced in this way. Such alienation is not the inescapable result of human nature. On the contrary, that it should appear to be so is itself a symptom of alienation and an indictment of contemporary society. This is the critical force of the concept of alienation, and the basis of one of Marx's fundamental criticisms of capitalist society.

Here, of course, Marx diverges from Hegel. Hegel is a much more conservative thinker. Although he, too, was aware of the human and social problems created by capitalism and large-scale industry (Sayers, 2011, pp. 14–31), he ultimately treats them as mere 'anomalies' of the system which should be capable of resolution within it. For he believes that alienation can be overcome and reconciliation achieved within the structures of capitalist society.

Marx, by contrast, sees that the problems are much more deeply rooted in the present order, being intrinsic to the capitalist system itself. A complete and revolutionary social transformation is needed before our present alienation can be overcome and before we can begin to be at home with our own powers and creations. Only then will we finally be able to recognize that the 'sorcerer' of our

economy and industry is in fact an emanation of *ourselves*—of our own powers and selves in alienated form. And only then will we be in a position to begin to take conscious social control of these powers and use them in a free and conscious way for our own real benefit.¹¹

Notes

- 1 As is common, I am using the word ‘alienation’ to cover two of Marx’s terms: ‘*Entäusserung*’ and ‘*Entfremdung*’ (sometimes translated as ‘estrangement’). See Sayers (2011, p. ix).
- 2 ‘The chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism—that of Feuerbach included—is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, in contradistinction to materialism, the *active side* was developed abstractly by idealism—which, of course, does not know real, sensuous activity as such’ (Marx, 1975a [1845], p. 421).
- 3 See Sayers (2011, pp. 14–31) for a fuller account of Hegel’s views.
- 4 Of course, collecting fruit and hunting, et cetera, involve ‘work’ in other senses—for example, they involve the expenditure of effort.
- 5 In *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, he cites animals that build nests and dwellings, such as ‘the bee, the beaver, the ant, etc.’ (Marx, 1975b [1844], p. 329).
- 6 Hegel and Marx both also stress that human work is an essentially social activity. I do not deal with this aspect of their thought here.
- 7 Replacing T.M. Knox’s translation, ‘impregnates’, which has misleading sexual connotations.
- 8 Note again that both Hegel and Marx treat work as one form of the wider category of practical activity.
- 9 There are disputes about the interpretation of Marx on this as on pretty well everything else he said. For a defence of this account, see Sayers (1998, pp. 1–91).
- 10 This is also the way in which work is regarded in much of the recent critical literature about work—see, for example, Gorz (1985) and Weeks (2011), but also Chamberlain in this volume.
- 11 This chapter started life as my inaugural lecture as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Kent in 2004. An earlier version of it was published as Sayers (2005).

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5

LEISURE AND RESPECT FOR WORKING PEOPLE

Andrea Veltman

1

What does it mean to respect working people? In these pages, I explore this question and argue that respecting working people entails, in part, providing ample leisure that allows working people to flourish. Respect for persons carries many connotations and implications, among which are recognizing the inherent value of persons and avoiding treating persons as mere means. Respect for persons also entails listening to their voices, caring for their well-being, allowing them to make their own choices, and acknowledging that their lives are priceless and irreplaceable. Providing leisure issues from respecting people for at least two reasons: first, respecting people means not treating people merely as tools, and without ample leisure, working people lack sufficient time and energy for their own well-being, their energies instead consumed in service to others. Second, respecting working people means caring for their development as human beings, and this development does not occur without time away from work, time for oneself, time for reflection and for the development of intelligence and abilities. Leisure in the classical sense of *scholè*, I suggest, should be a good for all people, rather than a good reserved for an elite class of intellectuals. Allow me to explain first (in Section 2) the varied implications of respecting working people, including providing leisure, and turn secondly (in Section 3) to an Aristotelian sense of leisure as a necessary resource for the development of human capabilities.

2

An ethical principle of respect for persons draws from Kantian ethics, but the principle is morally basic enough that we can appreciate it even if we are not exclusively or primarily Kantian in ethical orientation. In his second formulation

of the supreme principle of morality, the categorical imperative, Kant writes that we should treat humanity never simply as a means but always as an end (Kant, 1998 [1785], 4: 429, p. 38). To treat humanity as an end means treating persons with respect: we may not manipulate or use persons to achieve our goals; rather, we must maintain a distinction between rational persons and things. We may use things to our ends, but rational beings are ends-in-themselves. If we utilize a person, as happens continually in work and in business, we must simultaneously respect that she is an end-in-herself. Her life has inherent and priceless value, and morality demands we respect her agency. Deception, coercion, and exploitation are all out of bounds. In the simplest terms, people are not tools.

Respecting working people therefore means recognizing, first, that working people are not merely means to objectives such as productivity and profit. It clearly means that forced employment in slavery or slavery-like conditions is heinously at odds with respect for the autonomy of labourers. It also means that employing organizations act wrongly when they use and discard employees as though they were tools, or treat people as mere appendages of machines, or use employees without regard to their welfare, such as by sustaining toxic working environments. Respecting working people means antipathy for the syndrome of disposable workers, for unfortunate stereotypes of working people, and for the capitalist phenomenon, as lamented by Max Weber, of condemning men and women to 'mechanized petrification' in the inhuman iron cages of machine production in industrialized divisions of labour (Weber, 1992, pp. 123–4).¹ It also means that not anything goes in the pursuit of wealth and that we should remain aware of the tendency of economic imperatives to eclipse moral values. In her work on moral blindness, Margaret Heffernan, for instance, observes that we often use economic arguments to distance ourselves from the harms that our consumption puts upon others: exploitation becomes acceptable as necessary for economic wealth, at the same time that consumers prefer not to see the exploitation that makes our comfortable lives possible. At a point when economic imperatives eclipse humanitarian concerns, Heffernan (2011, p. 197) writes, 'market thinking has obliterated moral thinking on a grand scale'. It helps to return to moral principles prioritizing human persons, whether in the form of the categorical imperative or other principles.

One may wonder whether capitalism as a whole is at odds with respect for working people, and whether, in particular, capitalist control over workers is at odds with respect for workers' autonomy. Some socialists do make such a moral argument against capitalism (for example, Nielsen, 1989), and such an argument appears on point with respect to unbridled forms of capitalism in which the pursuit of the best bottom-line eclipses respect for persons and other moral values. But let us not overlook that, as James Bernard Murphy writes, in forms of both capitalism and communism 'the worker is often treated as a mere instrument, a factor of production, rather than as the subject of his or her work' (Murphy, 1993, p. 3). Workers flourish when able to develop skills and exercise autonomy within their work, and punishing, soul-destroying work occurs in diverse economies

and even in non-profit organizations. Disrespect is not limited to capitalism, and neither does a worker need to maintain control over the entirety of her work in order to experience it as satisfying and meaningful. Executing an assignment given by a supervisor, for instance, is quite compatible with being respected as a worker, although the forms of control and disrespect chronicled in capitalism today are stunning. As Elizabeth Anderson observes at the start of *Private Government*, Walmart employees cannot talk casually among one another, lest they be charged with time theft; Apple employees lose unpaid time every day as they wait for supervisors to search their personal belongings; Tyson employees are not allowed to use the restroom while on duty, with the result that some ‘urinate on themselves while their supervisors mock them’ (Anderson, 2017, p. xix).

If we accept the basic principle that people merit priority over economic values, we must reject the notion that Karl Marx saw embedded in the capitalism of his time that a worker ‘is allowed to live only insofar as the interests of the ruling class requires it’ (Marx and Engels, 2000 [1848], p. 257). Precisely because workers are not animate tools, we must reject any musing on how much a person can work before breaking, or before needing a break to regain strength for further work, so she can continue to advance the interests of the well-to-do. The ethically grounded and radically different question is instead how much work is necessary for working people themselves to live well. This is partly a philosophical question about the components of a good life and partly an empirical question, drawing on both our psychological need for work and on the natural limits of our productive capacities. Although answers as to how much work we need to thrive will vary across individuals and communities, it is quite possible that in a well-structured society, working just a few hours a day, or a few days a week, may be sufficient to meet personal and social needs for work (Veltman, 2016, pp. 13–4).

It is important to recognize that the norm of working eight hours a day, five days a week, is not a universal given or a rational Archimedean starting point for structuring working life. It is a historically contingent norm that arose following considerable struggle on the part of labour movements in the early 20th century (Hunnicut, 2013), and, as such, it is subject to critical scrutiny and change. I would join others in arguing that we now have good reason to accept a social norm of shorter working hours, particularly as advancements in technology and automation appear to lead us in the direction of a lesser social need for work. Shorter working hours, on the one hand, address important structural economic issues, including reducing worker fatigue and burnout, increasing productivity, and ameliorating problems of unemployment by spreading around the limited good of good work. On the other hand, shorter hours bring direct benefits for human well-being, allowing more time for doing whatever we enjoy, potentially enriching personal relations, increasing real opportunities for creative activity and self-development, and supporting choices to care for others in the home, volunteer in communities, fulfil domestic duties, or simply enjoy more of the arts of living.² A natural question in response to lessening standard working hours is,

of course, how working people will obtain enough money to thrive with shorter hours, as work is now the means by which most people *earn* a living. I believe one excellent answer is a universal basic income, which has many considerations in its favour and which I argue for at length elsewhere (Veltman, 2016, pp. 92–104; Veltman, 2020).

The standard 40-hour workweek makes work centre-stage in the lives of workers, as Monday through Friday working people typically rise early and get ready for work, expend their energies at work for several hours, and return home tired, and yet often still have many errands and responsibilities. The 40-hour workweek is exhausting, and it is itself the source of the ongoing problem of work-life imbalance, as the daily grind of full-time work, as we now know it, leaves little time for personal life, self-development, and other facets of a flourishing human life. The 40-hour workweek means that working people have little time or energy to *think* and to develop and exercise their minds to the fullest of their potential. Shortening the hours of the workweek is, in this way, a reclaiming of the time and energies of working people for their own well-being and a way of acknowledging that workers' lives are primarily their own. Leisure is integral to personal well-being even when a person is fortunate to have good work, and it is all the more important as a reprieve from bad work, that is, from work that undermines the well-being of a worker and has no redeeming value but a pay check.

It is a hard truth that some work is both integral to social functioning and yet damaging to the person who performs it, because the work is wearisome, tedious, disgusting, dangerous, or especially exhausting. In thinking about ethical solutions to recalcitrant problems of bad work, Russell Muirhead ends *Just Work* by discussing the possibility of limiting work as a way of recognizing that workers should not be consumed by their work and that they 'deserve a life that allows them to serve their own purposes' (Muirhead, 2004, p. 174). Alternative solutions to the unhappy moral problem of bad work, including sharing, eliminating, or outsourcing bad work, have clear limitations, for some bad work is socially necessary, and no amount of fiddling with the conditions of the work will transform it into work that fits human beings (Muirhead, 2004, p. 34). Sharing bad work can be impractical and coercive, even if it expresses a moral truth that some persons should not be the tools of others. Instituting a shorter workday is a place to start in moving to a more liberated modern world in which workers have a full life and pursue meaningful activities outside of work. To be sure, it is certainly possible and desirable to shorten the working day at the same time that we work to improve the quality of work life for working people.

It may come as a surprise that I recommend lessening working hours, since I worked to establish the centrality of good work in human flourishing in *Meaningful Work* (Veltman, 2016). Some theorists of work may see a duality of possibilities between, on the one hand, recognizing that we need work for its many economic, social, and psychological benefits and, on the other hand, seeing work as a disutility that we should attempt to minimize through shorter hours,

increased automation, or simpler living. In praising leisure, Bertrand Russell, for instance, employs a dichotomy that some thinkers might find natural between a leisure society and one centred on work. In his classic essay ‘In Praise of Idleness’, Russell (2004 [1935]) expresses hope for a future world in which modern technology makes possible a four-hour workday and a happier and more leisurely life for all people.³ He suggests at the same time that we be sceptical of the work ethic and of flowery praise of work, because such praise serves the interests of the wealthy and underlies a fabric of social and economic injustices. In something of a Thrasymachean perspective on the virtue of hard work, Russell writes that the whole gospel of work issues from ‘the rich and their sycophants’ in order that the working classes will accept a notion that it is their duty to work, all the while supporting others in idleness (Russell, 2004 [1935], p. 9). For Russell, the idea that work is virtuous is positively harmful; it impedes progress towards a world in which everyone can, through the advent of modern technology, work much less and cultivate a life of educated but playful happiness.

I find Russell correct in his ideal of a four-hour workday—and in his scepticism of any ethic that serves the interests of the wealthy—but incorrect in both his dichotomization of leisure and work and in his Thrasymachean perspective on the value of work. Work is not merely another’s good; it is rich in intrinsic benefits for workers. More than a means to a pay check, work enables people to exercise skills, earn esteem, and serve a purpose within the world. Work is a source of pride, peer recognition, and self-respect. A strong work ethic reflects a range of virtues, including willingness to contribute, self-discipline, dependability, cooperativeness, and industriousness. Work provides a satisfying outlet for our energies, a way of being useful, and a sense of accomplishment that comes from a job well done. It is at work that we hone our distinctive capabilities and skills, including job-specific skills, general problem-solving skills, social skills, and decision-making skills that help us thrive both within and outside of work. In this way, meaningful work is integral to living well, and there is good reason why a work ethic runs deep in many communities: people perceive the many personal and social benefits of work. Productive employment is a foundation of individual and social prosperity, and psychologically healthy people find pleasure in activity, including many kinds of work (Veltman, 2016).

Good work, however, is but one part of a flourishing life, and it is not the case that the more work we have, the better off we are. Human flourishing encompasses a plurality of goods, such as knowledge, health, virtue, pleasure, friendship, and citizenship, and for this reason work cannot promise complete human happiness. It is clearly prudent to avoid living for work, for when work overshadows life, crowding out other activities that stand to enrich life, life cannot be lived to its fullest, which is part of the very notion of human flourishing (Veltman, 2016, pp. 12–3). Human flourishing lies in contrast with what we might call, following Paul Gomberg (2007, p. 51), a moneyist conception of the human good, in which what is good reduces to a single, maximizable metric, like money, pleasure, or power. As a thriving life balances many goods, and as both work and leisure are

integral to living well, social theorists should avoid dichotomizing pictures of work-centred and leisure-centred societies. A flourishing community endows individuals with opportunities for both work and leisure, and we can still reap the benefits of good work with a shortened working day.

In short, I find an ethical principle of respect for working people works in tandem with other considerations to support a strong cumulative case for shortening working hours and increasing leisure. Taken as a whole, arguments for increasing leisure should be fairly uncontroversial, assuming we escape a purely capitalist and productivist mindset, frame leisure as discretionary free time, and think broadly about ways of transforming social life over the long term to improve human well-being. But, in fact, I have something more in mind than simply increasing the amount of free time standardly enjoyed by working people: an Aristotelian sense of leisure and an Aristotelian interpretation of the second formulation of the categorical imperative, which I favour, imply a goal of developing the rational capabilities of human persons. This goal has surprisingly radical implications for reshaping communities to support the development of human intelligence and potential in all people. Allow me to turn now to describe the implications of respecting the humanity *in* working persons.

3

Kant's imperative to respect persons as ends conceals a debt to Aristotle, for the second formulation of the categorical imperative, fully enunciated, is that we should treat the humanity *in* persons as an end. Kant asserts that the rational nature of humanity is an end in itself, and for this reason morality requires that we treat humanity, 'whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means' (Kant, 1998 [1785], 4: 429, pp. 37–8). As Thomas Hill observes, for Kant 'humanity' designates not simply persons but a characteristic, or set of characteristics, of persons. The humanity in persons contrasts with the animality in persons: we human persons share biological functions with animals yet stand apart from animals in our capabilities for rationality and autonomy.⁴ Developing and perfecting our human capabilities provides a natural purpose for humanity, precisely as Aristotle argues in his ethics. As Kant writes in his third illustration of the categorical imperative in the *Groundwork*, 'there are in humanity capacities for greater perfection which form part of nature's purpose for humanity in our person' (Kant, 1964 [1785], 4: 430, pp. 97–8). Neglecting to develop our natural gifts is not compatible with treating humanity as an end; we have a duty to develop our talents, rather than resigning ourselves to idleness and enjoyment, as our capabilities are given to us for the sake of perfection. The basic meaning of humanity as an end in itself is, therefore, at least in part, that the development of our capabilities should be a primary end or goal of our endeavours.

The seed of inspiration we may draw from this Aristotelian emphasis of the principle of humanity formulation of the categorical imperative is that respecting

working people entails caring about the development of their human capabilities. This caring means taking their education seriously and providing time and resources for the development of their intelligence and potential. Caring for human development through education may sound like something of a platitude, but in fact taking care and education seriously entails significant social change. It entails shifting away from familiar social orders in which elite classes of persons prosper through advanced education, leisure, and self-actualization, while working classes labour never-endingly to support the flourishing of others. Such a hierarchical order effectively makes working people tools of the flourishing of others, which is inconsistent with the principle of respect for persons and the goal of developing the humanity in persons. Respecting working people effectively imports a significant measure of egalitarianism into our evaluation of social orders, as it means supporting the development of intelligence and abilities in every person, from youth to adulthood. It also means that, as a moral ideal, those of us who enjoy significant leisure and other resources for self-development will need to take part in the everyday work of maintaining the world, for if we do not do our part, those who labour full-time in routine occupations will not have the time, energy, and freedom for their own self-development.

Caring for the development of human capabilities, particularly in working people, also entails significant changes in educational systems. For starters, taking the goal of human development seriously entails that we not view education as primarily just preparation for working life. To see education as a long process of job training makes this good of instrumental value and makes advanced education a justifiable expense for only some people: those who will put it to good use in their work. By implication, advanced education, such as at universities, will not appear advantageous for large segments of society who may have little use for it in their occupations. In the context of an ideal of human flourishing, education is not just for work but for life; it is necessary for living well and doing well. It is also necessary for meeting the civic responsibility of thinking cogently, proportioning belief to evidence, and maintaining literacy in the arts and sciences. By implication, indeed, nearly every person should go to college, as long as colleges remain sites of concentrated and unique opportunities for developing intelligence and skills. But even more, an egalitarian ideal of human flourishing implies that a culture of reading, discovering, and discussing ideas and of contributing developed skills to communities—a kind of culture that pervades an excellent university—should spread beyond universities and pervade communities at large.

To be sure, some may object that the principle of respect for persons need not—or even should not—imply such fanciful ideals as university education for all people or cultures of intellectually thriving individuals. Some may hold a liberal rather than perfectionist interpretation of the principle of respect for persons, in which case respecting persons means, primarily, respecting their choices and not interfering in their lives as long as they bring no definite damage, or risk of damage, to others. A purely liberal principle of respect for persons would entail that we not push perfectionist norms of, say, intellectual flourishing and self-development on

a public of diverse citizens, many of whom may have little desire for intellectual thriving and feel entitled to remain in a state of ignorance. A liberal principle of respect for persons, I say, is not unreasonable in emphasizing that our minds are our own, but it is also the case that ignorance and false beliefs damage communities, and societies flounder when critical masses of people lack a significant degree of intellectual development. The beliefs of all people matter, particularly in a democracy in which people vote on issues that affect the well-being of others, and communities cannot fully thrive without cultivating the minds of individuals.

It is true that intelligence manifests diversely among persons, and just as some delight in reading and discussing complex ideas, others find satisfaction in solving problems, building structures, or making crafts, and still others enjoy painting, drawing, or gardening, and all of these activities draw on knowledge and skills of different sorts. It is also true that a person need not attend a university in order to become learned, to rise above ignorance, or to delight in cultivating the mind through careful reading. But a university education provides a crucial start in a flourishing life, and a community that appreciates the value of an educated citizenry will not leave a broad mass of people to learn on their own, but rather plan for a university education for the population as a whole. It is important that universities continue to reflect the diversity of human intelligence at the same time that they nurture a love of reading, for reading is a baseline for the development of the mind, whatever other passions and interests one pursues.

The development of human intelligence requires leisure in the classical sense: freedom from the daily grind and time for nourishing the mind. The ancient Greek concept of leisure as *scholê*, which provides the basis for our concepts of school and scholar, contains an enduring insight that the true potential of leisure is time for the development of the mind. *Scholê* is a halting of necessary pedestrian activities, a time of peace and quiet, a time for contemplation and wisdom. *Scholê* is not idleness but requires being at ease, in order to pursue theoretical activity as part of human completeness. Ancient Greek philosophers who see *scholê* as integral to happiness draw the concept from the wider culture of ancient Greece, which, according to leisure scholar Sebastian de Grazia (1962, p. 10), took questions of leisure more seriously than we do today. The longstanding cultural valuation of leisure as the foundation of civilized life, Kostas Kalimtzis (2017, pp. 5–7) also argues, shaped the Greek conceptualization of leisure as more fundamental than its opposite, *ascholê*. *Ascholê* encompasses work, business, and busyness, meaning that a person is without time for leisure. As Kalimtzis interprets the concepts of *scholê* and *ascholê*, the ancient Greek language employs a unique conceptualization of work as the privation of free time: just as we understand having poor eyesight as a privation of the capability for full eyesight, for the ancient Greeks *ascholê* is a privation of the capability for intellectual flourishing. This insight, he argues, does not come purely from philosophical minds: ‘A shared cultural insight’, he says, ‘gave pre-eminence to *scholê* as being more natural than its privation’ (Kalimtzis, 2017, p. 6).⁵

Taking up the cultural priority of *scholê* in his ethics, Aristotle writes that a person who flourishes to the highest degree enjoys a leisurely and unwearied life,

having time, ability, and inclination for the transcendent and divine activity of contemplation (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1177b). Aristotle frames leisure as activity done for its own sake and, from this principle, forwards an argument that may strike contemporary readers as counter-intuitive: relaxation, play, and amusements are not true candidates for leisure. These activities serve the purpose of allowing a break from work, so that we may return to work refreshed and ready for yet additional productive or practical activities; relaxation, play, and amusements are thus not ends of life (*Nicomachean Ethics*, 1176b23–30).⁶ Using leisure correctly for education and self-development is the basis of living a good life, and people can readily fall into peril if they have abundant leisure without the temperament and training to direct themselves towards wisdom and virtue. As Aristotle says in an initially curious comment in the *Politics* (1271b), Spartan society was secure while at war but collapsed upon firmly establishing an empire, because the Spartans did not know how to use the leisure that peace brought, and they lacked discipline for activities higher than war. As de Grazia (1964, p. 10) comments on this passage, a ‘citizenry unprepared for leisure will degenerate in prosperous times’. Indeed, Aristotle picks up on a symbiosis between education and leisure: leisure is for education, and a flourishing community needs education for leisure.

Whereas Aristotle argues that a flourishing citizenry requires leisure, and some interpret Aristotle as offering an ideal of an egalitarian and intellectually thriving community,⁷ Aristotelian leisure is notoriously exclusionary: slave labourers and other workers do not flourish through lives of leisure but make possible the flourishing of others. Aristotle dichotomizes lives of leisure and lives of labour, believing that human flourishing requires freedom from manual work, which damages the development of moral goodness and saps the energy and leisure necessary for contemplation and cultivation of civic virtue. As he says in the *Politics* (1328b–1329a),

a state with an ideal constitution ... cannot have its citizens living the life of mechanics or shopkeepers, which is ignoble and inimical to goodness. Nor can it have them engaged in farming: leisure is a necessity, both for growth in goodness and for the pursuit of political activity.

It does not trouble Aristotle that manual labourers would not flourish, for on his account nature makes some persons less rational than others, and the polis permits mutually beneficial relationships between those who have greater rationality and those who have less. Nature makes some human beings slaves, animate tools in the service of the important activities of others (*Politics*, 1253b23–1254a7).

It is hard to overestimate the significance of the notion, shared by Aristotle and others, that labourers and workers cannot think with the rational sophistication of an upper class of more intelligent people. This notion not only lies behind a longstanding yet often hidden suggestion that common people should be taught that religious myths are true, at the same time that intellectuals regard them as untrue: noble fictions with social utility. More broadly, this notion also

serves as a rationale for a social order in which some people occupy roles devoted to thinking, judging, prescribing, and planning, while others occupy lower social positions in which they primarily follow orders and perform routine tasks. Once social engineers—whether ancient or contemporary—conceive and create non-intellectual social roles for those deemed less rational, by further implication, education becomes uneven: those deemed less ‘equipped’ for a life of the mind are not educated for critical inquiry. The result is an appearance of a justified social order in which different people have different capabilities, and accordingly only some occupy roles that demand a developed mind, when in fact it is the very notion that some are less equipped for intellectual work that creates and sustains hierarchical communities and educational unevenness in the first place.

It is precisely when we stop seeing limits on the intellectual abilities of working people—and when we take the development of their capabilities as an end in itself—that we really liberate ourselves to envision new possibilities for egalitarian communities of individuals who flourish through both work and leisure. Overcoming ancient social hierarchies where only some persons flourish through leisure, while others sweat to make this leisure possible, entails, first, a rejection of Plato and Aristotle’s notion that nature endows labourers with weaker rational faculties. Rejecting this ancient ideology and instead adopting an ideal that all people can flourish through the development of their capabilities means transforming social life to diminish divisions in kinds of people: it means rejecting differences between intellectuals and ‘ordinary people’; it probably also means sharing routine work and embracing advancements in technology and automation that free labourers for greater leisure. This ideal will undoubtedly leave some people aghast, for leisure has always been a good for a privileged class of people who delight in developing and exercising the mind. This delight, however, can be nurtured throughout a human community with an environment and a set of social norms that encourage intelligence and epistemic responsibility. As John Stuart Mill remarks of the development of our higher human potential, this potential is like a delicate plant, requiring just the right environmental conditions favourable to healthy growth, and without these conditions we can expect to see what we do in fact often see around us: people who do not reach their potential (Mill, 2006 [1861], p. 213).

Inevitably, some will doubt that if the majority of people have more time on their hands, they will spend it cultivating a rich life of the mind. Perhaps the *hoi polloi* will fritter away greater free time watching television, trolling the internet, enjoying cat videos, indulging in social media, shopping, and generally consuming more than is necessary for living well. In *The Human Condition*, Hannah Arendt condemns the old hope of liberating masses of workers for an intellectual life, writing of a fallacy she sees in the Marxist dream of emancipating working people from endless drudgery and necessity:

A hundred years after Marx we know the fallacy of this reasoning; the spare time of the *animal laborans* is never spent in anything but consumption, and the more time left to him, the greedier and more craving his appetites.

(Arendt, 1958, p. 133)

Arendt claims that Marx was under ‘the illusion of a mechanistic philosophy’ that lead him to think that ‘labor power, like any other energy, can never be lost, so that if it is not spent and exhausted in the drudgery of life it will automatically nourish other, “higher,” activities’ (Arendt, 1958, p. 133). To Arendt, the advent of automation, with its promise of freeing so many people from the human burden of labour, is threatening precisely because it will empty the factories, liberate labourers, and upset the human condition (Arendt, 1958, pp. 4, 133–4).

As I see it, the roots of this Arendtian pessimism are an assumption that people are of a type and a plain disrespect for the intelligence of working people. Her fear that *animal laborans* would devour society is perhaps also rooted in a tendency we still observe today, namely, that after a hard day’s work, tired labouring people find pleasure in consumption and relaxation in activities that are not intellectually demanding. Yet, as Julie Rose (2016, p. 8) points out in *Free Time*, we can infer very little from observing that, in the present time, people who are exhausted by work spend their little free time watching television. It is worth imagining instead how people could spend a truly fair share of free time while living in a just society that genuinely supports their freedom. Rather than seeing a fallacy in the very possibility that working people can achieve more than the satisfaction of their appetites, I say we should start a process of rumination on the human condition with the fact that people find satisfaction in the exercise of their energies and the development of their abilities. This flourishing occurs in leisure and in meaningful work, and it is important to acknowledge that work of many kinds can develop and exercise intelligence. But, as I noted above, work has its limits as an activity that contributes to flourishing, and it becomes possible to nourish our minds and further our own development precisely when we are not worn out from our work.

Thus, embedded in the work of Aristotle and Kant is an incredible ideal of a community that provides leisure—understood in the classical sense as freedom from toil and time for the development of the mind—for all people. This ideal functions as a corrective to hierarchical communities in which some labour to support the flourishing of others, in which some people become, in a real sense, left behind in the realization of human potential. Such a hierarchical community, I have suggested, is not in keeping with the principle of respect for the humanity in persons. Every working person deserves an opportunity for developing his or her capabilities—and not merely through initial chances in a competitive educational environment in which only some advance to higher echelons of human accomplishment. I admit a community centred on developing the intelligence and skill of everyone is hard to picture, and perhaps even harder to achieve. One primary place to begin is in abandoning regrettable dim views of the intellectual abilities of working people, and in generally working less to allow more time for intellectual life.

Notes

- 1 As articulated and discussed in Breen (2016).
- 2 For a discussion of many reasons in favour of shortening working hours, see, for example, Weeks (2011, especially pp. 151–74), de Grazia (1964), Russell (2004), and Hunnicutt (2013).

- 3 To be sure, idleness is different from leisure. Idleness carries connotations of doing nothing and, in large doses, it appears as a vice or an affliction. A life of leisure, in contrast, connotes the possibility of many non-working activities, or even (in an Aristotelian sense) a privileged life devoted to higher activities, such as contemplation of the eternal truths. In 'In Praise of Idleness', Russell occasionally implicitly appeals to an Aristotelian ideal of leisure: 'the wise use of leisure', he writes, 'is a product of civilization and education' and enables a person to indulge curiosities for knowledge (Russell, 2004 [1935], pp. 8, 14). He also stresses in a more liberal vein that, after four hours of work a day, people should be able to use their leisure as they see fit (Russell, 2004 [1935], p. 12).
- 4 Hill (1992, pp. 38–41). In interpreting the principle of humanity formulation of the categorical imperative, Allen Wood (1999, p. 143) also writes that the basic issue for Kant is that we disrespect humanity in placing things of lesser value ahead of our rational nature, which constitutes our humanity and which is an end in itself. Wood points out that the formula of using humanity as an end and never only as a means 'is rather like the Sermon on the Mount ... whose demands require such a radical departure from our customary practices and accepted attitudes toward ourselves and others that we are at first perplexed when we try to apply them' (Wood, 1999, p. 139).
- 5 Kalimtzis (2017, pp. 161–2) notes that the ancient meaning of *scholé* as higher leisure has faded from the Greek language, which now treats the concept as designating a holiday or a form of pleasurable entertainment.
- 6 As Richard Kraut writes in his interpretation of Aristotle on leisure, 'he thinks that, ideally, life should have some other element in addition to the cycle of work and relaxation... Relaxation does not supply the missing element, because even though it is pleasant, its role is to help us get back to work... Every well-lived life must have regular periods of leisure devoted to some entirely lovable activity. If one has the special talent and training of a philosopher, then one will devote one's leisure to philosophy' (Kraut, 2002, p. 200). If one does not do philosophy in one's leisure, Kraut says, he or she might listen to good music, poetry, or stories filled with wisdom, or engage in politics (Kraut, 2002, pp. 200–2).
- 7 Kraut interprets Aristotle as arguing in the *Politics* that all citizens should have lives of leisure in which they can achieve excellence through developing and exercising their capabilities for thinking, feeling, and social living (Kraut, 2000, pp. 200–2). As Kostas Kalimtzis interprets Aristotle's vision, he proposes to make the human impulse towards knowledge and understanding a common way of life among citizens, rather than an activity reserved for a select few: 'He is proposing a democratization of wonder, so that the prospect of cultivating this impulse to search out the causes might become a common principle. ... Rather than a leisured class looking downward in contempt of those who are excluded from it [as Veblen suggests], he envisions a shared education as the way of widening participation in it and elevating a population to it' (Kalimtzis, 2017, pp. 68–9).

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6

CONTESTING THE WORK-SPEND CYCLE

The liberal egalitarian case against consumerism

Samuel Arnold

1 Introduction

Liberal egalitarian justice requires a less unequal society, measured in terms of income and wealth. But does it also require a less *consumerist* society—a society less fixated on getting and spending? At first glance, liberal egalitarian theory may seem indifferent to consumerism as such. While liberal egalitarianism mandates a more equal distribution of income and wealth, it says little about the *uses* to which people put their economic resources. Let the rich spend lavishly on birthday parties, splurging for elaborate ice sculptures, camel rides, and pop-star performances; let the middle class fritter away their resources on McMansions and sport utility vehicles (SUVs) and travel teams for their kids; let us all spend feverishly on the latest fashions and gadgets: so what? Provided that these spenders are entitled, under liberal egalitarian principles, to what they have, liberal egalitarian theory (it might be thought) has nothing further to say about how they choose to spend what they have.

Granted, we may privately wince at these choices, thinking them gauche and imprudent. We may even nod in agreement with frugal sages like Thoreau, who declared that ‘most of the luxuries, and many of the so called comforts of life, are not only not indispensable, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind’ (Thoreau, 2017 [1854], p. 12). We may judge, that is, the work-and-spend consumerist cycle a rather poor route to human flourishing. But none of these insights, important though they are, have anything to do with liberal egalitarian theory *per se*. They speak to ethics, not justice; they concern how one should live, not how major social, political, and economic institutions should distribute the benefits and burdens of social cooperation. Liberal egalitarian theory, in short, tells us how fat a person’s wallet should be, but is largely silent about how that person should spend what’s in her wallet. Or so it may seem.

In fact, the view I have been sketching is, I shall argue, importantly mistaken. In this chapter, I identify a number of distinctively liberal egalitarian concerns with consumerism and the work-spend cycle it spawns. I argue that consumerism potentially threatens every aspect of liberal egalitarian justice—from political equality, to equal opportunity, to economic fairness, and even to basic needs satisfaction.

My argument draws on empirical work by Juliet Schor and Robert Frank, which I discuss in Section 2. I then identify, in Sections 3 through 5, various ways in which the consumerist work-and-spend dynamic described by Schor and Frank threatens liberal egalitarian principles and institutions. Sections 6 and 7 address a key objection: since one person's spending is another person's income, isn't consumerism actually *good* for the poor—hence, something liberal egalitarians ought to promote, not discourage? Section 8 summarizes the argument and notes several unresolved questions that warrant further inquiry.

2 The 'new consumerism'

In a consumer society, people satisfy most of their needs and wants not through self-provisioning or through consumption of public goods, but by purchasing goods and services through the market. Although the United States has long been a consumer society, present-day consumption practices differ importantly from those found pre-1970 or so. As chronicled by Juliet Schor in her classic work *The Overspent American* (1998), what she calls 'the new consumerism' is marked by two profound developments. First, people's 'consumption reference groups' have shifted. While people have always spent, in part, to keep up with their peers, the way that people define their peers has changed. Prior to roughly 1970, people compared themselves mainly to those in their immediate social environment—for example, neighbours, friends, relatives, and co-workers. Economic disparities within such groups being relatively limited, this way of constructing one's consumption reference group tended to establish feasible consumption norms; keeping up with the Joneses isn't impossible when the Joneses have roughly the same income as you. Keeping up with the Kardashians, on the other hand, is a different matter entirely—and yet this is precisely what most of us now try to do. Our consumption norms have been, as Schor puts it, 'upscaled', such that we no longer construct our consumption reference group by looking to our (similarly resourced) neighbours and friends; instead, we turn on the television or scan the internet, where we're met with images of celebrities, athletes, and Instagram influencers taking lavish tropical vacations, tapping away at fancy gadgets, eating at four star restaurants, and living in palatial mansions. The result: 'luxury, rather than mere comfort, [has become] a widespread aspiration' (Schor, 1999).

Exacerbating this upscaling of consumption norms is the post-1970 explosion in economic inequality. This, according to Schor, is the second key development in our new consumption practices. Not only do we look, increasingly,

to the very affluent for consumption cues, but the economic gap between the very affluent and the rest of us has widened considerably: they keep getting richer, while we stay in place or even grow poorer. The result, Schor writes, of these two developments—upscaling of consumption norms, coupled with rising inequality—is a growing aspirational gap: with desires persistently outrunning incomes, many consumers find themselves frustrated’ (Schor, 1999). To get a sense of this aspirational gap’s size, consider one recent survey which asked respondents how much money they felt they would need per year to have ‘made it’. The answer: \$147,104—nearly three times more than the average US annual household income of \$57,426 (Elkins, 2018).

Before moving on to my normative argument, consider three additional empirical points. First, much consumer spending is ‘defensive’ in character: its primary rationale is to preserve one’s (or one’s family’s) existing rank or spot in the social hierarchy rather than to climb the ladder still further. As Schor explains, ‘parents worry that their children need computers and degrees from good colleges to avoid falling behind in the global economy’ (Schor, 1998, p. 19). To a large extent, one spends to keep up with the Joneses, not because one wants to be *better* than the Joneses, exactly, but rather because one doesn’t want to fall hopelessly behind them. There’s something egalitarian in this rationale: looking up the consumption ladder, one sees people spending lavishly, increasing their power, status, and opportunity in the process; and one resolves, *precisely to protect one’s equal standing*, to follow suit. Again, it is a desire to avoid inferiority, not to achieve superiority, that fuels this type of defensive consumption.

Secondly, defensive consumption of the kind just described resembles an arms race, as Robert Frank explains in several influential works (Frank, 1997, 1999, 2011). Country A, not wanting to fall behind Country B militarily, spends 100 billion on defence. Country B, out of the same desire for security, matches A’s spending. The net result is that both countries purchase security, but at a needlessly high cost. Were they to coordinate military expenditures, each agreeing to spend the same, lower amount (say, 50 billion), then they could achieve an identical level of security at a fraction of the cost. Assuming that military spending conveys no intrinsic benefits, everything spent above this level is, strictly speaking, wasted.

A similar dynamic, Frank argues, characterizes defensive consumption. Suppose that Jones and Smith are the only competitors for a spot at a local law school. Jones, not wanting to lose to Smith, pays for test prep. Smith, not wanting to fall behind Jones, does the same. Neither increases his probability of admission. Assuming that test prep carries no intrinsic benefits, this is money wasted. Each would be better off spending nothing on test prep, freeing those resources for alternative uses. We will return to this idea in the next section, but for now, notice how widely this Frankian insight applies: not just to spending on test prep, but also to ‘spending on clothing, furniture, wine, jewelry, sports equipment, and a host of other goods’, for, as Frank explains,

the things we feel we “need” depend on the kinds of things others have, and our needs thus grow when we find ourselves in the presence of others

who have more than we do. Yet when *all* of us spend more, the new higher spending level simply becomes the norm.

(Frank, 1997, p. 1840)

To the extent that our spending is aimed merely at keeping up (rather than acquiring the additional goods or services as such), it is, again, collectively wasteful. We would all be better off if only we could arrange a lower level of consumer spending across the board.

My third empirical point is that one reason we would be better off at a lower level of consumer spending is that to *spend* money, one must somehow *get* money—and for most people, that means working. Other things equal, the more people consume, the more they must work (Schor, 1998, pp. 19–21). The ‘new consumerism’ therefore spawns a vicious circle: to finance increasing consumption, households must work longer hours. But longer hours render the household more dependent on the market to meet its needs. When both parents work full time, someone has to be paid to watch the kids; frazzled by the nine-to-five grind, people lack the energy and time to plan and cook healthy meals at home, and so must turn to restaurants or fast food. And so on. To put the point abstractly: to spend, one must get; but in the process of getting, one sacrifices one’s ability to meet needs *gratis*, requiring still more spending—which means more time getting, et cetera. The new consumerism thus locks people into a self-perpetuating ‘work-spend’ cycle, rendering them increasingly dependent on employers and businesses.

3 The liberal egalitarian case against consumption, part 1: opportunity costs

Thus far, I have described the broad empirical contours of our contemporary consumption practices. People spend competitively to keep up with those they regard as peers, but increasingly everyone regards the richest members of society as their consumption peers. This ‘upscaling’ of consumption norms, coupled with exploding income inequality, is a recipe not merely for frustration—most people being hopelessly unable to match the spending of the merely affluent, let alone the ultra-rich—but also, as Robert Frank suggests, for collective irrationality and waste. To the extent that we spend ‘defensively’, that is, merely to keep up with each other, we’d be better off spending less, thus freeing resources for better uses. These freed resources include not just money but also time, much of which we currently spend working to finance wasteful defensive consumption.

What should liberal egalitarians make of this ‘new consumerism’, of the way we today work and spend? To answer this question, I must first briefly explain ‘liberal egalitarianism’. Despite their many important differences, all liberal egalitarian theories provide an account of distributive justice: they specify principles for regulating the distribution of justice’s ‘currency’ (be it welfare, resources, opportunities, or whatever), such that when the principles are satisfied, the distribution is fair. All liberal egalitarian theories, in other words, answer the

question: ‘What’s a fair share?’ On John Rawls’s (1999) widely adopted version of liberal egalitarianism—with which I will operate for the rest of the chapter—each member of society has a fair share (of Rawls’s favoured currency, ‘primary goods’) when and only when the following principles are realized:

- First, ‘basic liberties’ must be distributed equally, with the ‘fair value’ of political liberties in particular being guaranteed—meaning that each person, regardless of economic power, must have roughly equal political power (not just formally, but substantively).
- Second, while a person’s draw in what we might call the ‘natural lottery’—her natural talents and abilities—may affect her economic prospects, her draw in the ‘social lottery’ may not. This is the Rawlsian requirement of ‘fair equality of opportunity’, which demands equal opportunities for natural equals.
- Finally, inequalities in certain ‘primary goods’ (especially income and wealth, but others besides) are permissible if and only if they are needed to maximize the prospects of the least advantaged for these same primary goods.

With this sketch of liberal egalitarianism in hand, I want to introduce—and, in the remainder of the chapter, build on—an important recent suggestion by Danielle Zwarthoed, who argues that the sort of consumption that ought to trouble liberal egalitarians is *expensive consumption*, by which she means ‘consumption...that threaten[s] other people’s access to their fair share, as defined by liberal egalitarian principles’ (Zwarthoed, 2018, p. 826). Notice that Zwarthoed is clearly right that expensive consumption, *if it exists*, must be opposed by liberal egalitarians. This conclusion follows simply from the definition of expensive consumption as consumption that undermines distributive justice. Since liberal egalitarians must condemn *anything* that undermines distributive justice, they must condemn *consumption practices* in particular that have this justice-undermining effect.¹ The difficult question is whether any consumption practices count as ‘expensive’ in Zwarthoed’s sense. That is, given that fair-share-undermining consumption, *if it exists*, would be unjust, *does* any such consumption exist? What we need is an account of how consumption can be expensive. How might *my* consumption habits, my getting and spending, invade, undermine, or otherwise threaten *your* fair share of justice’s currency? In what follows, I distinguish several varieties of expensive consumption.

First, and perhaps most obviously, consumption *can exhaust justice-relevant resources*. When justice-relevant resources are finite, one person’s use may equal another’s deprivation. If justice entitles me to some specific resource, and you use the last bit of that resource, then your consumption has denied me my fair share. Such cases are especially salient in the context of intergenerational and environmental justice (Zwarthoed, 2015, p. 289). Following Rawls, suppose that each generation must, on pain of injustice, hand over to the next

generation sufficient social, political, environmental, and material capital to maintain just institutions (Rawls, 1999, pp. 251–8). Suppose further that the present generation, in an orgy of consumption fuelled by ‘new consumerist’ practices, utterly depletes stocks of crucial environmental goods (for example, the absorptive capacity of our atmosphere, biodiversity, clean water, et cetera) essential to maintaining a minimally just society. Such consumption invades the fair shares of future generations, and so qualifies as ‘expensive’ in Zwarthoed’s sense. Barring further exonerating details, liberal egalitarians must regard it as unjust.

Second, consumption *competes with alternative uses—some of which are essential to justice*. Money spent on one thing is money that can’t be spent on another. In particular, money spent by agent A on A’s own purposes is money that cannot be spent for the sake of another agent B. How should we think about such cases? When A buys, say, a Starbucks coffee rather than spending that \$2.50 to benefit B, has A *wronged* B? This is a much-contested question, and one I will not resolve here (see, for example, Singer (1972)). Instead, I merely point out that *sometimes* A’s failure to spend for the sake of B clearly *does* wrong B. Consider a financially strapped parent—call him Profligate Pete—who blows his pay check on lottery tickets rather than paying the heating and grocery bills, condemning his son to a cold and hungry month. Clearly, Profligate Pete not only fails to benefit his son in this scenario, but actually *wrongs* him, since Pete has a parental duty (we may assume) to meet his son’s basic needs. More generally, *whenever A’s consumption undermines A’s ability to meet A’s obligations towards B, A’s consumption is pro tanto wrong*.²

Two important results follow from this general principle. First, when aggregate private consumption leaves the state inadequately resourced, such that it cannot discharge its obligations of justice, then aggregate private consumption undermines some people’s fair shares, and therefore qualifies as ‘expensive’. To illustrate, imagine a fantastically wealthy country—call it ‘Neoliberalandia’—that, despite its riches, fails to discharge basic duties of justice towards its citizens, leaving, for instance, 14 per cent of the population without health insurance, 16 million children hungry, and over 500,000 homeless. Suppose further that the explanation for this failure is not inadequate societal wealth—Neoliberalandia, remember, is far from poor—but rather a *misallocation* of that wealth across private and public consumption. Neoliberalandia devotes too much of its economic pie to private purposes and not enough to public ones; it achieves tremendous private splendour (for some), but only at the cost of unjust public squalor. Neoliberalandians are therefore just like Profligate Pete: collectively, they buy lottery tickets rather than food, opt for low taxes rather than the essentials of justice, undermining justice via misguided consumption choices.

To see a second important result, imagine a variant of the Neoliberalandia case: as before, the state fails to discharge some of its duties of justice, but this time the explanation is not inadequate funding *per se*, but rather poor stewardship. The public purse, in other words, is plenty full; government revenues suffice to meet

all claims of justice—if *only they were properly spent*. But alas, they are not properly spent. The government (in this scenario) squanders billions on budget-busting boondoggles, military adventures, and various ‘bridges to nowhere’ (literal and metaphorical), leaving it unable to afford, say, universal healthcare, publicly financed elections, high-quality public education, and other liberal egalitarian requirements. We can detect expensive consumption here—expensive *public* consumption rather than private. By spending money on bridges to nowhere rather than, say, medical care for the indigent (or whatever), the state consumes expensively. Again the analogy with Profligate Pete seems apt, although this time it’s the bridge-to-nowhere-buying government (rather than society as a whole) that consumes wrongly.

4 The liberal egalitarian case against consumption, part 2: justice erosion

My discussion thus far has focused on the opportunity costs of consumption. Since resources used to do X cannot be used to do Y, when the spender is under a moral obligation to do Y, spending resources on X instead proves morally problematic. We have seen several applications of this principle: it’s wrong for a parent to buy lottery tickets rather than food for his son; it’s wrong for the government to spend on tax breaks for the wealthy when basic needs go unmet; it’s wrong for society to spend so much on aggregate private consumption as to render the government unable to fund adequately the schools, hospitals, public parks, and so on essential to justice. In a nutshell, *we must spend first on basic needs and justice, and only then on other pursuits*. What I want to do next is consider whether any worries about private consumption remain in a society that heeds the just-stated injunction. That is: let justice be done; let the state be adequately resourced, and let it use these resources wisely; may we private consumers now spend to our hearts’ content?

I think not, for private consumption potentially *erodes* justice, transforming a just society into an unjust (or perhaps merely less just) one. How might private consumption erode justice? Notice that such consumption not only *competes* with public consumption (as discussed above); it also *substitutes* for it. Rather than send your kids to public school, you could send them to private school; rather than take public transportation, you could buy a car; rather than use the community pool, you could build your own. In themselves, these choices may seem morally unproblematic. Environmental considerations aside, where’s the harm in building a backyard pool?

Trouble emerges, however, when private substitution becomes a trend. As more people (usually the rich) opt for private versions of public goods—private schools, say, over public ones—political support for maintaining quality public goods erodes. Why tolerate high taxes to pay for excellent services that you never use? So, funding declines, worsening the services, which triggers yet more defections, et cetera, until eventually no one but the poor use the now-hollowed-out

public alternatives. Private substitution on a wide enough scale can thus trigger what Erik Olin Wright and Joel Rogers call a ‘vicious cycle’:

As the more affluent pull out of public goods consumption, they reduce their political support for the provision of those public goods, which—because they are politically influential—leads to a further deterioration of those goods, which leads to more people withdrawing to private, more costly substitutes.

(Wright and Rogers, 2011, p. 121)

So, one backyard pool does not an injustice make. But an entire *neighbourhood* of such pools, leading to reduced support for the city pool among elites, and eventually its closing—leaving the poorest citizens bereft of summertime recreational alternatives: this is a different matter altogether. At the limit, private consumption of key public goods—for example, education, transportation, recreation, and more—*can* erode justice by triggering a dynamic that worsens or even eliminates these vital public services.³

But consider a case in which private consumption of key public goods does *not* trigger a ‘vicious cycle’ of quality erosion. Suppose, for example, that although lots of rich people send their kids to private schools, they remain willing to pay the taxes required to fund high-quality public alternatives. How, it might be asked, could such private consumption possibly erode justice?

In fact, the problem is not difficult to spot. All liberal egalitarian theories include some sort of ‘fair equality of opportunity’ requirement, which, in a nutshell, says that natural equals should have roughly equal life prospects.⁴ Private consumption of certain key public goods—namely, those that (a) affect a person’s life chances, and which (b) have an importantly ‘positional’ aspect—potentially undermines this equal opportunity requirement. Take education, a classic positional good. As Brian Barry explains, ‘the essence of a positional good is that what matters is not how much you have but how much you have compared with other people’ (Barry, 2005, p. 176). Education certainly fits this description: your Southwestern State U diploma means a lot when you’re competing for a job against high schoolers, but rather little when you’re up against Ivy Leaguers. Your educational credential’s value to you, in short, depends greatly on how it stacks up against what others have.

Which brings us to the problem with private education. If my son goes to public school—even a very good public school—but yours goes to an even better private one, then, other things equal, your son has superior life chances. This is unjust, *per* the requirements of fair equality of opportunity. Notice that this objection does not depend on public school’s being bad in any absolute sense; all that matters is its relative quality. So, let public school be very good; as long as it is worse than at least some private alternatives, these private alternatives confer equality-of-opportunity-upsetting advantages and are, for that reason, unjust.⁵

A structurally similar argument impugns private spending on political influence, another importantly positional good. Rawls's first principle of justice guarantees the 'fair value' of political liberties, meaning (roughly) that each person, regardless of economic power, must have equal opportunity to influence politics. Private political consumption conflicts rather spectacularly with this guarantee. So long as the Koch brothers of the world are allowed to pour literally billions of dollars into lobbying, campaign donations, and other political expenditures, political equality—a first principle requirement of Rawlsian justice—will remain an unrealizable fantasy. Private consumption of political influence counts as 'expensive' and, in its present American incarnation anyway, must be eliminated.

To sum up the results of this section, private consumption can erode justice in two main ways: first, by undermining support for high-quality public goods essential to liberal egalitarianism; second, by conferring unfair advantages and opportunities—whether economic or political—on citizens wealthy enough to purchase superior private alternatives to key public goods.

5 Objection: consumerism, growth, and the worst-off

Thus far, I have catalogued a variety of ways in which consumerism fits poorly with liberal egalitarian justice. Gripped by 'luxury fever', liberal egalitarian citizens may prove unwilling to pay the high taxes required to fund justice-essential public programs, and they may push the state to misallocate the funds it *does* have, spending them to prop up private consumption (for example, through mortgage interest tax deductions and the like) rather than meet critical needs. What's more, the pressures of competitive consumption may drive wealthy citizens to abandon public goods for superior—but more expensive—private ones, a dynamic that retrenches the opportunity advantages of the rich while hollowing out the public services on which the middle-class and poor depend.

All told, then, I've painted a fairly grim picture of consumerism. Perhaps *too* grim, some readers might complain, for haven't I ignored a major way in which consumerism *further*s rather than undermines liberal egalitarian justice? Here's the argument: justice smiles on anything that improves the economic position of the worst off. But consumerism clearly *does* improve the economic position of the worst off. After all, one person's spending is another's income. The extravagant spending of the rich—for example, Paris Hilton's \$325,000 doghouse⁶—may seem morally grotesque, but, in fact, it creates jobs and puts money in working people's pockets. Indeed, on this line of thought, not only is a high level of private consumption *permitted* by liberal egalitarian justice, it may actually be *required*. As Rudolph Giuliani (admittedly, not a noted political philosopher) put this point in the wake of the 9/11 attacks: 'There is a way that everybody can help us ... Come here and spend money, just spend a little money. Like go to a store, do your Christmas or holiday shopping now, this weekend'.⁷ Be a patriot; do your duty; help the worst off by fuelling up your SUV, or taking the family out to dinner, or buying that new gadget you've been eyeing—or better yet, do all three! There's an important argument here, one that critics of

consumerism must take seriously: consumerism stimulates the economy, benefiting everyone—including the worst off—by creating jobs, raising wages, and generally improving people’s economic prospects and opportunities. Liberal egalitarians can hardly dismiss these benefits out of hand.

One might respond to this argument in a number of ways. For instance, the argument asserts that consumerism benefits the worst off in the form of jobs and increased income, but to what extent is this assertion really true? That is: even granting that consumerism increases gross domestic product (GDP), how much of this increased wealth actually trickles down the economic pyramid? Or—taking a completely different line—one might point out consumerism’s catastrophic environmental consequences and argue that these utterly swamp whatever income-lifting tendency consumerism might have. What good is job creation and/or higher wages if these come at the cost of a habitable planet (Wallace-Wells, 2018)?

Important though these responses are, I set them aside and develop instead two further points—one concessive, the other, not so much. First, the concessive point. Strictly speaking, nothing in my argument impugns consumption as such. I have opposed not consumption *sans* modifier, but rather *expensive* consumption, defined (following Zwarthoed) as consumption that threatens another’s fair share. Thus, even the most ridiculous luxury consumption is potentially fine on my account, provided that it is not ‘expensive’, which is to say, *provided that two conditions are met*: first, that the government is sufficiently resourced to meet its obligations of justice; second, that the private spending in question neither erodes justice nor undermines fair equality of opportunity. A society may meet the first condition simply by dividing the economic pie appropriately between private and public consumption. It may meet the second condition by providing high-quality public versions of key goods—namely, those fateful for basic needs (for example, healthcare, recreation, transportation) and equal opportunity (for example, education)—and protecting these goods from excessive private competition. So, let the rich buy their preposterously expensive doghouses: provided taxes are sufficiently high, income and wealth are fairly distributed, and core public goods are well-funded and protected from damaging private competition, liberal egalitarians have no quarrel with extravagant personal consumption. On the contrary, perhaps they should positively embrace it, for reasons well outlined by Giuliani—Hilton’s doghouse puts people to work, and all that.

Thus ends the concessive response. It is, I think, compatible with everything I’ve said so far—but not with what I am *about* to say, for I will now push my account in a more radical, anti-consumption direction. I do this through a parable.

6 The liberal egalitarian case against consumerism, part 3: the pathologies of ‘luxury fever’

Imagine, if you will, a just society, a society that realizes Rawls’s liberty principle, his fair equality of opportunity principle, and also his difference principle. This is a society, then, of free and equal persons, in which opportunities are spread fairly and in which nobody is economically worse off than anyone needs to be. Call it Justiceland.

While Justiceland is a just society, it is not, let us stipulate, a very *consumerist* society. True, its citizens do indeed meet many of their needs and wants through the market, and so it's a consumerist society in that weak sense. But in a stronger sense, it's not aptly described as consumerist, for—again, let us stipulate—its citizens have escaped Frank's 'luxury fever': not through some natural immunity, but rather because they've never been exposed to the 'influenza virus' in the first place (De Graaf, Wann, and Naylor, 2014). They simply haven't experienced the 'new consumerist' trends documented by Schor. Thus, while they can't help but look to their 'consumption reference group' for consumption cues—that's only human nature, presumably—they do not define their reference groups the way we do. We take spending guidance from the very richest; they take spending guidance from those of roughly similar economic means. We aspire to live like rock stars; they aspire to live like their neighbours.

Now, precisely because their consumption norms have not been 'upscaled', Justicelandians feel little pressure to increase their material standard of living. Their material reality more-or-less matches their material aspirations. And what does this material reality look like? Just how close to the bone are most Justicelandians living? Not that close. The median material standard of living resembles that of the United States in, say, 1965. Houses, then, are closer to 1,000 square feet than 3,000 square feet; wardrobes aren't bursting with extra clothes, nor closets with sporting equipment; garages are more likely to contain one car per family than two. So, while Justicelandians are hardly deprived, they certainly live more simply than we do. And yet they do not feel pinched by this simplicity: as a popular Justicelandian saying puts it, 'Just enough is plenty' (Alexander, 2016).

Their simpler ways impart a slower, more deliberate tempo to daily life. Justicelandians may have fewer material possessions than we do, but in exchange they can afford to work less. After all, 'reducing the pressure to consume is an important way to reduce the pressure to work, because we work mainly to consume, so the less we want to consume, the less we will want to work' (Skidelsky and Skidelsky, 2012, p. 202). But, of course, the less one works, the more leisure one has. And more leisure, in turn, means more time and energy to devote to family, friends, neighbourhoods, and communities—investments that yield a vibrant civil society (Rose, 2016). What Justicelandians lack in *material* capital, they more than make up in *social* capital—or so they like to say.

More leisure also means more time and energy for low-consumption, self-realizing activities like playing the guitar or learning to draw, and also for 'self-provisioning' activities like backyard gardening or learning to repair a leaky faucet. Not only are these activities intrinsically enjoyable (or so many Justicelandians report), they're also liberating, in that they enable still further reductions in working hours: the more you can do for yourself, the less you need to earn or spend.

In sum, compared to us, Justicelandians 'work and spend less, connect and create more' (Schor, 2010, p. 7), resulting in 'a manner of living that is outwardly simple, but inwardly rich' (Elgin, 1981, p. 93). Thus do Justicelandians flourish

in simplicity—until one day a world-renowned philosopher-economist named ‘Giuliani’ arrives at Justiceland’s shore. Justiceland’s leaders warmly greet him, eager to hear the sage’s advice.

‘We are all Rawlsians here’, he begins. ‘We believe in liberty, fair equality of opportunity, and the difference principle. On the first two points’, he continues, ‘I must commend you; Justiceland’s commitment to equal basic liberties and equal opportunity is beyond reproach. But regarding the difference principle, I’ve got some bad news. The difference principle requires you to maximize the economic position of the worst off. Bluntly, you aren’t doing that’. The audience gasps, but Giuliani presses on, undaunted; he’s used to telling hard truths. ‘Incomes are low here across the board—much lower than they could be. The culprit, obviously, is your low-octane economy. Simply put, *you don’t consume enough!* More consumption means more economic activity which means more jobs and higher incomes for everyone. Indeed, the more you consume, the richer you’ll be! I must therefore urge you to make dramatic changes to Justiceland’s basic structure. Every effort must be made to spur greater levels of consumption. You must recalibrate your consumption norms; no more of this “just enough is plenty” nonsense, and no more looking to your neighbours for consumption cues. From now on, *everyone should strive to emulate the very richest members of society.* And about your rich: they don’t spend nearly lavishly enough! Why, their houses are barely 3,000 square feet! Some of them only own one car! I’ve even heard that some of them throw their kids free birthday parties in local parks! Unacceptable. They need to set a good example for the rest of society. Tell them to start living the high life: it’s a matter of justice’.

Mesmerized, Justicelandians do as the sage says. The rich start spending more freely and conspicuously, making sure to post pictures of private jets and champagne bottles on social media. The non-rich take note and diligently upscale their consumption norms accordingly. Soon all Justicelandians feel dissatisfied with what they have, no matter how much they have.

Indeed, they notice a curious and troubling phenomenon: as consumption standards rise, it takes more and more spending merely to keep up.⁸ What people used to be able to do on the cheap now requires considerable expenditure. Take weddings. Justicelandians used to pride themselves on their rustic, simple ceremonies. Throwing a party to remember didn’t cost that much. But—as they are now painfully aware—what counts as a ‘party to remember’ depends on context. Rustic ceremonies feel a bit pathetic—even shameful—now that high-flyers are dropping millions on their matrimonials. True, no one but the elite can match that level of spending, but elite consumption habits shift the ‘frame of reference’ that defines acceptable wedding ceremonies for the near-rich, and then the middle-class, and all the way down to the poor (Frank, 2011, pp. 59–62). These ‘expenditure cascades’ affect far more than just wedding ceremonies. A similar dynamic has inflated the costs of ‘acceptable’ housing, transportation, dress, recreational activity, and more. In all of these areas, meeting a socially acceptable minimum now takes a great deal more spending than it used to.

Accordingly, consumer spending skyrockets, forcing people to put in longer and longer hours at work. As free time grows increasingly scarce, relationships and social ties wither, as do Justicelandians' do-it-yourself (DIY) skills. Nobody, it seems, has time anymore to attend a book club, play pickup basketball, or tend a backyard garden; they're too busy getting ready for work, commuting to work, actually working, or recovering from work. Or shopping—somehow, there's always time enough for that.

And so it goes, until eventually Justiceland's economy is entirely transformed from a low-consumption, high-self-provisioning, high-free-time, high-satisfaction model to a high-consumption, low-self-provisioning, low-free-time, low-satisfaction model. Scanning the latest economic indicators, Giuliani smiles. 'Mission accomplished! Job opportunities have never been so abundant; income has never been higher. All thanks to your newfound luxury fever! I am happy to report that the difference principle is now satisfied. At last, full justice for Justicelandians!'

7 Giuliani's mistake

Giuliani is wrong: Justiceland did not grow more just as the parable progressed. Liberal egalitarian justice requires maximizing the economic position of the worst off, but 'maximizing the economic position of the worst off' is not just code for 'maximizing the *income* of the worst off'. While it's true that, *other things equal*, more money is better than less, this *ceteris paribus* clause must be handled very carefully. For money does not simply drop out of the sky into bank accounts of the worst off. Instead, greater riches for the least advantaged are created as a by-product of increased consumerism throughout society. Such a strategy has its costs—rather significant ones, as the parable is meant to convey. Negative effects of increased consumerism include more work (to cover increased spending); reduced free time; hence, less social capital and fewer self-provisioning and self-realizing skills; diminished value of money, as escalating consumption norms make accomplishing a given goal (for example, throwing a 'party to remember', wearing socially acceptable clothing, et cetera) more resource intensive; and greater dependence on employers and the market. With these negative effects in view, is the cure of consumerism worse than the (supposed) disease of simple living? By my reckoning, it surely is, although I concede that not everyone will share this judgement.

For such readers, I pose a question. Do you really think that Justiceland's poorest citizens are in a better spot by the end of the parable than they were at the beginning? True, their wallets are fatter, but think of all they (and those above them in the economic hierarchy) sacrifice to obtain this improvement.

8 Conclusion

What should liberal egalitarians make of consumerism? I have argued that consumerism potentially threatens every aspect of liberal egalitarian theory: its commitment to political equality; its requirement of fair equality of opportunity;

its requirement that the economic position of the worst off be maximized; and even its very minimal demand that basic needs be met. My discussion has only scratched the surface of these issues, and indeed, it says nothing at all about a host of important related questions. For instance, one might wonder what policy implications follow from my account—or indeed, from any broadly anti-consumerist account. One might wonder, too, how taking a more global perspective might change the present analysis: I speak only of domestic justice, never of global justice. Finally, one might worry that my argument runs afoul of liberal neutrality and/or public reason—that my anti-consumerism rests, at bottom, not on considerations of justice but rather on a perfectionist conception of the good life (such as one might find in, say, Thoreau's *Walden*). These are worthy questions for future inquiry.

Notes

- 1 More precisely, the fact that a practice P undermines distributive justice automatically furnishes liberal egalitarians with a *pro tanto* objection to P. This objection may not, however, be decisive when all factors are considered: perhaps P is protected by a weightier principle of justice (consider practices protected by basic liberties, but which undermine, say, fair equality of opportunity—for example, reading bedtime stories to one's children). To apply this point to consumption practices, the fact that a consumption practice undermines distributive justice automatically gives liberal egalitarians a reason against it, but this reason may not be decisive if the consumption practice in question is protected by weightier considerations.
- 2 Why merely *pro tanto* wrong? Because circumstances matter. For instance, surely A is permitted to prioritize her own basic needs over those of a stranger. So, it's not wrong, all things considered, for her to buy food for herself rather than donating that money to hunger relief.
- 3 It might be objected that my argument fails to impugn private consumption as such. Harm follows not from the mere fact that I build (say) a backyard pool, but rather from the fact that, having built a pool, *I lose interest in paying taxes sufficient to maintain the public alternative*. It is the withdrawing of support for public provision, not the building of the private pool in itself, that triggers the harm. Fair enough. As far as the present argument goes, private consumption of key public goods is only contingently harmful: harmful only insofar as it contributes to the 'vicious cycle' described above.
- 4 As Rawls puts it, 'those who are at the same level of talent and ability, and have the same willingness to use them, should have the same prospects of success regardless of initial place in the social system' (Rawls, 1999, p. 63).
- 5 Does this mean we should ban private schools? That depends. Such a ban limits freedom and may reduce the absolute quality of educational options. For these and other reasons, banning private schools may be a bad option.
- 6 Bender (2017). Hilton's doghouse is discussed by Emrys Westacott in his *The Wisdom of Frugality: Why Less Is More—More or Less* (2016, p. 168).
- 7 Quoted in Westacott (2016, p. 165).
- 8 This paragraph presents ideas developed by Robert Frank. See especially Frank (1999, 2011).

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7

NO MASTERS ABOVE

Testing five arguments for self-employment

Iñigo González-Ricoy and Jahel Queralt

1 Introduction

Despite renewed philosophical interest in work, philosophers have largely ignored self-employment. In recent years, social and political philosophers have inspected issues like workplace authority, pay inequality, discrimination in hiring and firing, whistleblowing, and employee voice. But they have paid scant attention to self-employment, where few of these issues arise to begin with. This neglect is surprising, not just because self-employment was central to classic philosophizing about work—hence, for instance, in the work of Locke and Smith, who regarded it as a means to attain independence and escape domination by a landlord or employer. It is even more surprising given that half of the global workforce, including one in seven workers in wealthy countries, are self-employed (Baker et al., 2018; Chen, 2019).

Moreover, the nature and normative status of self-employment is increasingly contested, which renders the philosophical neglect all the more puzzling. On the one hand, the composition and boundaries of the self-employed labour force are growingly diverse, with rises in professional-managerial and in unskilled occupations, including new forms of precarious and dependent self-employment, and declines in traditional petty bourgeois and skilled self-employment (Arum and Müller, 2004). On the other, self-employed workers face disparate legal and political circumstances that merit normative inspection. In some countries they enjoy training, legal support, and tax breaks, whereas in others they encounter cumbersome regulation, financial barriers, and no assistance, and in some others they face direct hostility from government.

Careful examination of the nature and normative status of self-employment is thus badly needed. In this chapter, we take first steps on both counts. We start off by offering a definition of self-employment, one that accounts for its various forms

while avoiding misclassifying dependent self-employed workers as independent contractors, and by mapping the barriers to becoming and remaining self-employed (Section 2). We then examine five arguments why governments ought to promote self-employment, despite the forgone opportunities to promote employee work instead that this often entails (Sections 3–7): the argument from job creation, the argument from job satisfaction, the argument from independence, the argument from occupational freedom, and the argument from subsistence under non-ideal circumstances. Some of these are unconvincing, we argue, but others are not. Although the strength of the latter arguments hangs on various context-dependent conditions, such that they need to be carefully weighed against considerations of efficiency and equality, they nonetheless offer compelling pro tanto reasons to promote, and not just to protect, self-employment.

2 Unpacking self-employment

Philosophers and social scientists have often equated self-employment with the petty bourgeoisie, a class with high intergenerational inheritance and job security and distinct social and political views, frequently conservative. They have also often believed that self-employment was fated to wither away due to competition with large firms. ‘The small manufacturer, the shopkeeper, the artisan, the peasant’, Marx and Engels (2010 [1848], p. 494), for example, reckoned, ‘are ... not revolutionary, but conservative. Nay more, they are reactionary, for they try to roll back the wheel of history’.

Both assumptions are unwarranted. In recent decades, self-employment has not just ceased to decline. In many wealthy countries, it has grown (European Commission, 2017). And changes in its composition, with increases in professional-managerial (for example, communication, consulting) and in unskilled occupations (for example, construction, manual services) and declines in traditional petty bourgeois and skilled self-employment (for example, restaurateurs, skilled crafts workers), offer an increasingly complex picture (Arum and Müller, 2004). This is more so if we include informal self-employed workers in developing economies and, more controversially as we discuss below, new forms of ‘dependent self-employment’, which is on the rise in advanced economies as a means to skirt standard employer liabilities, like collective agreements and employment taxes, and to adapt to demand fluctuation (Williams and Lapeyre, 2017).

Before inspecting the goods and ills of self-employment, we thus need a definition, one whose purview is sufficiently broad to account for its diversity but narrow enough not to yield false positives. Social stratification researchers have offered disparate classifications and definitions. But the growing consensus is that self-employment comprises a discrete category and is best defined by the independence of self-employed workers (Arum and Müller, 2004). Self-employment is increasingly defined as comprising three necessary features to warrant independence. One is autonomy about how to run one’s

business. Another is authority to hire and dismiss staff. The third is having more than one client. On this definition, which some courts are following in deciding the legal status of dependent self-employed workers, one in three self-employed in the EU count as dependent self-employed (Williams and Lapeyre, 2017). Thus, although the particular status of such workers is moot, with some arguing that they be classified as any other employee and others as a separate labour category, we hereinafter put them aside and focus on those who are truly independent.

Among these, two further distinctions are relevant. One is whether they have employees or not. Self-employment with employees was typical in the past. But solo self-employment ('own account operators') is now increasingly the norm. For instance, despite marked variations by age and across industries, own account operators account for 71.5 per cent of all self-employment in the EU (European Commission, 2017). Another distinction is whether self-employment is voluntarily entered and remained in or not. In the past, self-employment was often a matter of inheriting a parental business. With some exceptions, like Italy and Japan, this is no longer true (Arum and Müller, 2004). The decision to become and remain self-employed hangs, then, on the incentives, resources, opportunities, and constraints in place. Thus, although a preference for self-employment exists in advanced economies—41.8 per cent of the French, 64.2 per cent of New Zealanders, and 70.8 per cent of Americans claim to prefer it if they could choose (Blanchflower, 2004)—barriers to self-employment critically shape decisions to become and remain self-employed, and how voluntary these decisions are.

Many of these barriers are determined by state policies. We therefore need to make them explicit before inspecting whether the reasons for self-employment are compelling enough to favour reducing these barriers, given the forgone opportunities to foster employee work that so doing often entails. First, there are regulatory barriers that authorities create and uphold, like bans on self-employment or, more often, inefficient regulations that hinder market entry and let corrupt officials extract bribes (De Soto, 1989). A second kind is comparative: the disparate protection by labour law and social security that the self-employed enjoy compared to wage labourers, including uneven unemployment benefits, paternity leave, sickness benefits, and pensions (Krueger, 2018; Williams and Lapeyre, 2017). A final kind comprises barriers that state policies only influence, such as poor access to financial services and scarce human capital. Here governments at most fail to assist those wishing to become and remain self-employed—something some nonetheless do through loans, legal assistance, educational training, and tax breaks, with fair results (Baker et al., 2018).¹

In brief, existing barriers to self-employment are diverse, and reducing them accordingly involves diverse state duties—not to interfere in some cases, to ensure equal treatment in some others, and to assist in various ways in yet others. We next inspect the main proposed reasons to discharge such duties, and how compelling they are.

3 Job creation

We begin, in this section and the next, by briefly discussing two arguments whose strength largely hangs on empirical evidence, before turning to more philosophical arguments in later sections. The first of these two arguments, which governments of various persuasions often cite, is that self-employment creates jobs, a view that comes in roughly three forms. The first is that small businesses, many of which are started and run by self-employed workers, account for the lion's share of job creation. On a second variant, small businesses often develop into large-scale enterprises, further increasing the workforce they employ. Finally, self-employment is often championed for its power to move jobless people into creating their own businesses, whether or not to later employ others.

All three views are contentious, alas. To start, although small businesses create jobs disproportionately, with firms under 50 employees accounting for over half of all new jobs in the US and in Europe (European Commission, 2017; Neumark et al., 2011), it is less clear that they are net job creators in the long run. Because 'gross job destruction rates are also substantially higher for smaller plants and firms', Davis et al. (1996, p. 170) argue, 'they [also] destroy jobs in disproportionate numbers'. Similarly, Haltiwanger et al. (2013) find that, although firm size and net job creation are negatively related, such that the smaller the firm the higher the jobs created, this relation is entirely attributable to most new firms being small. It is new firms that create jobs, regardless of size. Once firm age is controlled for, and given that small firms' survival is lower, 'the negative relationship between firm size and net [job] growth disappears and may even reverse' (Haltiwanger et al., 2013, p. 360).

The second view is also controversial, as it hangs on the traditional idea that the self-employed are entrepreneurs with employees who wish to grow their businesses. Arum and Müller (2004, p. 453) find that this is no longer true. 'Self-employment today', they reckon, 'often no longer employs others nor does it always involve individuals who likely even aspire to developing firms into large-scale enterprises'. Hurst and Pugsley (2011) are sceptical, too. Where policymakers see Schumpeter-type innovators scaling companies up, they instead find that 75 per cent of businesses with less than 20 workers report no desire to grow big over their lifespan, and accordingly never grow. Similarly, the European Commission (2017, p. 82) finds that '[t]he vast majority of self-employed firms do not increase employment substantially in the five years following creation'. And in developing economies, Banerjee and Duflo (2011) likewise find that—albeit for different reasons, including low input quality and productivity—the vast majority of small businesses, most of which operate informally, do not grow.

The third view, though less contentious, is limited in scope. Whether later employing others or not, self-employment no doubt gets some out of joblessness, especially in poor countries, where wage work is often scarce (see Section 7). But in advanced economies, in which employee work is less scarce, the argument is less straightforward. Certainly, some workers pick self-employment to select themselves into industries, like accountancy or legal practice, for which

employee work is often in short supply. Yet in industries in which employee work is less scarce, the ability of self-employment to get people out of joblessness may not suffice to justify governments fostering it, given the forgone opportunities to foster employee work that this entails. We also need to know its cost effectiveness compared to alternative means to reduce unemployment, which is unclear (Blanchflower, 2004).

In brief, these views may warrant that administrative barriers, including uneven treatment of employees and the self-employed, be removed or reduced, as self-employment no doubt creates employment. Whether they also suffice to vindicate that self-employment be actively fostered is less clear. This is because small businesses seem not to create net jobs in the long run, most of them never grow big enough to create much employment, and the cost effectiveness of self-employment vis-à-vis employee work in getting people out of joblessness, though critical in emerging economies, is contentious in developed ones.

4 Job satisfaction

Another much cited reason is that self-employment yields higher job satisfaction than drawing a pay check from someone else. Despite marked differences by age and gender and across industries, self-employed workers report being on average happier with their jobs than employees, a result that holds for America, Canada, and most European countries (Benz and Frey, 2004). Moreover, a sizable portion of employees wish to become self-employed, even in countries where the latent desire for self-employment is modest, like Norway or Russia, where one in three report such preference (Blanchflower, 2004). It is thus tempting to conclude that we should not just remove barriers to self-employment. We should actively foster it.

But this conclusion may be too hasty, for three reasons. First off, workers who are *compelled* into self-employment to escape joblessness are not happier with their jobs than employees (Binder and Coad, 2016). And although Binder and Coad find this result for Germany, it is likely to hold true for developing economies, where most informal self-employed workers, like street vendors and home manufacturers, wish, but are unable, to have a stable job (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011). This does not render the argument from job satisfaction inapposite. Yet given that self-employment amounts to more than half of the workforce in developing economies, and that unemployment is high in many developed ones, it limits its scope.

Second, the difference in job satisfaction may significantly decrease in the long run. Although becoming self-employed remarkably improves immediate job satisfaction, Hanglberger and Merz (2015) find that this largely stems from anticipation and adaptation to switching from employee work to self-employment. They find, to start, that being unhappy with your employee work, as some of the workers who report wishing to become self-employed presumably are, importantly explains the higher satisfaction of becoming self-employed, even when no lasting effect exists. And they also find that the satisfaction of becoming self-employed largely disappears after some years, once workers fully adapt to self-employment.

Third, and most important, to properly assess the argument from job satisfaction, we need to inspect what exactly renders self-employment more rewarding, so that we are clear about the alleged reasons to foster it over employee work. Perhaps self-employment yields more rewarding outcomes for workers? This is contentious, alas, for the self-employed are consistently worse off than employees on a range of valuable items. They earn less. They work longer hours. And they are more stressed and exhausted (Blanchflower, 2004; Hyytinen and Ruuskanen, 2007). On this score, if anything, self-employment should be discouraged instead of promoted.

Alternatively, self-employment may be more rewarding not due to its beneficial outcomes for workers but to the conditions yielding such outcomes and, in particular, because of the greater work autonomy it involves (Benz and Frey, 2004). There is evidence that control over one's conditions of work, such as equipment, work pace, and even temperature and ventilation, makes work more pleasing (Blanchflower, 2004). And although 'hierarchical types' may see grief in self-employment where 'independent types' see joy, work autonomy is an oft-quoted reason to find self-employment more pleasing (Blanchflower, 2004; Dawson et al., 2009). So perhaps governments should foster self-employment, if not for its outcomes, which are poorer, then for the autonomy it confers.

But how much more autonomous are the self-employed in practice? Two reasons suggest not as much as often believed. First, when the timing of the tasks within a typical workday is traced, as a study in Finland did at ten-minute intervals, it turns out that self-employed workers often follow routines very similar to those of employees (Hyytinen and Ruuskanen, 2007). In principle, the self-employed can pick when and how to work. And some, notably those who become self-employed for having dependent children, certainly do. But in practice many of them start the day, distribute hours, and interrupt work like employees do. Second, regardless of how they arrange work hours, self-employed workers have less off-duty autonomy. They have less leisure time available and can spend less time with their families, as they have to more often work on evenings and weekends (Blanchflower, 2004).

In sum, although the self-employed report more job satisfaction than employees, it is moot to draw clear support for self-employment from this difference. For one thing, self-employed workers only report being more satisfied when they are not compelled into self-employment, as many are. In addition, the difference largely disappears when we control for anticipation and adaptation effects. And, third, it may be sometimes based on an unrealistically rosy view of the benefits of self-employment, as Blanchflower (2004) reckons, at least regarding the degree of control over time use it involves, on the clock and off duty.

5 Independence

A third reason is that, whether or not it yields more effective control over working conditions, self-employment entails independence from a boss. Independence, which is the chief reason the self-employed today cite in preferring

self-employment (Dawson et al., 2009), was also central to classic philosophizing about work. Classic thinkers from Aristotle and Cicero to Kant and Marx typically regarded wage labour as a form of servitude, for it involved dependence on an employer's will. And others like Locke and Smith championed self-employment as a means to escape the 'servile dependency upon their superiors' that wage labour comprised (Smith, 1976 [1776], III.4.4). This view, which some have recently sought to recover (Anderson, 2015), comes in two forms. On an instrumentalist version, independence protects from arbitrary management. On a non-instrumentalist alternative, independence from alien authority is valuable as such.

Start with the instrumentalist version. On this view, self-employment is valuable because it shields workers from bosses' authority to issue arbitrary directives, which stems from the incomplete nature of employment contracts. Instead of attempting to specify the terms of exchange between employers and employees for every possible state of the world, employment contracts are rendered incomplete, such that employers, on whom authority over the unspecified terms of exchange is bestowed, can direct workers with flexibility as the innumerable contingencies of production unfold (Coase, 1937). But such residual authority may yield abuse, since bosses may use it to arbitrarily allocate overtime and reschedule working hours, discriminate against workers in promotion and compensation, or relocate them with no prior notice (Anderson, 2015).

Self-employment aims to solve the problem by attacking its cause, that is, by removing managerial authority altogether. Moreover, it may also reduce managerial abuse of employees, and not just of the self-employed. For employees can then resort to self-employment if employee work is unsuitably regulated and prone to abuse—as Arum and Müller (2004) find to occur in countries with loose labour legislation, in which self-employment is more prevalent. In a world in which opportunities for self-employment are scant, workers can quit a particular employee job, but cannot quit employee work altogether or avoid managerial abuse if such is rampant. By contrast, when employee work is not the only game in town, bosses face an incentive to restrain abusive behaviour, on pain of seeing turnover increase.

A limitation of the instrumentalist view is that if self-employment is valuable as a means to avoid arbitrary management, then alternative means may also pass muster. Suppose meaningful jobs abound and fitting workplace regulation is in place, including labour rights and worker representation. Some argue that potential workplace abuse is then much reduced, for bosses may issue directives but not arbitrary directives, and the instrumentalist case for self-employment is then less strong (González-Ricoy, 2014). Others retort that exacting regulation may yield, on net, more rather than less abuse. For regulators then need mightier powers to monitor and sanction noncompliance—powers that, due to the complexity of the regulatory task and the limitations of effective oversight by other state authorities, they may readily abuse (Taylor, 2017). Either way, it is undeniable that no means can better address arbitrary authority than removing authority

altogether. But how effectively employee–work alternatives constrain bosses’ authority is relevant to assessing the strength of the instrumentalist argument for self-employment vis-à-vis competing reasons for such alternatives. In other words, when employee work is properly regulated, such that self-employment adds little to reducing managerial abuse, reasons favouring employee work, if any, may more easily override the instrumentalist view for self-employment.

On the non-instrumentalist version of the argument, by contrast, it is superfluous how fittingly regulated employee work is. For what is valuable is independence from alien authority as such, no matter how constrained and accountable to workers’ interests said authority might be. On this view, self-employment is worth protecting and promoting because it entails not having to answer to others as to when and how one works. It entails not having to clock in and out, to report on your progress, or to let your manager snoop on your work email, whether under rules that force her to track your interests or entirely at whim. Interference, and not only abusive interference, is what self-employment is taken to free workers from—a view that helps explain the higher job satisfaction that self-employed workers report. They may work longer, harder, for less money, and with no more effective control over time use. But they are independent from someone else’s authority.

A criticism of this view, one that extends to the instrumentalist variant, is that self-employed workers may similarly depend, if not on their bosses, for they have none, on those with whom they trade, a view that comes in two forms. One is that market forces yield dependence on suppliers and customers, whose will the self-employed are compelled to observe to avoid going bust. But in a competitive market, in which trading alternatives are on offer, this idea stems from an ecological fallacy. For it infers dependence on individual suppliers and customers from dependence on the aggregate. This is not to say that the market may not compel self-employed workers through imperatives of competition, profit-maximization, and increasing productivity (Wood, 2002). But for all the dependence that the market may yield on the aggregate, the self-employed do not personally depend on any particular supplier or customer, whose wills they can skirt around. ‘A tradesman or artificer’, Adam Smith (1976 [1776], III.4.17) argued, ‘derives his subsistence from the employment, not of one, but of a hundred or a thousand different customers. Though in some measure obliged to them all, therefore, he is not absolutely dependent upon any one of them’.

A second view is that independence may be compromised when a single customer or supplier, or just a few, exists. True, when dependence is on a single *customer*, the status is no longer one of self-employment proper (see Section 2). But when dependence is on a single *supplier*, like a powerful creditor, it is tempting to think that the relation, albeit distinct, is analogous to that between employer and employee. Not quite so, however, once we separate out market-mediated and authority-mediated forms of dependence. Market exchanges between independent contractors may no doubt involve dependence and abuse, as when a single creditor uses its market power to set extortionate interest rates (Vrousalis, 2019).

But they do not involve authority-mediated dependence. For however powerful a creditor might be, it lacks authority to direct the self-employed contractor as to when and how to work.

To sum up: independence from alien authority offers a compelling *pro tanto* reason to foster self-employment, one that is discrete and that cannot be entirely offset by market-mediated forms of dependence that self-employed contractors often endure. That said, when independence is valued as a means to reduce managerial abuse, the strength of this reason importantly hangs on whether there might be suitably regulated employee-work alternatives to self-employment.

6 Occupational freedom

A fourth reason is that occupational freedom may require that options for self-employment be available. Free choice of occupation, which is protected as a basic right in many jurisdictions, typically entails prohibitions on forced labour, on discrimination in hiring, and on the state's conscripting people into jobs and occupations. Despite the consensus it enjoys, however, it is unclear why choice of occupation merits protection as a basic right, and why options for self-employment may be needed to secure it. We here explore two views to this effect, one grounded on self-ownership and the other on autonomy, which respectively map onto two distinct understandings of occupational freedom—as a right not to be interfered with in one's occupational choices and as a right that occupational options be in place.

Take the self-ownership view first. On this view, occupational freedom is best seen as one among other incidents of the moral right to self-ownership, which includes rights to control, use, and transfer one's body and skills, as well as rights against others' non-consensual interference with these rights (Nozick, 1974). Self-owning people are king over their bodies: they are sovereign to decide what use to make of themselves with no compulsion from others, such that actions that are okay if consented to (for example, organ donation) become impermissible absent consent (for example, organ theft) (van der Vossen, 2019). By the same token, forcibly allocating someone to a particular job, or preventing her from pursuing an occupation, is impermissible because it entails a non-consensual trespassing of her rights to control, use, and transfer her body and skills (Otsuka, 2008).

On this view, freedom of occupational choice, and to become and remain self-employed in particular, is entirely negative (Wilkinson, 2000). It commands that regulatory barriers to self-employment, like cumbersome registration procedures and steep fees, be removed, for they infringe on workers' rights not to be interfered with in their occupational decisions. But negative occupational freedom is wholly consistent with being unable to become self-employed due to constraints not attributable to others—be they external, like capital shortage, or internal, like scarce skills. The upshot is that, although the view opposes administrative barriers to self-employment, it likewise opposes state policies to foster self-employment, like those offering training or start-up funds. This is so

because, given that such policies are likely to entail redistribution via taxation, they violate others' property rights over the income generated from using their body and skills.

A serious drawback of this view is that it fails to ground core protections of occupational freedom (Stanczyk, forthcoming). Self-ownership renders it permissible, for instance, that workers agree to be bound to a single employer (Nozick, 1974) or to be covered by noncompetes, that is, contractual clauses that prevent employees from starting (or joining) a competing business in the same industry. Rights to quit, switch jobs, and start a business, all central to occupational freedom, go unfulfilled as a result. Self-ownership is also hostile to protections from discrimination in hiring, for an employer may refuse to hire women or blacks with no trespassing of their self-ownership. And enforcing a ban on discrimination would trespass the employer's self-ownership right to contract with whomever she likes.

The second view grounds occupational freedom, and freedom to become self-employed, on an interest in autonomy, which requires being able to act on one's aims and beliefs to pursue worthy plans (Raz, 1986). Occupational choices are critical to people's autonomy for various reasons. One is that for most people paid work is inevitable, for they cannot but work to make ends meet. Occupational freedom thus preserves their autonomy to decide, if not whether to work or to laze, then whether to become a lawyer or a nurse (Nickel, 2000). Second, like decisions about having children or where to live, occupational choices are structural: they have long-term and pervasive effects on other realms of life (Nickel, 2000; Raz, 1986). Finally, occupational choices are also central to autonomy because they let people develop their talents and skills, critically shaping their identity (Tomasi, 2012).

Unlike securing self-ownership, securing autonomy requires both negative and positive freedom of occupational choice. It certainly requires freedom from force and fraud, such that people can pick their occupation without being interfered with. Yet it also requires that decent options from which to choose be available (Raz, 1986; Stanczyk, forthcoming). Work-related autonomy shrinks not just when people are coerced into taking a particular job, but also when taking a dull or precarious job is the only alternative. Surely, people need not be able to take their dream job to have their autonomy secured. But they should have, for the three reasons sketched above, a range of decent occupational opportunities to choose from.

Now, should these opportunities include self-employment? They probably should for workers who, albeit indifferent between employee work and self-employment, have marked preferences for occupations that the labour market, because jobs in such industries are unavailable, cannot meet. Indeed, the nature of one's occupation is the second most cited motivation among the self-employed (Dawson et al., 2009). Such workers may only become a translator, an accountant, or a restaurateur if they can become self-employed at bearable costs—something that, when necessary to realize a vocation, may also be critical to fulfil, or at any rate not hinder, their sense of purpose or 'fit' (Muirhead, 2004).

In principle, these workers could be moved along the indifference curve, such that they would be equally satisfied, by investing in employee work instead of in self-employment. But this may be ever more costly for industries in which firms are increasingly resorting to market contracting (Krueger, 2018). And it may also be unfitting for workers with a marked preference for independence from a boss, as discussed in the previous section. For any of these kinds of workers—and, more controversially, perhaps also for those who do not belong to these categories today, but may want to be able to revise their conceptions of the good in that direction in the future (González-Ricoy and Queralt, 2018, pp. 634–5)—their work-related autonomy importantly shrinks when self-employment opportunities are lacking or prohibitive.

To take stock, although occupational freedom clearly requires that institutional barriers to self-employment be removed, whether it also supports fostering self-employment is less obvious. The self-ownership view, which only requires non-interference with occupational choices, does not. The autonomy view does. But its support importantly hangs on how scarce employee-work opportunities are, as well as on how inelastic and ubiquitous the demand for independence is—or on a controversial view of how self-employment opportunities improve the autonomy of those who, having no desire for self-employment today, may want to become self-employed in the future.

7 Subsistence under non-ideal circumstances

One last argument is that, where jobs and social rights are meagre, self-employment may prove the only alternative to destitution. This is the case in many developing economies, where vegetable sellers, food-cart pushers, shoe shiners, itinerant technicians, and other working poor get through as self-employed—typically in the informal sector and with scant or no access to legal and social protection, formal markets, and basic water, sanitation, and electricity infrastructure. Informal self-employment, which makes up 53 per cent of the workforce in low-income countries and 36 per cent in middle-income ones (Gindling and Newhouse, 2012), has two main causes. One is failure by governments to forge conditions for employee work (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011), the other being institutional barriers to access formal markets (De Soto, 1989). Though not ideal, protecting and fostering self-employment may the most feasible way out of destitution, some argue (CLEP, 2008; Queralt, 2019).

But why not promote employee work instead, such that formal labour markets absorb the self-employed poor? This retort makes all the more sense once we realize that, where some see ‘plucky entrepreneurs’ in a hostile environment (De Soto, 1989), ‘reluctant entrepreneurs’ is likely to more accurately portray the informal self-employed in poor countries (Banerjee and Duflo, 2011). This is because most of the informal self-employed would rather draw a stable pay check from someone else, and only resort to self-employment to escape destitution (Todaro and Smith, 2015). However, although reasons to foster wage work instead of self-employment exist, this strategy has three limitations.

One is budgetary. Increasing employee work requires not just general measures, such as stimulating growth in labour-intensive sectors. It also demands specific policies like supporting job-generating businesses, enlarging the public sector, and investing in human capital to reduce unfilled job vacancies stemming from skilled workforce shortage (Fields, 2017). And these policies are expensive and difficult to design. Some lower-middle income economies may be well placed to enact them. But absent increases in foreign aid, low-income countries, which struggle to meet their citizens' basic needs, may find them too onerous. Policies to improve the conditions of the informal self-employed are less burdensome and feasible to enact, as we discuss below.

A second limitation is that employee work may fail to raise living standards when monitoring and enforcement of labour rights is poor, as often is the case in developing economies. For instance, studying industrial jobs in Ethiopia, Blattman and Dercon (2018) find that the income security that factory jobs offer is often offset by the health and safety hazards they also involve. Two in three sweatshop employees quit within the first months for this reason, they find, resorting to street trade, farming, and other self-employed activities instead. Moreover, though weak enforcement of labour standards is common in early stages of industrialization, scarcity of funds and institutional capacity is not its only cause. In addition, keeping labour standards low often proves a way to improve poor countries' comparative position in unskilled labour-intensive industries, since it can be attractive to job-creating foreign companies. Troublingly, creating employee work often requires that poor employment conditions be offered.

Third, even when employee work is a policy priority, absorbing the informal self-employed into the formal labour market takes time. For example, Africa would have to create, on some estimates, 54 to 72 million new stable jobs by 2020 to absorb those currently self-employed. But the ratio of employed to self-employed workforce is unlikely to grow as a result—and may actually drop, given the 122 million new workers joining the workforce during the same time (MGI, 2012). Thus, even on best-case scenarios, self-employment is likely to remain the only way to make ends meet in the short and medium term for a sizable portion of the global poor.

These limitations suggest, in brief, that efforts to expand employee work must be combined with policies to improve self-employment, which are of two kinds—depending on whether they seek to formalize or to protect the informal self-employed. Policies of the first kind seek to reduce administrative and financial barriers to formalization. To illustrate: while starting a business in New Zealand takes just one step, half a day, and almost no fee, doing so in Haiti takes 12 procedures, 97 days, and fees equal to two years of the average income (World Bank, 2018). Ease in formalization requires, in a nutshell, simplified registration, swift licensing, and affordable fees. Although such legal changes may be difficult in countries with heavy-handed regulations and weak bureaucracies, there are examples of lower middle-income countries, like India and Kenya, having significantly reduced the procedures, time, and money required to start a business

(World Bank, 2018). Moreover, several towns in Uganda, where online procedures and merged applications have boosted business registration, show that local reforms may also achieve quite a lot (CLEP, 2008).

Policies of a second kind seek to protect, rather than formalize, informal self-employment, given that full formalization, whose effects on the poorest self-employed are limited, is probably unrealistic (CLEP, 2008). Because ‘informality is here to stay’, Martha Chen (2019) favours measures to protect informal self-employed workers, the poorest ones in particular. One is shielding them from repressive action by local authorities, such as arrests, confiscation of trade goods, and large-scale forceful evictions that street vendors routinely endure (Chen and Skinner, 2014). Another is replacing bans on informal trade, particularly street vending, with legislation that allows and regulates informal activity in public space. A third includes policies enabling access to transport and communication infrastructure, business training, and finance, which benefits informal and formal workers alike.

8 Conclusion

Not all inspected arguments are equally compelling, we have argued, at least when it comes to grounding policies to promote, and not just to protect, self-employment. Arguments that self-employment creates jobs or that it yields higher job satisfaction are contentious. Arguments that it offers independence or that it is needed to secure occupational freedom, by contrast, hold more promise. However, they are less persuasive when employee-work alternatives are abundant and appropriately regulated or when the demand for independence is weak. Less contentious is the argument that in poor countries self-employment is often the only alternative to destitution. Yet under less severe conditions, arguments for self-employment, however convincing, merely offer pro tanto reasons and need to be carefully weighed against considerations of welfare, equality, and efficiency, which is a task for another time. Having no masters above may be something worth promoting. But it may not be the only thing.²

Notes

- 1 A fourth kind of barrier includes cultural, religious, and family obstacles (Arum and Müller, 2004). Given that such barriers exceed the reach of the state, except perhaps in the very long run, we here put them aside.
- 2 Research for this article was completed under project PGC2018-095917-A-I00 on ‘Justice at Work: A Normative Analysis of Nonstandard Forms of Work’ funded by the ERFD/Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation, and Universities–State Research Agency.

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8

AUTOMATION, BASIC INCOME, AND MERIT

Katharina Nieswandt

Part I: A world without work?

1 The UBI-after-work argument

The following argument is popular in current literature on artificial intelligence (AI) and the future of work:

- P1 Automation will progress to such an extent that most human work will become superfluous.
- P2 Superfluous workers should be supported.
- C Some of the gains from the highly automated economy should be used to fund a universal basic income (UBI).

Call this the ‘UBI-after-work argument’. It frequently appears in newspaper headlines and tech blogs, but also in academic writings (for example, Bruun and Duka, 2018; Ford, 2015; Mann, 2018; Srnicek and Williams, 2016). Recently, the fear of automation has even prompted policy documents (for example, European Parliament, 2017; Executive Office of the President, 2016).

My chapter evaluates the UBI-after-work argument. I shall reject P1 (Sections 5–8) and thereby P2, which simply expresses a consequence of P1; that is, I argue that the argument is not sound. My objection to P1 says that, within a competitive market, automation provides an incentive to expand production rather than an incentive to lay off workers, and indeed that has been the result of previous waves of automation (such as the spread of engines or of computers). As a last step, I analyse a central presupposition of the UBI-after-work argument (Section 9): that income in contemporary economies is merited. Contrary to what its proponents claim, this argument hence does not advocate substantial economic change. The highly automated production facilities would continue

to be privately owned; all we would do is to abolish the means test for welfare recipients.

Please note that my chapter only evaluates the UBI-after-work argument, not UBI more generally. While I reject the argument, this does not exclude that there are other, sound arguments for UBI. To follow my discussion, an understanding of ‘UBI’ (Section 2) and some familiarity with the empirical findings on UBI (Sections 3–4) are helpful. If you already possess both, please proceed to Section 5.

2 What is ‘UBI’?

We can define UBI as follows:

UBI = a payment that is *unconditional* and *sufficient* and *regular*.

The three adjectives ‘unconditional’, ‘sufficient’, and ‘regular’ capture the three definitional features:

- 1 If the payment is based on a preceding evaluation of the recipient’s needs, then it is not ‘universal’. A *universal* basic income is paid to absolutely everybody (BIEN, 2019).
- 2 If the payment is not sufficient to cover the recipient’s basic needs, then it is not a *basic* income but a top-up of an income from another source, such as employment income or pensions, capital gains, alimony, welfare payments, or the like (confusingly, some authors call such a top-up a ‘partial basic income’ and oppose this to a ‘full basic income’; see BIEN, 2019). There is disagreement about what basic needs are. It could be mere survival, or a certain minimal quality of life—examples would be defences of UBI from basic human needs, such as Murray’s (2008). We could also take the ability to preserve what characterizes you as a person as our measure (Radin, 1993, essays 1 and 2), or basic capabilities (Nussbaum, 2006), or some type of equality or of freedom (Van Parijs, 1995)—to name just a few options. Whatever we regard as basic, however, has to be covered by this income.
- 3 If the payment is not regular, then it is, by definition, not an *income*. There are alternative proposals, such as that of a universal basic capital, which is a lump sum paid to everyone upon reaching adulthood (often traced back to Thomas Paine, made popular by Ackerman and Alstott (1999), and more recently defended by Anderson (2017)).

3 UBI still untested

What would a society with UBI be like? You might be surprised to hear that we don’t know. Very few of the many past and current basic income experiments have implemented all three definitional features. The vast majority violate feature 1 and many additionally violate feature 2. Payments are usually

made only to the poorest and often in insufficient amounts, even if we define ‘sufficient’ as ‘enabling bare survival’. Italy’s ‘citizens’ income’ (Giuffrida, 2019), the ‘basic income’ of the Canadian province of Ontario (Government of Ontario, 2017), and Finland’s ‘basic income’ (Henley, 2018) all require or required a means test. Italy’s payments also imposed further conditions that standardly come with welfare payments, such as a requirement to enrol in job training. Finland’s experiment was the only one that did not halt payments if participants obtained additional employment. The Finnish payments, however, were below the poverty line. A recent experiment in rural India finally implemented all three features and even included payments to children (Standing, 2013). The results were encouraging, but they are probably not informative for the main question regarding UBI: would UBI be better than the social security systems already in place in more affluent countries? (The researchers paid USD 7.5 per month, which is the poverty line for rural India, to people who had had no public security net before).

Why are there so few proper implementations? The main reasons are a lack of funding and of sustained political support (Winick, 2018). In addition, the operationalization of UBI’s three definitional features poses certain principled difficulties, such as an artificially limited time horizon. Participants of an experiment know that their income is temporary; often they even know when exactly it will stop. Similarly, citizens of a government that implements UBI know that this policy can be abolished again with a change of government. Such knowledge probably influences behaviour—few participants would quit their job, for example, for a time-limited UBI.

4 Would UBI bring Utopia or Dystopia?

Since UBI remains to be properly tested, predictions about what a society with UBI would be like are speculative. They extrapolate, either from incomplete implementations or from more general findings in behavioural economics. As a result, these predictions vary widely.

The context of automation introduces a further unknown variable, given that the respective technologies themselves are merely predicted: we cannot observe their effects on a real society, and often we don’t even know whether they will in fact be developed. There are at least four regularly proposed scenarios for automation combined with UBI:

Utopia: leisure for everyone.

If we introduced UBI today, people would begin to spend more of their time on intrinsically valuable or on socially necessary pursuits (such as raising children). Once automation spreads extensively, this process will culminate in *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* (Bastani, 2017), a world in which all production facilities are publicly owned and staffed only with robots, so that all products are available to all without work.

Dystopia 1: a class of the superfluous.

Since automation does nothing to change the ownership of production facilities, the robots will still be privately owned and so will the products they make (Dinerstein and Pitts, 2018). People whose jobs have been automated will form a tech lumpenproletariat, surviving on UBI as scraps from the table paid for by their former employers as well as those fellow citizens who still work.

Dystopia 2: a world of alcoholics.

This scenario comes in two versions. The first is a consequence of *Dystopia 1*, the second of *Utopia*. The first version says that the poverty and endless amount of free time resulting from massive technological unemployment will lead to an erosion of society in the long run. The class of UBI dependents will develop the same ails as the unemployed in deindustrialized regions today; they will be poor, unhealthy, socially isolated, and angry. The second version says that the material abundance and endless amount of free time resulting from fully automated luxury communism will cause ‘a nervous breakdown of the sort which is already common enough in England and the United States amongst the wives of the well-to-do classes, unfortunate women, many of them, who have been deprived by their wealth of their traditional tasks and occupations’ (Keynes (2010 [1930], p. 327) echoing Wollstonecraft (1989 [1792]), as well as numerous derisive comments on the degraded character of non-working-class women and the nobility that Adam Smith makes across his works).

Dystopia 3: economic breakdown.

Experiments in behavioural economics regularly demonstrate that the majority of human beings is not altruistic enough for UBI. Too many would stop working once they received UBI. Until we actually reach a level of automation that renders *most* human work superfluous, we hence cannot fund UBI (Enste, 2019).

Part II: Does technology eliminate jobs?

5 Forget experiments, consider mechanisms

Given how difficult it is to test the empirical hypotheses involved in the discussion of automation and UBI and how speculative, as a result, any prediction is that we base on such tests, I suggest a different strategy. Rather than analyse the insufficient data, I want to step back and consider some underlying economic mechanisms.

To evaluate the UBI-after-work argument, we must answer the following question: *is an increase in automation likely to cause a significant and permanent decrease in the overall number of jobs or work hours and, thus, likely to create the need for UBI (or another political response)?*

My answer will be that (i) historical evidence speaks against the prediction of permanent technological unemployment (Section 6), as (ii) do certain mechanisms of competitive markets (Section 7). In the past, technological progress in

production resulted in new occupations and more products, whereas more leisure was the result of political decisions. If you consider how markets function, you immediately see why. It is hence unlikely that there will ever be a technology-induced need for UBI. In the future, UBI will likely be as necessary or as unnecessary as it is today.

6 Past predictions and past outcomes

Let's begin by looking at historical precedents. There regularly are predictions that machines will make human labour redundant, some of which offer concrete lists of tasks or even calculations of the hours to be saved.

In 1891, for example, Oscar Wilde ('The Soul of Man under Socialism') predicts that future machines would render wage slavery superfluous:

All unintellectual labour, all monotonous, dull labour, all labour that deals with dreadful things, and involves unpleasant conditions, must be done by machinery. Machinery must work for us in coal mines, and do all sanitary services, and be the stoker of steamers, and clean the streets, and run messages on wet days, and do anything that is tedious or distressing. At present machinery competes against man. Under proper conditions machinery will serve man. There is no doubt at all that this is the future of machinery ... The fact is, that civilisation requires slaves ... Human slavery is wrong, insecure, and demoralizing. On mechanical slavery, on the slavery of the machine, the future of the world depends.

(Wilde, 2007 [1891], p. 1180)

In 1930, John Maynard Keynes ('Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren') famously classifies the ongoing Great Depression as a temporary bump in humanity's road to '*solving its economic problem*' (2010 [1930], p. 325, emphasis in original). Based on the better understanding of economic growth and on empirical tools for measuring it, which recent developments in economics afforded, he argues that:

There is evidence that the revolutionary technical changes, which have so far chiefly affected industry, may soon be attacking agriculture. We may be on the eve of improvements in the efficiency of food production as great as those which have already taken place in mining, manufacture, and transport. In quite a few years—in our own lifetimes I mean—we may be able to perform all the operations of agriculture, mining, and manufacture with a quarter of the human effort to which we have been accustomed.

(Keynes, 2010 [1930], p. 325)

Given this rate of productivity increase, by 2030 humanity's biggest problem would become 'how to occupy the leisure'. Indeed, Keynes worries so much about this last point that he suggests we 'make what work there is still to be done

to be as widely shared as possible' and thereby ease the transition (Keynes, 2010 [1930], pp. 328, 329).

In 1980, André Gorz (*Farewell to the Working Class*) predicts similar productivity increases for the rest of the 20th century. Additionally, he worries about the elimination of 'jobs by the million' during the impending 'micro-electronic revolution' (Gorz, 1982 [1980], p. 135). He suggests using these technological advances to progressively reduce workloads:

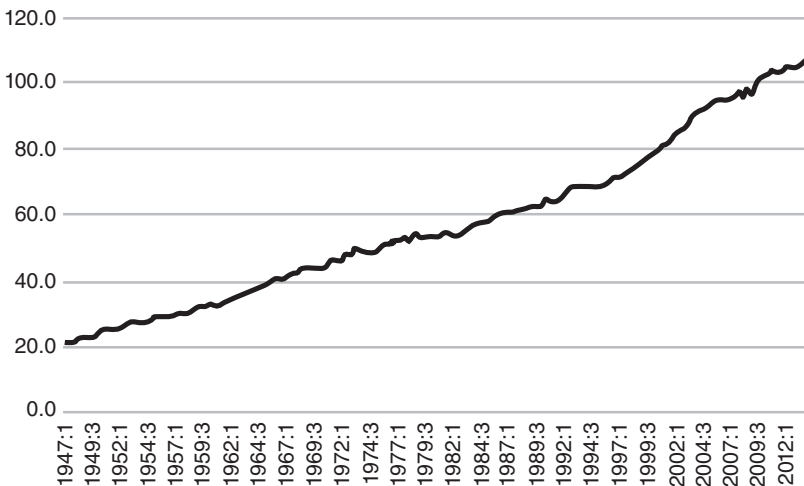
Imagine that society were to distribute yearly productivity gains in the following way: a third in the form of greater purchasing power and two thirds in the form of additional free time. With an annual increase in productivity of five per cent—easily achieved in the past—the length of the working week would fall from 40 to 35 hours over a period of four years. After four more years it would stand at no more than 30.5 hours, and after a total of 12 years would amount to 26 hours 40 minutes. A 20-hour week could be achieved in 20 years, by the year 2001.

(Gorz, 1982 [1980], p. 135)

None of these Utopian predictions has come true. This is surprising, given that the first half of each is largely correct: many of the imagined inventions were made, and productivity rose even more than predicted. As Figure 8.1 (from Sprague, 2014, p. 3) illustrates, the average contemporary US worker is five times as productive as their grandparent.

Labor productivity in the business sector, first quarter 1947—fourth quarter 2013

Index (2009=100)



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

FIGURE 8.1 Productivity increase since 1947.

Paradoxically, work hours did not decline during the same time. Most employees today still report to work 40 or more hours per week, as Figure 8.2 (from Saad, 2014) illustrates.

Average Hours Worked by Full-Time U.S. Workers, Aged 18+

In a typical week, how many hours do you work?

Employed full-time	
	%
60+ hours	18
50 to 59 hours	21
41 to 49 hours	11
40 hours	42
Less than 40 hours	8

Based on Gallup data from the 2013 and 2014 Work and Education polls, conducted in August of each year

GALLUP

FIGURE 8.2 Work hours today.

Calculated over a lifetime, work hours were even raised. As Figure 8.3 (from Prins and Kalf, 2015, p. 4) illustrates, almost all European countries have implemented reforms in recent years that aim to raise the retirement age.

	Effective retirement age (2012)		Reforms 2012–2014			amount of reform
	men	women	Increase pension age	restrict early retirement	Incentives	
Iceland	68.2	67.2				
Portugal	68.4	66.4		X	X	
Sweden	66.1	64.2			X	
Switzerland	66.1	63.9				
Norway	64.8	64.3				
Ireland	64.6	62.6	X			
United Kingdom	63.7	63.2				
Turkey	62.8	63.6				
Estonia	63.6	62.6				
Netherlands	63.6	62.3	X		X	
Spain	62.3	63.2	X	X		
Denmark	63.4	61.9		X		
Germany	62.1	61.6				
Finland	61.8	61.9		X		
Slovenia	62.9	60.6	X			
Czech Republic	63.1	59.8				
Poland	62.3	60.2	X	X		
Greece	61.9	60.3	X			
Italy	61.1	60.5	X		X	
Austria	61.9	59.4		X		
Hungary	60.9	59.6	X	X		
France	59.7	60	X			
Slovak Republic	60.9	58.7				
Belgium	59.6	58.7	X	X		
Luxembourg	57.6	59.6	X			

Source: OECD, Rabobank

FIGURE 8.3 Recent retirement age reforms.

Some readers might object that this increase is simply proportional to longer lifespans and lower birth rates. If a retirement scheme requires that all participants work n per cent of their lifetime, then n will mean a longer number of years if people live longer, and similarly if the ratio of contributing to receiving participants sinks. As the earlier Figure 8.1 illustrates, however, workers' productivity multiplied by five. Hence, we should be able to live five times as long as our grandparents before an additional hour of work becomes necessary, or we could have only one fifth of the number of children that they had, or a mixture of both.

In sum, the technological advances of the last decades significantly increased workers' productivity but not their free time. How can this be? If I am five times as productive as my grandmother, then why can't I leave my desk after one-and-a-half hours of work each day rather than eight hours? Or, alternatively, why can't I retire after an eight-year, eight-hour work life rather than a forty-year, eight-hour work life? Why did neither the combustion engine nor the computer nor the internet nor any other technological advance ever reduce average lifetime work hours?

Before we proceed to answering this question (Section 7), there is a problem with the above futuristic predictions that I want to flag here, just to put it aside. The type of scenario that Keynes describes, for example, seems to be this: if we had a time machine to transport the technology available in 2012 back to production facilities in 1947, then, as Figure 8.1 suggests, we could quintuple their output. Imagine a shoe factory in 1947 suddenly being equipped with robot arms that stitch pieces of leather together, with a sales department that receives orders through the internet and has them packed onto GPS-assisted trucks, et cetera. It is questionable, however, whether the technologies involved—the personal computer, the internet, satellites, et cetera—would have been invented and would have spread to the extent reached in 2012, had we progressively reduced work hours to one fifth since 1947. Keynes (2010 [1930], p. 325) argues that '[i]f capital increases, say, two per cent per annum, [then] the capital equipment of the world will have increased by a half in twenty years, and seven and a half times in a hundred years'. This compounding, however, cannot happen if we progressively reduce the rate of capital increase and hence reduce the amount that compounds. The problem that Keynes's scenario faces strikes me as similar to the 'grandfather paradox' of time travel: if you had a time machine and used it to travel back so as to change a past event, then that event would never have happened; hence you would never have travelled back to change it. Similarly, the compounding effects of technological inventions have made us five times as productive as we were in 1947, but this compounding would not have occurred had we reduced work hours with each invention since 1947 to always stay at the productivity level of 1947. I mention this here just to flag that it is questionable whether the imagined scenario is even coherent.

7 Automation in a competitive market

Back now to our question as to why technology does not reduce work hours. The answer is that in a competitive market—and by competitive market, I mean a market that is open for all to enter and exit and that is transparent—productivity increases usually result in more products rather than in more free time or higher wages. This point is already contained in various passages in Marx’s works, which Gerald Cohen (2000, pp. 297–324) synthesizes. Cohen concludes: ‘The economic form most able to relieve toil is least disposed to do so ... It brings society to the threshold of abundance and locks the door’ (Cohen, 2000, pp. 306–7). As I shall argue, the only way to distribute productivity increases in the form of more time rather than more products is to legally force all market participants to do so.

Let’s take the example of a shoe factory again. In 2017, the US shoe manufacturer Keen and the robotics company House of Design presented UneekBot: a robot that stitches a complete sneaker upper onto a rubber sole from a spindle of yarn in only six minutes. This is ‘half the time it would take a human’, even though the robot ‘still relies on humans for the final touches’ (Nikolov, 2017). Imagine you own a shoe factory. You have 100 workers, in eight-hour shifts, each stitching a new shoe every 12 minutes, that is, 20 pairs per worker per shift. That’s $20 \times 100 = 2,000$ pairs per day. At a trade show, you come across UneekBot and consider purchasing some of these robots. Let’s assume that the ‘final touches’ take a worker six minutes, so that during the time in which one robot stitches one new shoe, one worker can carry out all final touches on the previous shoe. In this scenario, a purchase could halve production time. Here are three choices you could make:

Utopia: Purchase 100 robots, keep your 100 workers, halve the shift to four hours while keeping the pay the same (once the robots are paid off), and continue to produce 2,000 pairs per day.

Dystopia: Purchase 50 robots, halve the workforce to 50 workers, keep the eight-hour shift, and continue to produce 2,000 pairs per day.

More Shoes: Purchase 100 robots, keep your 100 workers, keep the eight-hour shift, and double your production to 4,000 pairs per day.

Which do you choose? From your perspective as the owner, *Dystopia* clearly wins over *Utopia*. You only need to pay half the number of wages in comparison. So, *Utopia* will not be realized if the choice is yours. Which of the remaining scenarios would an owner prefer? Your profit = (sales price – production cost) \times number of pairs. The first two variables are the same in both scenarios, but the third variable doubles in *More Shoes* compared to *Dystopia* and hence so does your profit. Therefore, an owner’s preferred choice is *More Shoes*. *Dystopia*, too, will not be realized.

I am brushing over a number of details here that can lead to a different outcome. For instance, the shoe market could already be saturated. If there aren’t enough

buyers for 4,000 pairs per day, then you will prefer *Dystopia* to *More Shoes*. Another important detail is that there will be a difference between your short- and long-term position in the market. In the above scenario, you are a pioneer: as one of the first producers who install the new technology, you make twice as many products as your competitors in the same time and hence earn twice as much. Once your competitors start buying UneekBots, you all produce twice as much in the same time, which usually means that product prices are cut in half. Your doubled profit is hence temporary.

For our current question, we can put these details aside and focus on the underlying principle: in an open and transparent market, where the means of production are privately owned—that is, in an idealized capitalism—automation neither leads to *Utopia* nor to *Dystopia*. It does not lead to *Utopia* because the owner of the means of production has no egoistic incentive to give the workers paid time off. It is important to see, however, that even an altruistic owner or a worker-owned factory could not do this. The members of a cooperative might collectively decide that they would prefer more free time to more profit. In the long run, however, their cooperative would not be competitive anymore. Once all factories have UneekBots, the four-hour workday cooperative would produce at double the wage cost of every other factory and would therefore go out of business. Product price competition eliminates wages that are higher than average in a given sector as ‘inefficiencies’. The workers would have to live off half their wage in order to permanently halve their workday. That, however, is an option they already had before UneekBot. From the perspective of a worker-owned cooperative, the situation is a ‘prisoner’s dilemma’. All workers would profit if the workday were reduced, but unless a central authority (in this case the state) forces all producers to reduce it, none of them can reduce it individually.

Let me stress here that my claim that *Utopia* will not come as the consequence of new technology does not mean it is not achievable. The obvious (and perhaps only) means of achieving it is legal prescription: a conscious political choice of more time over more products, implemented by force for all market participants. We could have had the 30-hour, the 25-hour, the 20-hour workweek, et cetera, a long time ago. It is down to political decisions that we do not.

As argued, automation in a competitive market does not lead to *Dystopia* either. The owner has no incentive to lay off workers until, in Douglas Adams’s words, we reach the ‘shoe event horizon’ (Adams, 2005, CD 3, track 10). In a competitive market, automation does not result in either more time or fewer jobs; instead, automation in a competitive market results in *More Shoes*.

In conclusion, I answer our original question in the negative. Automation, including AI, is unlikely to permanently decrease the overall number of jobs or work hours. Historical precedent speaks against this; none of the predicted declines in work hours materialized even though the productivity increases that were supposed to enable them did (for some concrete examples of tasks and professions, please see Section 8 below). More importantly, however, this can be axiomatically deduced from certain general features of a competitive market.

Unless we deliberately require market participants to disburse a productivity increase in the form of more time rather than more products, all will produce more rather than take time off.

As a consequence, I reject P1 of the UBI-after-work argument. To reject P1 means to also reject P2, which is a consequence of P1. C hence has no support.

Part III: Objections and implications

8 Objections

Let me now address some common objections to my arguments.

First, haven't we seen an enormous decrease in work hours in a longer historical perspective? Admittedly, there was no decrease over the last three generations, but before WWI the average workday was 12 or more hours long (Roser, 2019b, Table: Weekly work hours). Why not think that this decrease was the result of the technological advances we call the 'Industrial Revolution'?

Second, ecological problems might, at some point, put a hold to further increases in production. For Gorz, for example, ecological considerations are at least as important as social considerations in justifying his progressive workload reduction scheme. If the next wave of automation should push us to the long predicted *Limits to Growth* (Meadows et al., 1972), then two scenarios are conceivable: either humanity goes beyond these limits and destroys itself with its economies or we halt productivity by finally reducing work hours for each invention made after the sustainable productivity maximum is reached.

Third, the shoe factory example only models the reduction of work hours per task but not of complete professions. The workers are still required for the task of making shoes; they just have a better tool (in essence, UneekBot is an upgraded sewing needle). In the near future, however, the workforce will be completely taken over by machines, rendering all low-skilled workers superfluous. In the medium to long term, management will suffer the same fate because they can be replaced by AI. There already are contemporary examples of this: 'legal tech' companies, where contracts or legal communications are written and examined by algorithms rather than lawyers, or medical centres, where internet-based diagnoses replace doctors (Susskind and Susskind, 2015).

To the first objection, I reply that these historical decreases in work hours are best explained as the result of political measures, which in turn are the result of political struggles. The eight-hour workday, the free Saturday, paid vacations, no child labour, and reduced hours for teenagers: all of these decreases in work hours are the result of workers' rights movements, workers' parties, unions, the spreading of democracy, et cetera. The eight-hour workday in the US, for example, was largely achieved through strikes (Brooks, 1956; Whaples, 1990). Work hours did not decline as a happy, unintended consequence of the steam engine or the moving assembly line.

My reply to the second objection is similar. Granted that we will reach the limits of ecologically sustainable productivity, it would be a political decision

to let productivity stagnate at that level by reducing work hours proportionally to the productivity increase generated by any invention made afterwards. Political measures implementing this decision would likely be the result of political struggles by environmentalist movements, green parties, an increasingly environmentally conscious public, et cetera. Productivity-increasing technology itself does not result in productivity stagnation at a sustainable level; it results in ecological collapse, since no individual producer in a competitive market can reduce work hours unless all others do (compare Section 7).

The third objection needs to be addressed in multiple steps. The initial step is to actually look at the facts. The endlessly repeated claim that automation is currently reducing the overall number of low-skill jobs is probably false. While the media regularly remind us of taxi drivers who might soon be replaced by self-driven cars, sociologists point out (for example, Standing, 2018; Wajcman, 2017, pp. 124–5) that the digital revolution has so far created a shockingly large number of low-skill jobs—often recruited through websites with names like ‘Mechanical Turk’. Consider YouTube’s digital cleaners, who live in poor countries and spend their days deleting violent videos, or Amazon’s warehouse workers, who are not even allowed to take a bathroom break. Taxi drivers themselves are actually an example of this: unionized and insured professionals are today threatened by services like Uber (Huws, 2014; Standing, 2011).

It also is false to claim that the replacement of complete professions is a new phenomenon. By 1800, for example, 60 per cent of France’s population worked in the agricultural sector; today it’s three per cent (Roser, 2019a, Table: 1300 to today). The Industrial Revolution destroyed professions on a massive scale without creating permanent technological unemployment. The milker, the coachman, the weaver, and the glassblower have all vanished, but the train conductor, the electrician, and factory workers of all kinds took their place. Some economists hence refer to this concern as the ‘Luddite fallacy’—after the ‘Luddites’, 19th-century English textile craftspersons who stormed factories that had installed the then newly invented automatic loom.

Those who make the objection usually reply that this time, things will be different. The Industrial Revolution is no guide to the coming, post-digital revolution because AI will also destroy high-skill professions (Ford, 2015; Susskind and Susskind, 2015).

In and of itself, this reply is hard to evaluate because it is unclear why the skill level should make a difference to the general point that technological progress rarely leads to permanent technological unemployment. The assumption made by Ford and the Susskinds has to be this: AI is so versatile that it can replace workers in any profession, even the newly evolved ones. With the spread of personal computers, for example, the profession of typist has largely vanished, but the profession of web designer was created. In the future, however, such a new profession would immediately be taken over by AI again. Or, rather, no profession would ever develop because one would immediately use a machine for the task.

Readers might not be aware of how speculative this scenario of an AI takeover is. Among AI researchers, a consensus seems to have evolved in recent years that AI—understood as trained, artificial neural networks—will be limited in its applications to tasks that are narrow and highly repetitive (Waldrop, 2019). It hence is a bold assumption by the above authors that AI will be able to carry out all and any tasks that a human worker can perform.

Even if we concede this bold assumption, the case looks dubious. First, it moves us to an entirely different discussion because it raises entirely new questions. One is: if our robots are so developed that they can carry out any task a human being can, might this not require that we assign them similar rights? Wouldn't they, for example, have to be paid for their work? Another question is: wouldn't this also be the end of the market rather than just the end of work? As regards the latter question, there appear to be two ways to spell out the implications of the bold assumption:

- 1 In the first scenario, the material resources and the robots are privately owned. As owner of the shoe factory, you used to possess yarn and needles and pay workers. Now you possess yarn and robots and have laid off all workers, and the same is true for all other factory owners. In this scenario, there would be no paying consumers anymore for the shoes that your factory produces (apart from the few other factory owners). According to some, this is precisely why future societies will need UBI (Duchâtelet, 2016). Mathematically, this makes no sense: if you and other factory owners are the only ones who still possess wealth, you will have to fully finance the UBI with which your former workers then buy your shoes. You might just as well give away your shoes for free directly.
- 2 In the second scenario, the material resources and the robots are publicly owned. In this version, everyone receives all robot products for free. Why, then, should we lament the vanishing of all occupations? This is Utopia—finally!

9 Income allocation under capitalism

I have already rejected the UBI-after-work argument. As a last step, I want to discuss a presupposition that this argument makes (and that is not necessarily shared by other arguments for UBI or by advocates of UBI generally). This presupposition says that income in today's economies is merited.

The UBI-after-work argument appears radical and emancipatory. It hence is worth pointing out that this argument does not challenge the following two assumptions:

- 1 That those who own the means of production (now robots) are entitled to all income from these.
- 2 That those who don't own such means have to be unable to work if they are still to receive income.

The argument hence accepts capitalist principles of income allocation, as well as the underlying conception of merit. Let me expand on this point.

In contemporary capitalist economies, there are three main sources of income: work, capital gains, and governmental payments. In the first case, you live off your own work. In the second and third case, you live off the work of others.

Public attitudes toward the second and third option are very different (Bamfield and Horton, 2009; Bartels, 2016; Guardino, 2019; Svallfors, 2012); a fact already lamented by Adam Smith (1976 [1759], Part 1, Section 3). Most people (though not necessarily most scholars) believe that the third option is permissible only for those with no other option, the justification being that it would otherwise be a form of free-riding and impossible to fund. In contrast, those who live off others' work in the second way are not generally publicly perceived as doing so, and even where they are, they tend to elicit admiration rather than contempt. In the rare case that widespread public criticism arises, such as after the 2008 global banking crisis (Bennett and Kottasz, 2012), it is often not sustained enough to force significant legal changes (Cihak et al., 2013; Griffith-Jones et al., 2010), even though there recently is some evidence of a more sustained change in public attitudes (Piston, 2018). These strikingly different attitudes toward the second and third option seem best explained by the fact that the second income is often seen as merited, while the third is seen as donated. The second is based on a property right, while the third is based on the charity of others.

Now, this system of property allocation might be justified, as would then be the dominant public attitude toward it. My point is that the UBI-after-work argument presupposes that it is.

P2 justifies UBI through the former workers' need. It describes UBI as something that the community—or perhaps their former employers—offer in support, not as something to which these former workers have a property right. All property rights, as C implies, still lie with the owners of the (now automated) production facilities. Consider the shoe factory example again: I tacitly presupposed that you, as owner, are entitled to all of the additional gains. In the scenario *More Shoes*, for example, you doubled your profit whereas the wages stayed the same. It is not obvious that this is just: if a group of human beings become more productive through the acquisition of a new tool, one could think that those who work with the tool also deserve a share of this increase, not just the person who bought the tool—as a long line of intellectuals from Hobson (1931) to Brecht (1988 [1935]) has pointed out. One could furthermore think that there is something wrong with a community in which some members can monopolize the tools. The UBI-after-work argument, however, presupposes that this arrangement is just, or at least leaves it uninterrogated. In the scenario it forecasts, the highly automated production facilities have the same owners as before. The newly unemployed live off transfer payments justified through their needs, just as today's welfare payments are. Admittedly, means tests have been abolished—otherwise the measure would not qualify as UBI—but this is not because we have changed our ideas on who merits what. The tests simply became

superfluous because in a highly automated economy with private and highly concentrated ownership in means of production almost everyone is in need. The argument suggests an egalitarian scenario, where all members of society profit from technological progress. In order to translate the additional capital gains into public wealth, however, the same constraints and strategies as always apply: we would have either to tax or mutualize these facilities. How highly automated a facility is makes no difference here.

I have not argued against the presuppositions of the UBI-after-work argument. They might not be problematic, and then what I point out in this section might be no reason to reject the argument. It is important to see, however, that the UBI-after-work argument does not demand that we switch to a new economic system. It fully subscribes to the capitalist conception of merit and does not question its principles of income allocation.

10 Conclusion

I conclude that the Utopian and the Dystopian predictions regarding automation and basic income are equally wrong. Widespread technological unemployment will not come to pass, and even if it did *and* UBI were introduced to ameliorate these effects, our conceptions of merit and our principles of income allocation would not be challenged by this measure because the payments are made to people based on their inability to work, just as today's welfare payments are. Political decisions, not technological progress in production, lead to more leisure and a more egalitarian distribution of incomes. If these are our aims, then other political reactions to technological progress are probably preferable to UBI. This result does not entail that UBI might not be worth introducing for other reasons, only that technological progress is no reason to introduce UBI.¹

Note

- 1 A short, early version of this chapter appeared as 'Basic Income after Automation? That's Not How Capitalism Works!', in *The Conversation* (US edition), 6 October 2016 (see <https://theconversation.com/basic-income-after-automation-thats-not-how-capitalism-works-65023>). I am grateful for comments by Keith Breen, Jean-Philippe Deranty, Jeff Inglis, Pablo Gilabert, and the audience of *Filosofie* in Montréal for this fuller iteration of my argument.

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9

MARGINAL LIBERALISM

Lucas Stanczyk

1

My aim in this essay is to characterize a family of fateful theoretical errors that I believe deform our ethical judgements regarding contemporary institutions and exercise a constraining effect on our political imagination. I will refer to these errors as instances of ‘marginal liberalism’, for the reason that they are characteristic of political and moral thought with distinctively liberal commitments and yet, when exposed, betray doctrines that could convey at best a marginal commitment to the values thought to be central to the liberal tradition. These errors are also often hidden from view by a widespread, unreflective practice of allowing observations that hold true only on the margin to stand in for more general support for an institution or policy or normative judgement.

The errors of marginal liberalism consist of the failure of prevailing conceptions of basic liberal rights to meet three minimal conditions of adequacy on the specification and justification of basic rights. The first is the requirement that the protections conceived to be constitutive of a basic right should be capable of being extended to each and every person at the same time. The second is the requirement that these protections must be specified in such a way that, when they are indeed extended to all at the same time, each person enjoys them in the distinct, further sense that he actually inhabits the state of affairs that the right is supposed to secure or protect. In the case of basic rights to centrally important liberties that everyone should have, this condition amounts to the requirement that each person actually be free in some identical way to perform the protected actions, or actually be free in some identical way to inhabit the envisaged protected situation. The third requirement is that a basic liberal right must be conceived in a way that, when these first two requirements are met—and thus the protections constitutive of the right are extended to all, and each person is in

fact left in some way identically free to be or to do what the right is all about—then a centrally important interest or interests in freedom that everyone has is thereby also normally advanced for all.

I believe that these three requirements have extraordinarily wide appeal and resonate throughout the modern moral and political philosophical tradition. They can be found between the lines of authors as diverse as Thomas Hobbes and John Stuart Mill, Hugo Grotius and Jean-Jacques Rousseau, John Locke and Mary Wollstonecraft. My ultimate purpose here, however, is not to catalogue contemporary or historical commitments, but to stress the substantive importance of meeting the three requirements listed, assuming we indeed wish to find an adequate conception of the basic rights and liberties of free and equal citizenship. Since the significance of these requirements is most clearly witnessed in the breach, I will argue for them simply by describing how existing conceptions of basic liberal rights fail to measure up.

A final preliminary remark. While at times I will be concerned to make claims regarding one or another particular liberal right, the following reflections are put forward in defence of a more general claim. If the analysis provided here is on the whole sound, then the problem extends to all prevailing conceptions of basic liberal rights, irrespective of whether these rights are evaluated singly or conceived and assessed as a comprehensive interlocking system. For at bottom the problem lies in a widespread and nonchalant acceptance of certain pervasive modern workplace authority relations, relations incapable of justification on *any* conception of liberal rights that satisfied each of the three minimal conditions of adequacy above. The troubling implication, if I am right, is that most of us have been, at best, only marginally liberal thus far.

2

The central aspiration of the liberal philosophical tradition is to secure the freedom of the individual. Given that liberalism is also committed to the moral equality of persons, this aspiration takes the form of a commitment to securing equally the freedom of each and every adult person. These two commitments give rise to the following problems of specification.

First, the type of freedom at issue must be identified and specified. Frequent rhetoric notwithstanding, no one thinks that every freedom that a human being can enjoy should be respected or promoted. On the contrary, it is generally recognized that the freedom to assault or rob another human being with impunity is normally not valuable. Laws and institutions that deny people such freedoms are rightly regarded as morally obligatory. For this reason, liberalism has traditionally called on societies to extend rights to particular individual freedoms. These rights have ranged from the freedoms of inner thought and conscience, to the freedoms necessary to perform various kinds of valuable activity, to the right not to be arrested arbitrarily. For the liberal project to make moral sense, the

centrally important forms of human freedom must be identified, and individual rights to these particularly important freedoms must be carefully specified.¹

Second, as a universal doctrine, liberalism is officially committed to the freedom not merely of traditional elites but of each and every individual. For this reason, on a liberal conception, rights to the specially important liberties that everyone should have must be specified in such a way that every responsible adult person can indeed possess these rights at one and the same time. It is a measure of the distance of the modern moral imagination from that of the ancient Greeks that we suppose a conception satisfying this requirement is obviously within reach. Many Greek philosophers evidently could not. According to Aristotle, ‘it [had] to be admitted that we cannot consider all those to be citizens who are necessary to the existence of the state’ (Aristotle, 1885 [350 BCE], bk 3, ch. 5). Mechanics and labourers had to be excluded from the prerogatives and duties of citizenship in the ideal configuration of the state, since everyone who performed demanding physical labour—however necessary—was judged to lack the mental fitness to hold office, sit on juries, and come to sound political conclusions:

It clearly follows that in the state which is best governed ... the citizens must not lead the life of mechanics or tradesmen, for such a life is ignoble, and inimical to virtue. Neither must they be husbandmen, since leisure is necessary both for the development of virtue and the performance of political duties.

(Aristotle, 1885 [350 BCE], bk 7, ch. 9)

In the absence of self-working hammers, sickles, and ploughs, freedom for some required the subjection of others. Hence

the very best thing of all would be that the husbandmen should be slaves taken from among men who are not all of the same race and not spirited, for if they have no spirit they will be better suited for their work, and there will be no danger of their making a revolution.

(Aristotle, 1885 [350 BCE], bk 7, ch. 10)

To a significant extent, this repugnant view has since been abandoned. Whereas Aristotle (1885 [350 BCE], bk 1, ch. 5) once mused that universal freedom was contrary to nature, chattel slavery is today considered an abomination in most countries, and few people would say that effective global abolition is necessarily a pipe dream. Nonetheless, modern society is replete with profound and enduring hierarchy, towards which even proud liberals exhibit an eminently relaxed attitude. Nowhere is this more evident than in a certain nonchalant acceptance of the asymmetrical authority relations that constitute the modern workplace.

More precisely, here is the claim that I will be making. For centuries, liberal authors have been content to think of post-feudal capital-labour relations as raising primarily downstream questions of distributive justice. More recently, some have

also stressed that concentrated capital poses a threat to the fairness of the competition for political influence.² In both high theory and the vernacular, however, the presumption has long been that modern—so-called ‘liberal democratic’—market society straightforwardly satisfies a much more basic requirement of liberal political morality: granting to every responsible adult citizen a set of equal basic liberties of citizenship. Indeed, so obvious has this proposition seemed that no liberal theorists have ever cared to try a proof. And yet the proposition is false.

3

It is often said that, in a market society, every citizen ultimately enjoys the same basic freedoms. This truism is belied whenever a child born into the working class enters the workforce penniless for the first time. Instead of being emancipated upon reaching the age of majority, most working-class children simply pass from a condition of subjection to the authority of their guardians to a condition of subordination to the pervasive authority of employers. Admittedly, the transition is sometimes softened by a period of time in college, where a fortunate minority is able to evade subjection to virtually all managerial authority. In most cases, however, even higher education is only a temporary respite from the fate of being subject to constant direction. For the truth is that most young adults born into the working class eventually wind up under one or another manager’s thumb. For the remainder of their working lives, they are told each day in no uncertain terms not only whether they must show up to work, but also exactly how their workday is to go, for what purpose, where, and for how long. And if they ever tire of obeying their employer’s orders on the whole, they will be promptly told to hit the road, only to have to look for another job and therefore subordination to yet another boss. One way or another, then, the subordination of the ‘emancipated’ working-class adult lives on.

These facts are familiar aspects of working-class reality. What is surprising is how rarely liberals have thought to challenge them. To be sure, there have been uproars directed at particular employers for certain managerial practices regarded as excessive, such as Walmart requiring several million of its workers to submit to humiliating drug tests,³ or Nabisco requiring its assembly-line workers to wear adult diapers.⁴ However, what is striking about liberals’ indignation at such practices is what is left unsaid about the very fact of ordinary workers’ subordination as such.

Namely, for the duration of her working life, the typical working-class adult finds herself the unambiguous subordinate of one or another member of the class of wealthy business owners. This description holds true in every modern society for the following two reasons. First, for the duration of her working life, the typical working-class adult is subject to managerial authority of a vast and largely undefined scope. Indeed, unless the law explicitly forbids it, the presumption is that the worker can be ordered to carry out *whatever* her employer plans or momentarily wishes. Second, for the duration of her working life, the typical

working-class adult is expected to take orders issued by or more commonly on behalf of people who, because of their wealth, never have to take *any* personal orders themselves. These two facts combined make the typical worker in every society an unambiguous subordinate of people who, in the crucial respect of having to obey other people's orders, belong to another class or social rank entirely.

Now, one might have expected that liberals, committed to the freedom and equality of each and every citizen, would have been gripped by the two-part observation that every modern society that has been called liberal (1) profoundly subordinates (2) only some of its people. Be that as it may, the history of liberalism fails to vindicate this expectation. In the 20th century, liberals certainly came to see class inequality as a locus of distributive injustice. Some also warned, we saw, that capitalism would undermine the fairness of the competition for political influence. To this day, however, most liberals suppose that capitalism is obviously compatible with a universal grant of equal basic liberties. Accordingly, most liberals have never been especially troubled by the lifelong asymmetrical subordination of working-class adults to the members of the business-owning class. On the contrary, as long as employers do not use their vast authority over workers to make 'unreasonable' decisions, and as long other persons in authority (that is, judges) are granted asymmetrical powers to overrule the more unreasonable decisions, then the fact that the typical worker is a lifelong naked subordinate with no influence over the countless workplace rules he is to follow, even while a small class of wealthy business owners never have to take anyone's personal orders, has historically wrinkled very few liberal eyebrows.⁵

This nonchalance, however, should be seen as quite surprising. As an anti-authoritarian doctrine, liberalism is officially committed to the like emancipation of every responsible adult citizen. Accordingly for liberals, every form of hierarchy present in society's basic structure must be justifiable to each person viewed as equal citizen and not as naked subject. And yet when it comes to those parts of the basic structure whereby the members of a business-owning class perennially rule over others, liberals have long been content to point out how things like occupational health and safety standards can be used to constrain the open-ended authority of employers and their hired managers at the margins. As a response to the justificatory demand just stated, however, such observations are entirely inapposite. It may be that even oligarchs as powerful as the Waltons can be constrained to exercise their vast authority over workers in innocuous ways.⁶ All the same, the asymmetrical subordination of working-class adults to the members of the business-owning class must *itself* be justified somehow. Otherwise, liberalism will have ignored one of the most pervasive forms of hierarchy in modern social life.

At the same time, it is not plausible to say that subjection to authority in the workplace should be eliminated altogether. The first impulse of liberalism—to leave important matters to individual discretion—cannot be the answer to questions such as when assembly-line workers should be at liberty to go to the bathroom. On the contrary, when production depends on simultaneous joint effort,

often a single common rule is necessary. More than this, however, where production requires many forms of simultaneous labour, extensive and open-ended authority to issue directives to particular workers from a central vantage-point is often essential, particularly when changes to the productive process are needed frequently and yet the nature of these changes cannot easily be anticipated. In short, in a complex economy, managerial authority as such is not to be eliminated.

To justify subjection to authority in the workplace, then, ultimately a single strategy is available to anyone seeking to disavow authoritarianism. Managerial authority is not to be eliminated altogether in the name of individual discretion. Nor is it enough for business owners and their hired delegates to be restricted to broadly reasonable exercises. In addition, whatever open-ended managerial authority may be called for, citizens as equals *should not be asymmetrically subordinated to it*. And yet for this purpose, two structural changes to modern society are necessary, to which most liberals have been strikingly indifferent.

First, if every citizen is to be symmetrically liable to workplace orders, then every citizen must face an identical liability to labour in productive employment, not only those who failed to be born the billionaire children of the founder of Walmart. Second, every worker will not be symmetrically subjected to managerial authority until the managers of the largest enterprises are selected democratically, whether through elections at the enterprise level or some wider social process that gives every worker symmetrical procedural rights to determine the identity of his supervisors. In truth, without these changes to the basic structure of society, it will be impossible for each citizen to have even just the same basic liberties as every other.

After all, consider what's true under the standard capitalist economic structure, where firms are *not* democratic and there is *no* equal liability to labour: the basic liberties of working-class adults are straightforwardly delimited by the managerial authority to which they and they alone are subject. The typical worker is free to speak and associate with whomever she would like, *except* when her employer orders her to work alone and in silence. The typical worker is free to drive to a family event in another state, *except* when her employer orders her to be ready to work overtime at a moment's notice. *Mutatis mutandis*, the same goes for all of her other so-called equal basic liberties of citizenship, from the right to vote during business hours on the first Tuesday of November to the liberal freedom of assembly: they, too, are delimited by what employers are able to demand from her, on pain of termination.⁷ By contrast, none of the basic liberties of wealthy business owners are thus delimited by managerial authority, since where the members of this class are free to go or what they are free to say is not in *any* way constrained by where a manager expects them to be or what he orders them to do each working day.

Call this the contrast between the freedoms of ordinary workers and the rather more extensive freedoms of wealthy capitalists and their adult children. This contrast has been obvious to every working-class kid ever hired by a successful privately-owned business. Why, then, have so many self-identifying liberals

never cared to notice it? A partial answer is that many self-identifying liberals are intellectuals and a substantial number are college professors. As professionals in workplaces where most of the managerial prerogatives presently lie dormant, intellectuals tend to forget that—unless they are already rich or happen to work for the state—they, too, are subject to the asymmetrical authority of the owners of capital and their agents. In a word, our private sector employers could tell us exactly how to work, where to stand, and when to pee, if only this were somehow in the interest of our employers and our bargaining power fell dramatically for whatever reason.⁸ Indeed, for the adjunct professors who comprise over two-thirds of US college instructional staff, this possibility is already uncomfortably close to the truth (Childress, 2019).

However, it is implausible to think that forgetfulness alone is why so many liberals have been so accepting of the class-based nature of modern workplace authority relations. On the contrary, many liberals simply deny that working-class adults today are subjected to any significant workplace authority at all. Still others accept that this is plainly so. Yet they presume that, when capitalist society subjects exclusively working-class adults to pervasive managerial authority, this fact must ultimately be compatible with every responsible adult citizen enjoying the same basic liberties of citizenship. I will now argue that each of these attitudes, too, is an illusion. Modern workplace authority relations are incapable of justification on any conception of liberal rights that satisfies each of the three minimal conditions of adequacy on the specification and justification of basic liberal rights.

4

The first condition is that the protections conceived to be constitutive of basic liberal rights must be capable of being extended to each and every adult person at the same time. Otherwise, if by their very nature these protections are ones that some persons will necessarily be denied, it will never be plausible to say that the envisaged protections comprise a set of truly equal liberal rights. Yet in the light of the platitudes that I have described, it should be obvious that on any conception of liberal rights that satisfies the requirement stated just now, the organization of work in modern capitalist societies is strictly incompatible with every adult citizen ultimately enjoying the same basic liberties. For the sake of clarity, let us state one more time the contrasting observations that warrant this damning inference:

- 1 Under our existing capitalist economic structure, the basic liberties of working-class adults are straightforwardly *delimited* by the managerial authority to which they and they alone are subject: working-class adults are free to speak, interact with others, and move their bodies however they would like, *except* when their managers order them to be at work from nine until five, to unload deliveries silently in the back, or to carry out any other of their employers' otherwise lawful plans.

- 2 By contrast, *none* of the basic liberties of wealthy business owners and their wealthy adult children are thus delimited by their subjection to managerial authority, since where the members of this class are free to go or what they are free to say is not in any way constrained by where a manager expects them to be or what he orders them to do each working day.
- 3 Accordingly, as long as the basic structure of our capitalist society protects (only) the members of an exclusive class of wealthy business owners from ever having to take other people's orders, it cannot possibly be the case that every responsible adult citizen ultimately enjoys the same basic liberties. On the contrary, the protections delimiting these liberties for people of working-class origins are necessarily less extensive, since—unlike in the case of the moneyed classes, whose much more extensive freedoms the state *also* protects and enforces—these protections do *not* shield people of working-class origins from lifelong subjection to managerial authority.

Now, perhaps because this conclusion is so obvious at bottom, many liberals have long been inclined to take issue with the basic premise of the argument. Indeed, some have gone so far as to deny that, post-feudalism, workers are subject to any significant workplace authority at all. In this vein, Paul Samuelson (1957, p. 894) once claimed that, in a competitive market, we might as well say that 'labor hire[s] capital'. Even more remarkable, Samuelson has not been alone in having trouble seeing the lowly worker's subordination. Among economists, a standard view was stated decades ago by Alchian and Demsetz. According to these authors, it is 'delusion' to think that capitalist employers possess any asymmetrical authority over workers (Alchian and Demsetz, 1972, p. 777). To be sure, effective production often requires what they euphemistically call 'a team use' of inputs, but, in such cases, having some one person provide discipline and direction is, they suppose, only rational from everyone's perspective. After all, it would be far too costly for each team member to negotiate prices for his every bodily movement with every other member. And even with such prices, a great deal of shirking would remain individually rational yet prove collectively disastrous. For these reasons, any effective enterprise will have one or more team leaders who monitor effort, apportion reward and discipline, and centrally direct everyone's activity. However, according to Alchian and Demsetz, the presence of managers does *not* mean that anyone is asymmetrically subject to anyone's authority. On the contrary, because each worker is at every moment free to quit serving or 'fire' his employer, the employer at bottom has no more authority over his workers than the typical customer wields, symmetrically, over his grocer.

It's worth pausing for a moment to reflect on the unforced harmony in this story. It's as if capitalist enterprises were indistinguishable from evening pottery classes, with the participants eager for gentle 'discipline' and 'direction' while the instructor exercises no more power than what is furnished by a recognition of his practical wisdom. When appreciated from this perspective, the economists' desire to find reason and camaraderie in the world is almost touching. Sadly,

there are two fatal problems with the standard story—each completely unrelated to the fact that decentralized production in a market is often indeed profoundly inefficient.

The first problem is that under the legal infrastructure of contemporary capitalism, it is courts and legislatures that set out the core prerogatives of business owners and their hired managers; it is *not* the members of individual firms acting as contracting parties. In fact, the sweeping powers that courts designate as the ‘core managerial prerogatives’ are, properly speaking, not even part of the law of contract.⁹ Instead, these prerogatives are reserved to the owners of capital and their agents through the standing laws of property, the laws of labour and employment, and the laws of business corporations. According to the courts, it is these laws rather than any collective agreements or contracts that explain why it is the sole prerogative of the business owner to decide whether to relocate the business to China, to alter the company’s product line and hence its need for labour, or to make myriad other operational decisions that will be fateful for its workers.

It is therefore simply false that the authority of capitalist employers is strictly the result of individual contracts over enterprise roles being continuously renegotiated. In fact, for most non-managerial workers, the opposite is closer to the truth: assuming a subordinate role in an enterprise typically involves no negotiation whatsoever. Instead, the authority of the business owner to make all of the important decisions is fixed from the outset by property, corporate, and employment law, and then, with this statutory and judicial background in place, the worker is offered a mop and summarily told when to show up.¹⁰

Now, there is of course a sense in which the worker is always free to refuse any given standard-form job offer. It is the same sense in which, under capitalism, the worker is always free to quit working for or ‘fire’ her employer altogether. Namely, when a worker no longer wishes to work for her employer, *no one is legally allowed to prevent her from walking out the door, nor is it any longer lawful for anyone—including the police—to capture fugitive labourers and bring them back against their will.* While some critics of the modern workplace have been inclined to be dismissive, there ought to be no question that these are two hugely important freedoms. Indeed, their recognition is what distinguishes hired labour under capitalism from indentured servitude and the many forms of feudalism. For it is precisely in virtue of these freedoms that a worker cannot be bound to continue in personal service, whether by inherited duty or by contractual agreement. Accordingly, when a worker breaches a contract for personal service (for example, by quitting short of the required notice), courts today may occasionally award monetary damages for unavoidable financial losses to the employer, but they will virtually never award the remedy known as ‘specific performance’. As I have argued elsewhere, this latter-day refusal of courts to order specific performance of contracts for personal service should be seen as a central protection constitutive of the worker’s right to free choice of occupation, since without it workers would cease to be free to quit their jobs and to *change* occupations (Stanczyk, forthcoming, ch. 3).

However, none of this means that wealthy business owners like the Waltons wield no significant asymmetrical authority over workers under capitalism. Instead, it means that the asymmetrical subordination of working-class adults to the members of the business-owning class is not a simple matter of what employers are permitted to do by the narrow writ of corporate and employment law. To explain the subordination of one class to another, two further elements of the contemporary economic structure must be cited:¹¹

- 1 The first is that the modern state delimits and protects extraordinary holdings of real property and financial wealth. As a result, *a wealthy minority is enabled to live comfortably without ever having to work—let alone having to make a living in any actively supervised role.* Of course, some of the beneficiaries of comfortable capital incomes choose to spend time working in paid professional or managerial roles, in the process often amassing even more income-producing financial wealth. The fact remains, however, that the state does not *force* the capital rich to play any of these roles, since at any moment they are free to liquidate their business and financial wealth, buy some treasury bonds, and retreat happily to their paid-up homes. To be clear, it's not simply that no one will forcibly prevent the capital rich from leaving their entrepreneurial, professional, or managerial posts; this much is true of anyone who is not a modern-day indentured labourer or serf. Instead, the crucial fact is this: should even the youngest owners of generous income-producing capital assets decide to quit working tomorrow, the operative regime for capital taxation in every modern capitalist country will let them live out their days in historically unprecedented comfort. No private citizen or state official will threaten to remove them from their houses, nor will they ever be denied groceries, electricity, or healthcare unless they take a job at Walmart. In short, whether they choose to do so or not, the minority of people who have been rendered 'independently wealthy' by the operative property and capital taxation laws are thereby socially enabled *never* to have to work in *any* supervised role.
- 2 By contrast, the conditions imposed on the vast majority of working people are not so liberating. On the contrary, for every able adult person whom the state does not render the beneficiary of generous capital income, the modern state makes access to even a basic income conditional on the performance of paid labour. In this crucial sense, then, the vast majority of working-age adults are not free to quit working for an income altogether. Again, it's true that if the typical worker quits and tries to loaf, no one will threaten to physically drag her to a job fair. Nonetheless, the modern welfare state will leave her no acceptable alternative. For—having quit her job—she will be categorically ineligible for unemployment insurance. Nor will she be able to rely on any work-tested social welfare benefits. However, in every capitalist country, all other categories of income support are much less generous. For this reason, the typical worker who tries to loaf will have little

choice but to blow through her savings. Once she falls behind on the rent, in turn, she will sooner or later be evicted by police officers, court-ordered at the request of her landlord. Thus, on pain of being deprived of shelter and other basic goods, the ordinary worker (but not the capital owner) will be continually forced to do one of two things: search for a job that pays a liveable wage, or actually to be employed in this way. Accordingly, while she is always free to quit her job and to accept a different one next door, *the typical working-class adult (but not the capital owner) is continually forced, on pain of state-enforced deprivation, to obey the personal orders of one employer or another.*

At the risk of belabouring the obvious, let me now spell out briefly what follows from this time-worn contrast. It's not simply that, notwithstanding the economists, (a) it is working-class adults alone who are subordinated, (b) by the joint effect of the state's tax, welfare, and employment laws, (c) to the managerial authority exercised by or on behalf of members of the business class. In addition, what this contrast shows is how farfetched it has been for modern liberals to suppose that every citizen of a contemporary market society ultimately enjoys the same basic liberties as every other.

After all, the protections conceived to be constitutive of basic liberal rights must be capable of being extended to each adult person at the same time. Moreover, there must be something that, as a result, each person is in some identical way freed up to be or to do. Otherwise, if by their very nature these protections are ones that some people will necessarily be denied, or if there is nothing at all that these protections leave each person identically free to be or to do, then it will never be plausible to say that the envisaged protections comprise a set of truly equal liberal rights.

Yet in the light of the contrast that I have described, it should be clear that every existing market society must be judged wanting on any conception that satisfies these two requirements. For as I have stressed many times by now, in every existing market society the basic liberties of working-class adults are straightforwardly delimited by the open-ended managerial authority to which they and they alone are subject: the typical worker is free to speak, associate, and travel wherever she would like, *except* when her employers have conflicting plans. At the same time, the protections delimiting these liberties for people of working-class origins are decidedly less liberating, since—unlike in the case of the propertied classes, whose much more extensive freedoms the state *also* protects and enforces—these protections do *not* in fact shield people of working-class origins from lifelong subjection to liberty-delimiting managerial authority. As a result, while the capital rich are free to opine and protest and travel to a funeral on a Tuesday without *ever* taking leave from other people, all of the protections extended to working-class people do not add up to shielding them from the comprehensively liberty-delimiting condition of always *first* having to heed other people's private and commercial wishes, lest they suffer state-sanctioned deprivation of shelter, electricity, and other such necessities.

The final wrinkle is that, in a market society, there is ordinarily no private citizen or state official who prevents the given working-class adult from permanently quitting his subordinate social status. After all, there are no laws against striking it rich as an entrepreneur, being tenured with lifelong dining rights at Yale, or becoming a masterless executive at Google. Were ample credit available to the penniless young working person, the absence of this prohibition might even be worth something to more people. Be that as it may, the stated wrinkle cannot vindicate the complacency examined in this essay. Market societies surely let some people go from rags to riches, but that is no reason to conclude that they secure each person's rights to equal basic liberties. For to believe this, one would have to ignore a third condition of adequacy on their specification.

To wit, rights to equal basic liberties must be conceived in such a way that, when the universally co-enjoyable protections constitutive of these rights are extended to each person at the same time, and each person is consequently in some identical way freed up to do or to be what these rights are all about, then a universal interest in being emancipated from other people's authority that every responsible adult person has is thereby also effectively advanced *not merely for some lucky few but for everyone*.

And yet market rules that allow a few select people to become wealthy rentiers or masterless super-managers cannot plausibly satisfy this requirement. For these same rules ensure that, in every modern market society, there are only a few positions whose incumbents never have to take anyone's orders. As a result, no matter what anyone does, most people are bound to remain forever asymmetrically subordinate to the members of the business-owning class.

Let me put the point differently. If every last worker were to escape the asymmetrical subordination described in this essay, there would be no one left to the masterless business owners from whom to buy and command labour. Hence there would no longer *be* a class of wealthy masterless men directly or indirectly managing people. Nor would there any longer be a separate class of unequally subordinated working people. For better or worse, there would be only equal participants in social cooperation and their various categories of formally accountable professional and legislative servants. If our values were truly anti-authoritarian or truly liberal, we could not judge this outcome worse all things considered.

Notes

- 1 For influential reflections on the nature of this task, see John Rawls (1987) and T.M. Scanlon (2003).
- 2 For example, Rawls warns repeatedly that even a generous form of welfare-state capitalism poses a threat to the 'fair value of the political liberties', which is secured only when equally capable and motivated citizens have similar prospects of influencing the content of legislation. However, like most other liberals, Rawls supposes that capitalism of the *laissez faire*, as well as the welfare state, variety effectively secures the equal basic liberties, or 'formal equality'. See Rawls (2000, pp. 137–8).
- 3 For an indignant description of the mechanics of routine drug-testing, see Barbara Ehrenreich's *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (Ehrenreich, 2001, pp. 121–91).

- 4 See Linder and Nygaard (1998). As of 2013, US employers are allowed to impose ‘reasonable’ restrictions on employee access to bathrooms. Firing a production-line worker, after 26 years of employment at the company, for leaving his station three times in one 12-hour shift in order to use the bathroom has been deemed reasonable. See *Zwiebel v. Plastipak Packaging* (2013) Ohio 3785 (Ohio Ct. App.). For commentary on earlier regulatory developments, see Linder (2003).
- 5 Two notable exceptions—both ultimately content to constrain capitalist employer authority to ‘reasonable’ exercises—can be found in Hsieh (2005) and Anderson (2017).
- 6 Sam Walton was the founder of Walmart, to this day the world’s largest single corporate employer of labour.
- 7 Recall that in the United States, election day is not a statutory holiday requiring employers to release their workers with pay. Nor is it unlawful to fire a worker who disobeys his manager in order to go vote. European readers, and others who have been granted greater electoral freedoms, will be tempted to downplay the significance of such examples. Yet this response would be mistaken. For one thing, European and Asian countries have long been dependent on immigrant labour with second-class formal social standing. More to the point, however, the fact that in comparison to their American counterparts, some workers have more statutory holidays and longer bathroom breaks is merely the exception that proves the global social rule that I am outlining. For the relevant comparison is not with American workers but with the members of the local business-owning classes. And yet, when we reexamine the matter in this light, we will see that the basic liberties of European and Japanese and South Korean working-class adults are *likewise* straightforwardly delimited by the managerial authority to which they and they alone are subject. In Europe and Japan and South Korea, the extent of this authority has merely been hemmed in. Even so, it is working-class adults alone who continue to be subject to the comprehensively liberty-delimiting condition of perennially having to heed one or another employer’s wishes, on pain of risking their livelihoods, their savings, and their place in the community. For a more detailed description of the elements of this condition, the reader is invited to keep reading. The point here is that this class-defining condition has nowhere been eliminated, even if in some places its edges have been softened.
- 8 Readers inclined to doubt this claim are urged to read Linder (2003).
- 9 See, for example, *Fibreboard Paper Prods. Corp. v. NLRB*, 379 US 203 (1964) (opinion of Justice Stewart, at p. 223) for a classic statement of the idea that various exclusive prerogatives lie ‘at the core of entrepreneurial control’.
- 10 For an extended development of this point, see Anderson (2015, 2017, pp. 37–73).
- 11 It’s worth noting that these elements are missing from existing influential treatments of the nature of subjection to authority in the workplace. See, for example, Elizabeth Anderson’s *Private Government* (Anderson, 2017, pp. 37–73). For a close reading and critique, see Yunhyae Kim’s analysis (unpublished manuscript).

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10

WORKPLACE DEMOCRACY AND REPUBLICAN FREEDOM

Keith Breen and Onni Hirvonen

1 Introduction

One value appealed to in arguments for workplace democracy is freedom. This appeal poses two questions: first, what do we mean by freedom, and, second, what is the relation between workplace democracy and what we mean by freedom? Here we consider the case for democratic worker voice based on the neo-republican ideal of political freedom as non-domination. While not unconvincing, this case sees workplace democratization as an instrumental means to promoting freedom as non-domination and, being mostly consequentialist in character, is therefore open to significant empirical disagreement from within the neo-republican perspective itself. Indeed, together with neo-republican arguments for democratic worker voice, there are arguments for worker voice that nonetheless reject workplace democracy; arguments that, while not dismissing worker voice, see state regulation plus universal basic income as sufficient for minimizing domination at work; and arguments that focus exclusively on right of exit and are hostile to the idea of augmenting workers' voice.

Our central claim is that this policy indeterminacy stems from the neo-republican restriction of political freedom to the dimension of non-domination alone and its treatment of worker voice as primarily a means towards promoting non-domination, rather than a right and demand reflective of our status as free and equal persons. If we expand our understanding of political freedom to include worker autonomy, a dimension of freedom underpinning and motivating the 'expressive egalitarianism' and ideal of 'discursive control' (Pettit, 2014, p. 80; 2001, p. 5) definitive of republican citizenship, properly understood, we can arrive at a less contingent and thus less precarious freedom-based case for workplace democracy.

The argument falls into two parts. We first set out the neo-republican understanding of political freedom as non-domination and review the stances taken by neo-republicans on how best to minimize workplace domination. These stances vary for a number of reasons, the primary one being disagreement over worker voice as an instrumental means towards promoting non-domination. The argument for democratic worker voice as an efficacious means towards increased non-domination is, we contend, on balance more convincing than those which focus on exit rather than voice, but it suffers, as with the other stances taken, from a restricted understanding of political freedom and of the implications of republican citizenship. We then move to clarify these implications by immanently critiquing Philip Pettit's view of republican political theory as based on the ideals of expressive equality and freedom understood as discursive control. Our main claim is that these ideals point beyond freedom as non-domination to an autonomy-centred conception of political freedom, despite Pettit's explicit restriction of political freedom to non-domination. Moreover, they suggest workplace voice—a voice that must be heard and respected by all—is better conceived not as a contingent means towards greater non-domination, but as a legitimate demand stemming from our equal citizenship that places strong *prima facie* constraints on workplace authority relations.

2 Non-domination and workplace *dominium*

For neo-republicans the basic political value is freedom. Although they certainly recognize other dimensions of freedom, they equate freedom in its political sense with freedom as non-domination. Freedom as non-domination, following Pettit, does not entail 'the presence of self-mastery' or 'the absence of interference by others', but instead 'the absence of mastery by others', namely, the absence of domination understood as 'arbitrary' or 'uncontrolled' interference and power (Pettit, 1999, p. 165; 2012, pp. 57–8). To be dominated is to be exposed to forms of interference that, unlike the non-arbitrary or controlled interference of an equitable system of law, show no regard for your interests and over which you have insufficient or no control. Such subjection to others has deleterious effects, not least a constriction of your choice and options, endemic uncertainty and anxiety as to your future, and, most importantly, an asymmetry of power and status between persons that offends against your personal worth (Pettit, 1997, pp. 82–90). A genuinely free social order is one where these effects are minimized and a symmetry of status between persons institutionally assured so that we can look each other in the eye without worry or deference.

Minimization of domination is the main goal of the neo-republican theory of political legitimacy and of social justice (Lovett, 2010, p. 15; Pettit, 2014, p. 201). This requires attention to two categories of dominating power: *imperium* or 'public power' and *dominium* or 'private power'. You are subject to *imperium* when you stand vulnerable to unchecked state power and public agencies, whereas you are subject to *dominium* when you stand vulnerable to unchecked power in relation

to your fellow citizens and non-state institutions (Pettit, 1997, pp. 12–3; 2014, p. 77). *Imperium* is checked and political legitimacy ensured when a constitutionally constrained government upholds basic liberties and when ‘free citizens share equally in controlling the state’, that is, enjoy democratic rule (Pettit, 2014, p. 203). *Dominium* is checked and social justice ensured when mechanisms are in place that, on the one hand, ‘insure’ all against hardship and uphold their welfare, and, on the other, ‘insulate’ citizens in weaker socio-economic positions against unchecked interference by those enjoying superior institutional power or resources (Pettit, 2014, p. 203).

For our purposes, the *dominium* of concern is workplace domination, namely the potential unchecked interference in the lives of workers by both employers and managers. The source of this domination is manifold, stemming from workers having little choice but to contract with employers in order to fulfil their basic needs, but also the concentration of socio-economic resources in a limited number of hands and a system of corporate, labour, and employment law that both inscribes and reinforces employer superiority by granting employers organizational discretion and a right to rule over employees in capitalist firms. While typically hemmed in by legal restrictions in varied ways, the extent of this rule is extensive, dictating employee behaviour both within and outside the workplace.

Most obviously, managers have discretion over the performance of work, deciding its pace and intensity, the distribution of roles and production targets, as well as the time allocated for rest, et cetera. Likewise, they enjoy discretion over workplace relations, determining how employees should dress and conduct themselves, the surveillance and security practices they have to submit to, and the limits on individual expression to be observed within work. Employers and managers also have considerable leeway as regards employment conditions, including overtime, training, promotion, and firing policies. Such leeway, should they desire to utilize it, empowers managers to seek to control—sometimes quite legally and using penalties such as reprimands, fines, and dismissal—workers’ lives outside of work through compulsory drug or medical testing, surveillance of online communications, and restrictions on various activities, whether religious, sexual, political, et cetera (Bertram et al., 2012; Maltby, 2009). Furthermore, it is senior managers who often have greatest say over matters—redundancies, relocations, the closure of firms, and so forth—having grave repercussions not only for workers, but also their families and communities.

From the neo-republican viewpoint, two points appear central here. First, while a number of the above workplace policies and restrictions are not unacceptable in themselves—for instance, having well-defined rest breaks or codes of appropriate conduct—they do become unacceptable when one group decides their form alone. Second, it is certainly true that many employers will not routinely use their discretion in oppressive ways, since this would breach norms they themselves share and lead to organizational inefficiencies or a negative reputation. Yet from the viewpoint of freedom as non-domination, what matters is not whether they

will act oppressively, but instead whether they *can* act oppressively. If they can, even only sporadically, they pose a dominating threat to employees.

As regards *imperium*, neo-republicans agree that a constitutionally-constrained democracy, where all citizens enjoy an institutionally mediated decisive voice, is the prime instrument or vehicle towards maximizing freedom as non-domination. Democracy's importance rests, Pettit avers, not on any 'independent attractions', but on 'the fact that it is a means of furthering liberty', that is, is 'necessary for promoting the enjoyment of freedom as non-domination'.¹ However, as regards workplace *dominium*, neo-republicans differ significantly on the means they think best promote non-domination. In the current literature, we find four distinct positions, which fall under two broader strategies, that of bolstering *employee right of exit*, on the one hand, and augmenting *employee voice*, on the other.

Pettit provides one iteration of the right of exit strategy. He concurs that state-enacted and -enforced workplace regulations help minimize employer power by imposing legal duties as regards safety standards, remuneration, and appropriate workplace behaviour. Workers are further protected from uncontrolled interference by being entitled to unionize and seek legal redress when faced with discrimination or arbitrary dismissal (Pettit, 2014, pp. 89–90). These measures, while significant, are nonetheless insufficient insofar as they provide a check on employer power without addressing its source, that is, workers having to take on jobs so as to meet their basic needs and their resulting mismatched bargaining position in relation to employers. To rebalance this mismatched bargaining position, an *effective*—rather than simply formal—right of employees to exit jobs is required. Within a 'well-functioning labor market', Pettit (2006, p. 142) avers, 'no one would depend on any particular master and so no one would be at the mercy of a master: he or she could move on to employment elsewhere in the event of suffering arbitrary interference'. One obvious route to an effective right of exit is to have everyone's basic needs provided for by the state through unconditional basic income (UBI). Having this income to fall back on, none would be forced by circumstances to take up unattractive jobs or accept abuse at work – instead, they would be free to seek alternative employment (Pettit, 2007). Enjoying this freedom would, moreover, grant workers leverage to negotiate with employers and managers on matters such as pay, working conditions, et cetera.

Robert S. Taylor provides a second, distinctly neoliberal, iteration of this republican market-focused right of exit strategy. Where Pettit insists that state regulation is required and does not rule out worker voice as a means to increased non-domination, Taylor is expressly sceptical about the domination-minimizing effects of state regulation and generally hostile to augmenting employee voice, believing these measures would not be effective overall and would lead to other forms of domination by increasing the reach and intrusiveness of state agencies and bolstering the dominating power of worker associations, in particular unions (Taylor, 2017, pp. 20–5, 46–65). Instead, he insists that policy-makers should 'remain largely aloof from relations within the firm, trusting instead that free exit will discipline owners and managers and prevent them from dominating

their employees'.² This requires the provision of UBI, but also further measures that would increase the flexibility and competitiveness of employees. These measures include freeing-up labour contract law (through, for example, a 'move to right-to-work laws and universal at-will employment'), relocation vouchers to enable workers to move to economically vibrant towns and cities, educational campaigns directed towards informing workers of their rights and economic opportunities, and capital grants to facilitate the acquisition of marketable physical, financial, or skill-based assets.³

The second strategy geared towards minimizing workplace domination endorses employee voice on account of the inadequacy of solely relying on exit. The right of exit is assuredly a basic right that distinguishes free from unfree social orders. Nevertheless, the threat of workers exiting a firm may often appear to managers as implausible, given the dependence of many workers on firm membership for their income and the lack of alternative employment opportunities. As well, even where alternative employment opportunities exist, the costs of exit can be excessive for workers, including the loss of intra-firm capital gained over many years, the expense and uncertainty of acquiring and subsequently transitioning to new work, and the risk one might fall into sustained unemployment.⁴ In such circumstances—circumstances ignored or underplayed by neo-republican advocates of exit—threatening exit would be rational only as a last resort and therefore a rather suboptimal means by which to resist employer power.

A similar criticism applies to relying on exit via UBI. An important point here is that none of the neo-republicans advocating exit think UBI should be of a level to allow workers to leave the world of paid work (Lovett, 2010, p. 203; Taylor, 2017, pp. 94–5). What they have in mind is a 'strong exit' right, where workers have the means to sustain themselves temporarily in moving from an unappealing to a better job, and not the 'radical exit' right of 'leaving the labour market altogether' (Birnbaum and De Wispelaere, 2016, p. 63). Thus, even with UBI, workers will have to pursue employment opportunities. However, a problem attaches to UBI when it is not directed towards the demanding goal of freeing people completely from work, which concerns its efficacy as a policy and the groups it would most likely benefit. As regards its efficacy, UBI 'only offers a real [strong] exit option for those wanting to escape a bad job by moving to a better one when such better jobs are available' (Birnbaum and De Wispelaere, 2016, p. 63). If better jobs are unavailable, many exercising their right of exit will be faced with replacing one bad job with another or falling into long-term unemployment and thus periods of relative poverty (given the limit of a sustainable UBI). As regards the groups most likely to benefit, while UBI will certainly grant all a regular income, it is unlikely to grant all 'an equal opportunity to exit' (Birnbaum and De Wispelaere, 2016, p. 63). Workers with a low skill or educational base, and with limited access to services such as subsidized training and other types of support (childcare provision, for example), will be less able in comparison to privileged workers to exit their jobs and thus reduce the workplace domination they are subjected to.⁵

It is because of these limits to the exit strategy that other neo-republicans stress the importance of employee voice, albeit arriving at two different conclusions. Neo-republicans stressing voice agree that in addition to right of exit, there must be state and non-state regulation of firms. The purpose of workplace regulation is not to establish

the right of employees to costlessly quit, so they can use it as an implicit threat in their daily relation with managers. Rather, it attempts to set clear and specific standards to which managers have to conform in the exercise of their authority, in order to reduce their discretion.

(González-Ricoy, 2014, p. 242)

Similar to a bill of civil rights that secures significant protection for citizens from arbitrary state interference, a bill of workplace rights ensures the same for employees against unchecked employer discretion, providing protections as regards wages and pensions, safety standards, dismissal, harassment, discrimination in hiring and promotion, and so forth. Yet while regulation has constraining effects on organizations, it, like exit, is again insufficient in countering workplace domination. One reason for this is its reliance on enforcement by external bodies (arbitration committees, employment tribunals, et cetera). The issue here is that pursuing redress through external bodies can be very costly for employees and their representative bodies and is mostly reactive, that is, usually a reaction to prior arbitrary interference. Thus, it cannot always undo the harms done to employees (Hsieh, 2008, p. 92). A further reason concerns the application of regulatory requirements within firms. While all firms within a sector will have a general set of regulatory requirements, how these are internally embedded will vary across firms, depending upon the aims and actions of management. There is, thus, substantial scope for arbitrary discretion in the implementation of regulations.

Hence the call for worker voice as a means for countering workplace domination. This call takes two forms, the first identifying workplace voice with a right to internal organizational *contestation* and redress, the second identifying it with having organizational *control*, that is, a democratic voice. According to Hsieh (2005, pp. 136–7; see also Anderson, 2017, p. 69), resilient protection against domination requires a mode of workplace governance in which employees are positioned ‘to contest managerial decisions that result in severe forms of interference not only *ex post*, but also as part of the decision-making process internal to economic enterprises’ via internal adjudicative bodies and workplace committees. However, this does not involve employee control—or even control shared with employers and managers—of organizational policies, but instead the representation of employees in decision-making processes in ways ensuring their opinions will be heard. The reasons why full democratic voice is deemed an inappropriate goal are that such voice is assumed to be incompatible with employers and managers having organizational discretion (Hsieh, 2005, pp. 116,

138; 2008, p. 92), which is required for the effective running of organizations, and that workplace democracy is subject to inefficiencies rendering it suboptimal economically relative to non-democratic firms (Anderson, 2017, pp. 69, 130–1).

Other advocates of worker voice insist that it must be a democratic voice, a voice having a significant degree of organizational control, if it is to properly minimize workplace domination (Breen, 2015, 2017; González-Ricoy, 2014). In taking this stance, their first claim is that the right to contest managerial decisions remains an ineffective right without workers also having a significant degree of organizational control. This is because without being linked to organizational control, worker voice would be one that has to be listened to, yet not one which would necessarily have to be addressed and acted upon. Thus, in periods of heightened conflict managers would be tempted to ignore or thwart the recommendations of internal adjudicative bodies and workplace committees (Breen, 2015, pp. 279–82). Second, a right of contestation suggests that worker voice amounts to an internal retrospective right of redress, instead of a prospective right to influence agenda-setting and control the direction of organizational policy, which is surely what we require to effectively counter workplace domination (Schuppert, 2015a, pp. 115–6). Finally, the advocates of democratic worker voice reject the assumption that democratic firms are necessarily subject to crippling inefficiencies by highlighting their efficiencies relative to authoritarian capitalist firms (Bowles and Gintis, 1993; Landemore and Ferreras, 2016, pp. 70–2) and the appearance and endurance of successful democratic firms in a variety of industries (Dow, 2003, pp. 45–91; González-Ricoy, 2018, pp. 645–6).

These differing stances on how best to minimize workplace domination reveal a conspicuous policy indeterminacy within neo-republican theory.⁶ This indeterminacy as regards workplace governance stems in part from the development of the neo-republican research programme along trajectories already marked out within contemporary political theory, with Pettit taking a fairly orthodox liberal stance, Taylor a libertarian perspective indebted to Hayek, and the defenders of voice adopting strongly liberal-egalitarian and, indeed, liberal-socialist perspectives. However, the main reason for the indeterminacy is that in each case the argument offered is primarily consequentialist in character, hinging upon assessments of the instrumental efficacy of the strategy considered—whether exit or voice (or a combination of either with regulatory mechanisms)—for promoting freedom as non-domination. As with consequentialist arguments generally, there is therefore extensive room for reasonable disagreement as to which stance best fulfils its goal. On balance, we do seem to have good grounds for thinking the voice-focused stances fare better consequentially in this regard than the exclusively exit-focused stances. This is because in focusing primarily on the labour market and unequal market-bargaining power in contractual exchanges, the latter stances tend to mistakenly equate workers with independent contractors and misrepresent the main institutional setting in which the majority of people find themselves in advanced economies, that is, the firm. Unlike labour markets, firms are defined by

command hierarchies and authority relations, and unlike independent contractors, workers in firms are instead employees who are subordinate to and governed by their bosses (Anderson, 2015, pp. 59–60; Gourevitch, 2016, p. 18). Workplace domination is therefore not just a result of unequal market-bargaining power that can be ameliorated by strengthening exit options. Instead, it is more fundamentally a result of the unequal authority relations within firms that systemically constrain what employees can say or do—that is, their voice and discretion—and are legitimated and thereby rendered standard by state-sponsored corporate and employment law (Ciepley, 2013). Addressing such unequal authority relations requires reconfiguring these relations and corporate governance as a whole.

More needs to be said about this reading of firms and corporate governance than can be said here.⁷ However, our key point is that the reasonable disagreement between neo-republicans over the necessity of worker voice generally and workplace democracy in particular is due to an equation of political freedom with freedom as non-domination and a treatment of voice as a means towards furthering non-domination.⁸ Regardless of where one stands on the positions listed above, the non-domination case for worker voice and democracy is therefore contingent and, to that extent, always somewhat precarious. Yet if we embrace a further dimension of political freedom, we might be able to reconfigure our understanding of worker voice so that it appears not only as an instrument towards limiting workplace domination, but also, and more deeply, an intrinsic, irreducible aspect of our status as free and equal persons.

3 Expressive equality, republican citizenship, and freedom as discursive control

We aim now to establish that we have cause by the lights of Philip Pettit's own neo-republican theory to embrace an autonomy-centred ideal of freedom, above and beyond freedom as non-domination, and that this embrace significantly realigns the import of republicanism for workplace governance. This requires consideration of Pettit's 'expressively egalitarian' understanding of socio-political equality, the fuller meaning of republican citizenship, and the ideal of 'freedom as discursive control'. Our contention is that properly appreciating these ideas transforms voice from a means towards non-domination into a legitimate demand that places strong *prima facie* restrictions on the character of our social relationships and the permissible conduct within them.

We get an initial sense of why this is so by reflecting on what Pettit describes as the fundamental commitment of his neo-republican theory, its endorsement of expressive egalitarianism. By expressive equality is not meant substantive material equality—that all should possess an equal level of wealth, resources, or distributive goods (though the level of material equality required in a proper republic would be significant)—but rather that citizens should enjoy equality of *status* before and within all institutions directly established by the state, as well as

those institutions enabled by state action (or calculated inaction) and which are of public concern in terms of their impact on citizens and society. As Pettit puts it:

The republican approach strongly supports expressive egalitarianism. In this tradition, the ideal of the free citizen requires a *civic status* that enables each to stand on an *equal footing with others*. Such a status can be established only under a state that treats all its members as equals *and* only under a culture in which people are prepared to accept such treatment and to claim no special privileges.

(Pettit, 2014, p. 80, *emphasis added*)

Three aspects of this expressive egalitarian ideal stand out. First, in fixing a civic status where all stand on an ‘equal footing with others’, expressive equality is the criterion by which vertical state–citizen relationships are to be measured, but also the measure of horizontal citizen–citizen relationships in wider society. Thus, in common with relational or social egalitarians, who argue that an egalitarian politics should first attend to the nature of social relationships rather than the distribution of resources, this ideal is ‘essentially social in character’, concerned with the status persons have in their interactions with others across society as a whole and, importantly, critical of all hierarchical divisions in terms of rank, power, and standing which harm or diminish that status.⁹ And this applies to the institutions making up the republican state, but also to those major social institutions lying outside the state and yet facilitated by state action (or inaction) in various ways, including civil–society institutions, the market, and, of course, the firm, a direct product of state-mandated law.¹⁰

Second, and strongly echoing the views of recognition theorists such as Axel Honneth, the norm defining expressively egalitarian relationships is *mutual respect*. In social relationships defined by mutual respect, ‘free persons can walk tall, and look others in the eye’ without depending ‘on anyone’s grace or favour for being able to choose their mode of life’, and relating to ‘one another in a shared, mutually reinforcing consciousness of enjoying this independence’ (Pettit, 2012, p. 82). Respect, of course, is core to the freedom as non-domination ideal, but, and decisive to our argument, as a norm it is not limited to non-domination alone. Indeed, the role accorded respect in Pettit’s expressive egalitarianism has ‘obvious affinities with Kantian notions of respecting others as autonomous members of the kingdom of ends’, with free persons being bound to each other ‘not by ties of affection or unequal dependence, but as equals with the moral power to *call others to account* and, by the same token, *to be called to account by others*, in turn’ (McBride, 2015, p. 359, *emphasis added*). Third, and again echoing theories grounded on autonomy ideals of freedom stressing our mutual accountability, the norm of mutual respect definitive of expressive egalitarianism operates ‘as an absolute constraint on public policy and institutional design’ rather than ‘merely as a means to promote non-domination’ (McBride, 2015, p. 360). In Pettit’s (2014, p. 80) own words, ‘the expressive egalitarian constraint always applies’, with no policy or action being able to ‘command support unless it is compatible with the principle that no one is

special and all are to count as equals', even if a policy or action would otherwise increase the level of non-domination enjoyed in society overall.

Should the above points ring true, then in adopting an expressively egalitarian standpoint in which the norm of respect is central, Pettit's neo-republican theory already points beyond an ideal of freedom as 'the absence of mastery by others', that is, the absence of arbitrary interference or domination, to one where our freedom *also* consists in being mutually accountable, that is, being persons who are capable of reflecting and deciding on our actions and offering a justification of those actions to our peers—the very essence of freedom as autonomy.

This is reinforced by his portrait of the free person and republican citizen. To be a free person in the republican sense, Pettit declares, 'is to be a *voice that cannot properly be ignored*, a voice which speaks to issues raised in common with others and which speaks with *a certain authority*', to be seen 'as someone *worth listening to*' (Pettit, 1997, p. 91, emphasis added; see also Pettit, 2001, pp. 139–40). This portrait incorporates the freedom as non-domination concern as regards the absence of a potential for arbitrary or uncontrolled interference, but again gestures beyond it. Viewed negatively in terms of the evils avoided, free persons are spared the anxiety and insecurity that compel dominated persons to adopt fawning and other demeaning strategies in dealing with powerful actors. However, viewed positively in terms of how they regard themselves in relation to others, free persons enjoy self-respect grounded on the justified belief, first, that they have the capacity, and are recognized by all as having the capacity, to voice reasoned opinions on shared matters and have those reasoned opinions taken seriously by others, and, second, that they are properly co-authors of a socio-political order held in common. Our capacity to voice reasoned opinions and our being recognized as equal partners in public deliberation whose opinions count—that is, are regarded as possessing at least a degree of authority—are generative of self-respect not just because they enable us to fend off dominators, but because they are valuable in themselves, are intrinsic to our understanding of ourselves as autonomous persons.

These observations already point to an understanding of voice as an integral part of freedom, rather than simply as a means to freedom. Under this view, free social relationships and institutions are those where we enjoy significant scope for deliberation over matters of common concern, and unfree social relationships and institutions are those where deliberation is denied or thwarted.¹¹ Thus, having a voice is something that all can legitimately expect in a free social order, since it is foundational for the exercise of individual and collective agency.

This is given further support if we consider Pettit's ideal of 'freedom as discursive control', which he deems the defining feature of free personhood and which amounts, in essence, to a relational view of autonomy, that our freedom necessarily depends upon and arises through deliberative or discursive engagement with others.¹² To 'discourse', Pettit (2001, p. 67) contends, 'is to reason and, in particular, to reason together with others'. Genuine discourse or reasoning together is possible only in social relationships that 'do not obstruct or jeopardize

or restrict discursive influence' between people and which allow them 'to exercise discursive influence over one another' (Pettit, 2001, p. 69). Indeed, the exercise of discursive influence is what defines personal freedom. Pettit declares:

An agent's freedom as a person will naturally be identified ... with the form of *control* that people enjoy within discourse-friendly relationships. An agent will be a free person so far as they have the ability to discourse and they have the access to discourse that is provided within such relationships.
(Pettit, 2001, p. 70, *emphasis added*)

Being free, in other words, means having a voice that others must hear and being able (and willing) to hear others' voices in turn. Furthermore, freedom as discursive control can only be reliably experienced when all parties who have the ratiocinative and relational capacity to engage in discourse—something we can presume of all cognitively and socially competent persons—are recognized and respected by all as discursive interlocutors.

The necessity of mutual recognition and respect places strong restrictions on the modes of interaction permissible within discursive relationships between equally competent persons. Coercion, threats, deception, and manipulation are all offences to the ideal of freedom as discursive control, since they distort or pervert discursive interaction, skewing it towards the opinions and interests of one party over others. So, too, are peremptory claims of possessing a voice that has an especial authority, one which purports to outweigh and render subordinate others' voices in terms of relevance and significance. Thus, there must be 'a presumption in place', Pettit (2001, p. 72, *emphasis added*) maintains, 'that as the person is treated in those groups where they gain recognition as a discursive subject, so they *ought in general to be treated*; the failure to accord such treatment will call for *special explanation*'. In other words, the default position we should adopt in assessing social relationships is that all within deliberative interactions should be presumed to speak with an authoritative voice and be permitted to equally exercise that voice, without being subordinate to others, except where there are compelling and publicly justifiable reasons for thinking and acting otherwise. Moreover, and to reinforce a point previously made, this pertains to all major social institutions—including civil-society institutions and the workplace—not just those institutions making up the republican state.

The idea of discursive control positions voice, once more, at the heart of the meaning of freedom and free citizenship. It is, by Pettit's own account, a 'richer ideal' of freedom than freedom as non-domination and it is ultimately the ideal of freedom that the republican state 'should be given partial responsibility for furthering' (Pettit, 1997, p. 81; 2001, p. 5). However, Pettit nonetheless seeks to restrict our understanding of political freedom exclusively to freedom as non-domination, asserting that freedom as discursive control represents a personal ideal of freedom and cannot therefore function as a guide to political action (Pettit, 2001, pp. 125–7). His reason here is the Berlinian worry that a politics

aiming to directly advance freedom as discursive control would take upon itself the task of imposing a particular vision of autonomous citizenship on people and thereby ‘degenerate into an intrusive and oppressive entity’ (Pettit, 2001, pp. 127; 2015, pp. 381–2). A further reason is his belief that a republican theory of the free society need only make reference to freedom as non-domination, that focusing on this ideal is sufficient to ensure political legitimacy and social justice.

Neither reason is convincing. As for the Berlinian worry, there is a crucial distinction to be drawn between thick ideals of autonomy grounded on substantive conceptions of the good life and thin ideals of autonomy which focus on the general conditions of being able to lead a good life, regardless of what your conception of the good might be (Breen, 2015, pp. 482–3). The idea of discursive control, in itself, makes no reference to a substantive conception of the good life and is therefore not an inappropriate political ideal.¹³ Pettit is likewise mistaken in believing that directly fostering discursive control would entail illegitimate state attempts at ‘improving people’s psychology’ (Pettit, 2001, p. 127). Were this true, then public education systems, informational campaigns designed to increase citizens’ awareness of shared issues and problems, controls on press and online media reporting, state subsidization of the arts and culture, et cetera, would be illegitimate, which they are not.

As regards the claim that republican theories of the free society need only make reference to freedom as non-domination, this is belied by the truth, as explained above, that Pettit’s own vision of republican citizenship points beyond non-domination towards our status as co-authors of a shared socio-political order. It is also belied by the fact that in setting out the implications of ensuring freedom as non-domination, Pettit implicitly relies upon freedom conceived as autonomy or discursive control. That non-domination hinges upon the idea of autonomy and for that reason is insufficient is a claim convincingly made by Richard Dagger, among others.¹⁴ One of Dagger’s arguments concerns a key republican prescription. Republicans, Pettit (1997, pp. 76–7) insists, should be concerned not only with countering those socio-political factors which ‘compromise’ freedom, that is, instances of domination, but also with addressing natural and social factors—poor health, disability, lack of education, poverty, et cetera—which, whilst not involving intentional arbitrary interference, nevertheless lessen or ‘condition’ people’s capacity to avail of their freedom. Dagger thinks Pettit correct in wanting to address both compromising and conditioning factors, but his point is that if freedom is ‘construed simply as non-domination’ it would be sufficiently served by countering compromising or dominating factors alone. The addition of conditioning factors thus involves an inevitable appeal to a broader notion of freedom, not just the absence of domination but of leading ‘a self-governed life’ (Dagger, 2005, p. 186).

It is therefore not possible to restrict our understanding of political freedom to non-domination, insofar as freedom as discursive control must also be invoked in arriving at an adequate theory of both political legitimacy and social justice. Furthermore, we have good reason to think non-domination less fundamental

in value than freedom as autonomy. This is because ‘the desire to be free from domination is rooted’ in a more elementary ‘desire to be in some sense self-governing ... [w]e want to be free from domination, in other words, so that we can exercise autonomy’ (Dagger, 2005, p. 185). When we criticize dominators, then, we rightly condemn their dominating actions, yet we also condemn their enjoyment of a freedom—autonomous choice and control—which they unjustifiably accrue to themselves and deny others. Thus, it is primarily autonomy, not non-domination, that we ultimately care about.

4 Conclusion

What are the implications of this discussion for workplace relations and worker voice? We believe the implications are fourfold. First, underpinning the republican viewpoint is an idea of expressive equality centring on the norm of mutual respect that functions as a basic constraint on how citizens should interrelate and what can be done to them. Second, our freedom as citizens is not exhausted by the non-domination ideal, but also encompasses freedom as discursive control and autonomy, understood in inherently relational or social terms. Third, emphasizing the idea of discursive control and autonomy, alongside the norm of mutual respect and the expectation that we be mutually accountable, transforms the place of voice within republican theory. That is, voice is now better viewed less as a means of promoting non-domination, and more as an essential aspect of all discursive relationships and therefore our status as free and equal persons. Fourth, this understanding of voice, together with the ‘expressive egalitarian constraint’, leads to a presumption in favour of all being able to equally exercise their voice in the social relationships of which they are part and, thus, to strong *prima facie* restrictions on attempts to curtail or limit deliberation, *whether* in our dealings with the state, in our interactions within civil society, *or* in our workplace relations. The default republican position on workplace governance should, therefore, be a strong commitment to worker voice and, thus, to some form of democratization. Only if it is provable, beyond question, that workers lack the capacity for autonomy and discretion in work that they otherwise exhibit in other social relationships can this commitment be definitively gainsaid. Yet should this lack of capacity in a fundamental sphere of social life be proven, the general republican antipathy to authoritarian rule would likely itself fall to pieces.¹⁵

Notes

- 1 Pettit (1997, pp. 8, 30). See also Pettit (1999, p. 166). This instrumental view of democracy is also espoused by Lovett (2010, pp. 210–20) and Taylor (2017, pp. 66–91).
- 2 Taylor (2017, p. 58). Here Taylor is close to Lovett (2010, p. 199), who argues that a proper right of exit would ‘eliminate the need for much workplace regulation’.
- 3 Taylor (2017, pp. 53–4). In the US, ‘at-will employment’ refers to a contractual relationship in which employees can be fired by their employer for any reason—without the latter having to have ‘just cause’—and with no warning, with the proviso

- that the reason does not contravene the law (for example, being motivated by hostility towards an employee's gender, race, or religion).
- 4 On these exit costs, see Hsieh's (2005, pp. 128–32; 2008, pp. 89–90) powerful analysis, but also Dahl (1985, pp. 114–5) and Gourevitch (2013, p. 608; 2016, pp. 23–4).
 - 5 Some of the measures Taylor suggests—for instance, grants facilitating the acquisition of skills—might well advance the position of vulnerable workers, but others, such as relocation vouchers, do not properly address the costs of exit, and some, especially 'at-will employment', would clearly exacerbate that vulnerable position.
 - 6 For a discussion of neo-republicanism's ambiguous implications for workplace governance and employment law, see Bogg (2017). For a more general contention as to the policy indeterminacy of neo-republicanism and the need to 'supplement freedom as nondomination with other social and political values', see McMahon (2005, p. 92).
 - 7 For a fuller discussion, see Hirvonen and Breen (2020).
 - 8 To be clear, we do not claim all neo-republicans follow Pettit in identifying political freedom with non-domination in their broader political theories. Rather, our claim is that when they reflect upon workplace governance, their arguments are predominantly motivated by freedom as non-domination.
 - 9 Pettit (2012, p. 91), where he also explicitly notes the closeness of his position to the idea of social or relational equality developed by Anderson (1999) and Scheffler (2005), among others. On the connections, as well as differences, between Pettit and social egalitarians, see Schuppert (2015b).
 - 10 The family is also an institution of concern for social egalitarians. There is no space here to say what a fully developed republican theory of the family would stipulate, but central to it would be the encouragement of familial relationships that support rather than thwart expressive equality.
 - 11 Hence also Pettit's (2012, pp. 15–6) insistence, with Jürgen Habermas, on a 'deliberative constraint', which dictates that 'everyone is able to speak and vote on an equal basis, and yet is required to speak and vote on the basis of a concern with the common good'.
 - 12 That we can view freedom as discursive control as a relational, autonomy-centred conception of freedom is suggested by Pettit himself, as when he claims that in terms of personal freedom he 'is committed to a version of the autonomy ideal', understood in terms of what he calls 'orthonomy' (Pettit, 1997, pp. 81–2). On discursive control as a relational ideal of autonomy, see Garrau and Laborde (2015, pp. 54–5).
 - 13 Of course, it is not an inappropriate political ideal once we have already accepted freedom as a prime political value. Other political tendencies will not have that starting assumption, but this should not trouble republicans: republicanism, like liberalism, is, in the end, a 'fighting creed' (Taylor, 1994, p. 62).
 - 14 Dagger (2005). For related critiques highlighting the insufficiency of non-domination taken on its own, see Breen (2015) and Schuppert (2015b).
 - 15 Our thanks to Jean-Philippe Deranty, Allyn Fives, Lisa Herzog, Andrew Schaap, Fabian Schuppert, and the audience at a meeting of Queen's University's *Research Seminars in Political Theory* for their comments on an earlier draft.

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11

DEMOCRATIZING WORKPLACES FROM BELOW

Beyond workplace republicanism

Jean-Philippe Deranty and Emmanuel Renault

1 Introduction

One of the most striking paradoxes of contemporary societies is the clash between their egalitarian, democratic ethos, the notion that every individual is equally entitled to have their voice heard in collective decisions and needs to be considered in them, and the reality of contemporary organizations, notably the capitalist firm, in which a large part of the population lives under entirely undemocratic regimes, where they have little or no voice in relation to decisions that affect them directly. Awareness of this paradox has had a major impact in the field of political philosophy (Young, 1979). Following the renewal of interest in the republican tradition, a number of political philosophers have argued that the value of freedom as non-domination should apply to all social spheres, especially the economic one. As a result, a rich strand of ‘workplace republicanism’ has developed in recent years (González-Ricoy, 2014; Hsieh, 2005, 2008a). The influential work of Elizabeth Anderson (2015a, 2017) has given particular prominence to this approach.

However, despite the great progress that workplace republicanism has achieved for democratic thinking, this chapter will argue that there are some limitations to this approach. These relate to an aspect of economic organizations that remains largely unaddressed by workplace republicans and most other political theorists. This is the ‘productive dimension’ of ‘life in production’, to paraphrase an influential article (Hsieh, 2008b). By ‘productive dimension’ we mean the complex forms of experience attaching to working activity, the actual performance of work tasks. In a recent book written with two other colleagues, Christophe Dejours and Nicholas H. Smith, we have tried to characterize some of the defining features of working activities in order to highlight their significance for human subjects, and consequently, their normative import (Dejours et al., 2018). What emerged from our research in particular is the importance of work collectives,

especially in formal work settings where work takes the form of waged labour. As we will try to show here, focusing on working activities and work collectives has significant implications for workplace democracy.

From the point of view of the experience of work, republican approaches overlook two key aspects. First, they do not sufficiently consider the democratic potential that is inherent in work collectives. Such democratic potential stems, we argue, from the specific logic that brings workers together, namely the logic of production, of doing and making things, and doing them together. A second blind spot of workplace republicanism concerns the kind of democratic practices that are made possible (in the best scenarios) through participation in well-functioning work collectives. Republican accounts focus on classic, long-established ways to off-set domination and ensure participation, namely legal frames and the affordance of voice. Looking at workplace domination from the perspective of the experience of work, it becomes clear that democratization also involves other kinds of demands and practices. Our general claim is that the democratization of work involves not just institutional and legal transformations, based on the analogy between political government and government in firms (Landemore and Ferreras, 2016), but also a notion of democracy defined as a set of democratic habits or a 'way of life' (Dewey, 1987 [1937], 1988 [1939]). Whereas republican approaches to workplace democracy usually conceive of voice as control of firm governments through procedures of representation and deliberation, a focus on the experience of work leads to a specific participatory model of workplace democracy, based on the democratization of participation in productive activities.

In the next section, we show in what sense we think workplace republicans have not analysed with sufficient detail the social logics at play in workplaces. As a result, they have missed some of the democratic resources inherent in the activity of work and in effective work cooperation. In Section 3, we consider the obstacles to democratization that are internal to workplaces. We argue that in focusing on a particular kind of negations of freedom, many republicans paradoxically seem to accept forms of hierarchy and the kinds of domination these hierarchies produce that, on a different conception of democracy, are inimical to democratization. By contrast, our participatory model requires the abolition, or at least a sharp reduction, of these hierarchies. In the fourth section, we look at obstacles to democratization that are external to the firm, namely the relation of subjection inherent in capitalist economies, the principle of expertise rooted in the achievement principle, and discrimination based on gender, racial, and class identification. We show that there is a circle between domination at work and domination outside work and highlight the significance of this circle for the democratization of workplaces.

2 Democratic dynamics in work activities and work collectives

In order to get a clear sense of what is at stake in trying to define a contemporary theory of workplace democracy, it is useful to start by reminding ourselves of the amount of domination experienced by many citizens in their work

situations. Elizabeth Anderson's (2017) recent book is particularly important in this respect. Her intervention has the merit of delineating clearly, at a simple empirical level, the extent to which a large part of the population in contemporary societies is under the sway of multiple forms of domination in its economic life. The conclusion Anderson draws from her initial descriptions is in fact akin to a 'communist dictatorship in our midst' (Anderson, 2017, p. 37).

In light of the immense power differentials between employers, managers, and employees, how serious can we be in referring to working activity and cooperation as real sources and leverages for democratization? In answer, it is worth remembering at the outset that organized labour as a political force emerged historically not just on the basis of a shared experience of injustice, not just because proletarians were a particularly dominated and exploited class. As several studies have shown (Mason, 2007; Ranci re and Faure, 2007; Thompson, 1996 [1963]), labour as a political force emerged precisely as *labour*, the very experience of *working* and of working *together* providing the platform, the subjective and organizational resources, and the incentive to make political demands for more equality and justice. From a sociological point of view, many studies in labour process theory have likewise illustrated empirically the concrete links between work experience, cooperation, and politicization (for a recent example, see Taylor and Moore, 2014).

It might sound ill-advised to speak of working activity and work collectives in general, given the vast diversity of experiences and of forms of sociality in different enterprises, industries, and national settings. However, beyond the multiple differences across myriad work situations, it can be argued that some basic 'ergonomic' features are common to all work activities and have great impact on the subjects engaged in it.¹ In the context of wage work, in firms especially, the tasks to be completed are defined and framed by a multiplicity of rules and prescriptions: what the output ought to be, its quantity, how it should be produced, using what technical means, abiding by what kind of control process, in what deadlines, and so on. In capitalist firms, the prescriptive framing of work activity is one clear aspect of how individuals are subjected to domination in their work. A key insight from ergonomics and industrial psychology is that there is always a gap between the prescribed aspects of work and the reality of the work to be done so that the work performance is complete and the output achieved. In some highly controlled environments, that gap is very small, but for the vast majority of work it can be quite significant. Work contexts and work processes are full of contingencies that make the prescriptive framing of the activity inherently deficient as regards the reality of the performance necessary to deliver the outputs.

This gap between the prescriptive side of work and the actual realization of work means that workers are always in a critical position in relation to management regarding what is precisely the main object of their interaction: the productive task and outputs to be produced. Only the people who actually engage in the productive process and who actually produce the outputs know

what it takes to deliver them. For many tasks, this critical insight can be minimal, differing only infinitesimally from what engineers, coders, and managers have put in place and think is actually happening in their workplace. For other tasks, this critical insight can be much more substantive. Indeed, workers might know amongst themselves that the official representations of the work process have little to do with, and little understanding of, what is happening on the shop floor or in the open plan office.

This leads to another dimension of working activity. All workers who are engaged in the same work process share the same knowledge of 'real work'. Crucially, they share the same critical position in relation to the external powers who direct their activity. This shared knowledge of real work and the shared distance from management define a common identity that involves neither gender, nor race, nor age, nor any other difference. Some of these differences, of course, might well be prevalent amongst workers and structure their social interactions. There might well be discrimination amongst them based on one of those markers. But underneath those differences, there is the shared identity grounded in real work and the shared awareness of the ignorance and being-out-of-touch of management.

Another key insight of ergonomics and industrial psychology is that just as extra effort, demanding mobilization of subjective resources, is required at the individual level to bridge the gap between prescriptions and actual performance, something structurally similar applies for coordination. Most work involves teams of workers in the same productive unit or across productive units. Coordination of efforts, outputs, temporalities, and spaces between all the productive agents involved is just as crucial for efficient production as prescriptions relating to tasks at the individual level. Yet external prescriptions can never achieve the full coordination of individual-level activities, for the same reason that they fail to fully define those activities in the first place. Therefore, a gap between prescribed coordination and real cooperation also exists at the level of coordinated activities. In fact, the gap is likely to be even higher at the coordinated level, since the contingencies getting in the way of coordination multiply with the number of agents involved.

Here two ideal-typical scenarios can be distinguished. In the first, positive scenario, different workers come together and exchange their experiences of how they deal personally with the realization of the required tasks. Efficient cooperation between them arises from this sharing of experience, when a collective decision is reached at the level of the work collective on how best to organize the work process. This requires that everyone is prepared to share their own experience, including the ways they bend the prescriptive rules or even manipulate them to achieve work tasks. Everyone needs to be able to listen to other ways of doing, and, as the case may be, to change their own view and adopt the consensus opinion. In the second, negative scenario, if trust does not exist between workers, information is not shared and discussion does not occur. Since the work collective is not playing its mediating role, prescribed coordination is hardly

transformed into actual cooperation. Some disruptions in the work process are thus bound to occur and a vicious circle can quickly arise: the more coordination between workers becomes difficult, the more distrust grows, undermining the very possibility for an effective work collective to maintain itself and making cooperation increasingly impossible to reach.

It is from this understanding of cooperation that work collectives can appear as spaces of small-scale democratic practice and democratic learning (see Dejours et al., 2018, pp. 195–204). For cooperation to work, individuals need to accept other people's views and question their own assumptions about the reality of the process. When cooperation works well, workers extend their professional identity and shared knowledge about technical aspects of the work process, exhibiting care towards the people with whom they cooperate. They are prepared to stand up for each other, show solidarity when management proves unreasonable or unjust. They can demonstrate courage in taking action to face adversity. The fundamental critical standpoint each individual finds herself in through her knowledge of the gap between real work and prescribed work is shared by the group. The sharing of real doing, of real knowledge, and of a critical stance towards management creates a bond and an identity that explain the phenomenon noted above, which has been amply documented by historians and sociologists: that the struggle against economic, social, and political injustice has often had its original source in workplaces, in shared professional experiences. In other words, when cooperation works well a set of habits grows that might be called 'democratic': habits of mutual respect and tolerance, of solving problems through discussion, of criticizing orders and prescriptions, and, more generally, of resisting asymmetrical power relations.

Workplace republicans rightly criticize mainstream liberal and libertarian theories of 'justice in production' for basing their accounts on the fiction of the labour contract as an agreement between two parties allegedly bargaining on an equal footing about the terms binding them. Elizabeth Anderson's intervention in this respect is particularly significant. She has shown that the normatively salient feature in work relations is not the market, the mechanism liberals and libertarians mistakenly view as explaining how agents within firms allocate their resources and interact with each other, but instead 'enterprise governance' (Anderson, 2015a, p. 59). She has thus brought attention to the power relations that, as a matter of fact, structure modern work organizations. But in opening the black box of the firm to critical scrutiny, Anderson and other republicans have not paid sufficient attention to the full gamut of experiences and social relations there. Republicans are concerned about relations of domination and it is from that general point of view that they consider different social spaces. The questions Anderson and other republicans ask are: How are individuals governed in particular social spaces? Is the government public, do the governed take part in it, or is it private, are they under arbitrary control? But the forms of domination and the subjective and collective resources to criticize and struggle against domination are likely to differ between social spaces, according to their specific

structures and the social logics at play in them. In work, domination takes on specific forms: it is enshrined in work contracts in which many of the terms are not negotiated because they are part of the broader legislative framework and cultural norms; it is anchored in property rights and the mainstream vision of what a firm is; it is enacted not just in chains of command, secured by hierarchical relations, but also in material processes (like surveillance, evaluation, control of processes, et cetera), in the spatiality of the workplace, and in the design of the technical means of work. Anderson and other republicans account well for those features of domination that involve direct control by hierarchy, by the boss and managers, as well as by owners. But she does not pay attention to the ‘productive’ aspect of work, and so misses aspects of domination, and of the possibilities of resistance to domination, that are anchored in the very process of work. For instance, she misses the fact that it is much easier for a well-functioning work collective to resist arbitrary use of hierarchical power than for a destructured collective. Or that actively destructuring work collectives (via internal competition, internal mobility, the spatial isolation of co-workers, et cetera) is a prevalent technique used by management to undermine the resistance of employees.

Similarly, the republican concern with criticizing and overcoming domination within work organizations is attuned to forums and modes of contestation and participation that mirror those existing in the broad public sphere. While this concern is significant, it does not attend to democratic potentials inherent in workplaces that arise from the specificity of those spaces, the fact that a work collective can be the origin of specific democratic habits. Since Anderson (2014, 2015b) herself highlights the pragmatist inspiration behind her work, it is appropriate to refer to Dewey’s criticism of what he called merely ‘political’ democracy, that is, a conception of democracy limited to a set of institutional procedures. Dewey’s point was that democratic institutions lose their function and value when they are not underpinned by democratic habits of mutual respect, tolerance, and critique, the sharing of experience, or, in short, by a ‘way of life’ (Dewey, 1987 [1937], p. 217). Dewey’s point was also that political institutions cannot produce by themselves the democratic habits they require. His conception of democracy as a ‘social ideal’ (Dewey, 1984 [1927], p. 287; Renault, 2017) underpinned his focus on the democratization of education and industrial democracy, since educational and work organizations have formative effects greater than any other institution. Dewey’s approach to workplace democracy is particularly valuable in the context of current debates, because it goes beyond ‘parallel-case arguments’ (democratization justified on the basis of analogies between the state and firms) and points to the fact that work organizations can be places where democratic habits are formed, or undemocratic habits, or, indeed, even anti-democratic habits. What matters for the constitution of these habits is not just the way in which firms are governed, but also the ways in which workers are habituated, in the very process of production, either to obey unintelligently or to collectively criticize—and potentially autonomously develop—orders and prescriptions and to affirm deliberative forms of collective decision-making. From these Deweyan

insights, it follows that two types of workplace democratization can be analytically distinguished, one that focusses only on the governance of the firm, in a top-down approach, and another that focusses also on the democratic habits that can be fostered at the level of the work collective, in a bottom-up approach. In the next section, we discuss these two models.

3 What kind of democratization?

The positions republican authors take towards democracy in general, and democracy in workplaces in particular, are far from straightforward and vary significantly. In her seminal article on the point of equality, Elizabeth Anderson (1999, p. 315) equated her ‘relational’ ideal with a democratic one, bringing the two concepts together under the heading of ‘democratic equality’. Equality in social relations was presented then as being simultaneously verified in, and the condition for, equal participation in collective decisions (Anderson, 1999, p. 313). And yet, in her recent work on private government, she has explicitly rejected extending democratic procedures to workplace governance (Anderson, 2017, pp. 130–1). To counter the domination in workplaces she herself has highlighted with such force, she trusts rather the legal protection of workers’ basic rights and interests, through the tightening of regulations at the national and international level. Increasing legal oversight internally is for the purpose of lessening domination, not with a view to establishing workplace democracy (Anderson, 2017, pp. 65–71). The circle between social and political equality that was supposed to obtain in the broad public sphere thus appears to be broken in the case of the firm. Other major republican authors, notably Phillip Pettit and Frank Lovett, are just as reluctant to grant power to workers within the firm, and rely solely on the possibility of exit to address domination by managers and owners.² For these major authors as well, the close bonds between struggle against domination, social equality, and political equality cease to apply in what Marx famously referred to as ‘the hidden abode of production’ (Marx, 2004 [1867], p. 279).

Other republicans, of course, do not share this reluctance and explore the possibilities of democracy in all social places, including workplaces. When committed to the goal of workplace democracy, the political procedures these republicans recommend go beyond legal regulations. They also advocate strengthening the capacity of workers to have a ‘voice’ in decision-making processes. There is a whole spectrum of positions in this regard across the possible levels of worker participation (from shop floor to head office) and the scope of their participation (from consultation to fully binding decisions). One influential author, Nien-hê Hsieh (2008a), only recommends that workers be allowed to contest decisions that significantly interfere with their rights or interests, while other republicans advocate greater control. Breen (2017) and González-Ricoy (2014), in particular, recommend granting binding power to workers in decisions on intra-firm processes.

It is undeniable that the law has a significant role to play in limiting managers’ and owners’ prerogatives over workers’ lives. Equally, the detailed discussions

by workplace republicans about the different ways in which ‘voice’ can be guaranteed are invaluable in showing the range of options available and their respective economic and political costs and benefits. However, the way in which these discussions characterize the imperative for democracy means that, from the viewpoint of democracy as a social ideal, some important aspects remain unaddressed.

To justify this critical claim, we need to explain further what we mean when we resort to Dewey’s vision of democracy as ‘a way of life’. As he stated: ‘The key-note of democracy as a way of life ... is that *all* those who are affected by social institutions must have a share in *producing* and *managing* them’ (Dewey, 1987 [1937], pp. 217–8, emphasis added). The contrast with the democratic conception implicit in workplace republicanism revolves around the emphasis on ‘*all*’ being involved, which is an egalitarian concern, and what Dewey meant by ‘*producing* and *managing*’ the rules of collective life.

Let us focus on the egalitarian imperative first. Democracy as a social ideal implies a strong egalitarian commitment because any hierarchy, whether material or symbolic (statuses of all kinds), risks leading to forms of domination of some over others that will prevent the latter having their true and full share in the production and management of collective rules. The democratic imperative therefore implies another imperative, well captured, for instance, by some of the formulas characteristic of Foucault’s late work, that the aim in modern society is being governed ‘with as little domination as possible’ (Foucault, 1997, p. 298). On this view, the denunciation of all kinds of domination is the negative counterpart of a general demand for equality.

This might sound very close to a republican stance, since contemporary republican political theorists also appear to equate freedom as non-domination with democracy and equality. As Anderson (2015a, pp. 52–5) remarks, some historical versions of republicanism were highly elitist and exclusionary. By contrast, she finds inspiration in egalitarian strands of republicanism, those associated with early-modern egalitarian movements, like the English Levellers, and republican movements in the United States during the 19th century (the latter reference is shared by the ‘labour republican’, Alex Gourevitch (2013, 2014)). As we saw, she explicitly equates the social ideal behind her republicanism with both democracy and equality. Similarly, Pettit’s ‘neo-Roman’ republican ideal is that all should be in a position to look each other in the eye without fear or deference (Pettit, 2012, p. 84).

There thus seems to be a close proximity with our egalitarian imperative. Such proximity, however, is only apparent. First, as González-Ricoy (2014, p. 245) and Breen (2015, p. 479) recall, most republicans (Arendt would be one of the notable exceptions) care for democracy only as a *means* to limit arbitrary domination, not as an end in itself. It is the freedom of each individual that truly matters for republicans. The quality of social relations and the mode of participation in collective life are only instrumental to that ideal. This might well be one of the defining differences with socialism, at least on some definitions of socialism

(Honneth, 2016). Equally, republicans do not see as close an interconnection as we do between non-domination and equality. Equality of standing is the proof, or sign, that there is no possibility of arbitrary interference hanging over anyone, but equality is not an intrinsic republican goal separate from freedom.

From the viewpoint of democracy as a social ideal, this leads to problematic consequences as regards the workplace. Republicans like Anderson are highly sensitive to all kinds of inequalities at the general social level. Her work on racial injustice, for instance, is exemplary. It is all the more surprising, then, to see how easily, along with many other republicans (Gourevitch being a notable exception), she is happy to countenance forms of hierarchy and inegalitarian relations when the latter occur in workplaces.

Hierarchies proliferate in modern firms as regards employment status and seniority and between steps in the promotion ladder, between positions in the managerial structure, between occupations, between levels of pay, et cetera. If these hierarchies lead to the possibility of arbitrary interference, republicans would raise concerns. But if they are justified, for instance by appeal to the performance principle, and are exercised accordingly, then there is nothing wrong with them from their point of view.

There are other forms of hierarchy that from the republican perspective cannot be defined as being *intrinsically* forms of arbitrary interference or domination, even though they can certainly produce it, because they again are also supported by normative justifications in the capitalist context. The first is the hierarchy that arises from some individuals being in a position of command over others simply because they have the *financial means* to own the firm or buy shares in it, whilst those others have only their labour at their disposal and no other option but to sell it. For that bare reason, the latter are automatically in a position of subjection towards the former. Despite what Pettit (2007) suggests, it is doubtful that a universal basic income and the ability of workers to ‘exit’ work contracts are sufficient to address the power imbalance that is at the heart of the wage relation under capitalism. This is especially true if we highlight a second form of hierarchy that is linked directly to the wage relation, namely the one that arises from the power of the owners to appoint their representatives in the firm, the *managers*, who through a descending line of command control and direct the rest of the workforce. The power asymmetry built into the wage relation also produces a third type of hierarchical relationship when it combines with the performance principle to select some workers as *experts*, with the power to organize the production process and in that capacity to issue their own orders to other workers.

Most republicans have no issue with those forms of hierarchy and inequality either. They take for granted the principle of expertise, which gives power to experts over those deemed non-experts. Even if some insist that power through expertise should be democratically controlled (Breen and Gonzalez-Ricoy, in particular), they do not question the principle itself. Similarly, most republicans do not question the idea that private ownership of the means of production confers on owners of capital the right to nominate representatives (managers)

to whom authority and power is thereby rightfully entrusted. Nor do they take issue with the commonplace belief that modern organizations require clear, vertical lines of command and hierarchical control. As a result of all these assumptions, most republicans take it for granted that, for reasons of efficiency and the complexity of capitalist production, managers and engineers are entitled to design all aspects of the workers' activity in their place and exercise residual decision-making rights. Because they accept these hierarchies as justified, most republicans do not think the inegalitarian relationships that arise from those hierarchies would have to be radically transformed. Here the contrast is strong with socialist conceptions of workplace democracy, such as the one formulated in classical form by Cole (1920).

From the point of view of democracy as a social ideal, in which equality is a central plank, those hierarchies and the power differentials they produce need to be problematized normatively and practically. Indeed, as already noted, the problematization of hierarchy is inherent in the position of workers who engage in real work and work collectives that display real cooperation. From the perspective of these individuals and collectives, the discourse of expertise, which is one of the strongest justifications for hierarchical power, often proves to be seriously out of touch with the reality of production. Workers frequently complain that external models of management are superimposed onto productive processes without consideration of what is really required. In such situations, the experts, technicians, and engineers who tell workers what to do from on high might benefit from organizational power to enforce their decisions, but they lack the actual productive justification for their alleged expertise.

Workers might well agree that the complexity of production processes and of coordination requires supervision, management, and direction, as Marx himself argued (2004 [1867], p. 448–9). But this does not imply that supervision, management, and direction must take the undemocratic form of what Marx termed 'factory despotism'. If, as he says, complex work processes require coordinators just like an orchestra requires a director, and if no director is functionally more important to the success of the endeavour than any other orchestra member, then there is no reason to value the director's role much higher than that of any other proficient musician in the orchestra. Indeed, many of the other musicians could also act as the director! In other words, managerial functions need not be ranked higher, or very much higher, than other productive functions. The power attached to those functions of organization and direction should instead be limited to their main goal of 'better' production, that is, more efficient or sustainable production, depending on the values the work collective aims to defend. In arguing in a similar way about restrictions to managerial prerogatives, Breen (2017) demarcates himself from other republicans, notably Hsieh and Anderson. Dejours et al. (2018) develop this insight further through an alternative, cooperative theory of management.

Equally, from the productive, bottom-up viewpoint, no authority properly derives from private ownership of the productive apparatus and control of workforce

labour. One might well argue at a macro-economic level that only with private ownership of the means of production can an economy be fully efficient. But what is at stake here is the legitimation of hierarchical power and inequality in the firm that derives from private property. From the perspective of those who were hired to produce, and who work together to do so, the only real justification for the power based in property is merely the factual power attaching to legal force and the force of bare necessity. Ferreras (2017) has shown convincingly that there is a serious conceptual confusion in collapsing the enterprise as a productive endeavour into the corporation as the unit in which investors have bought shares. For workers, their work contributes to the enterprise as a productive venture. Their wages are a means to sustain themselves, but also recognition of this contribution to the firm's overall output. Moreover, workers are generally aware of the fact that their efforts take place in the general division of labour and contribute to the fulfilling of other people's needs across society (Gomberg, 2007). All these contributive aspects of productive activity legitimate their claim to participate not only in the firm's governance, but also in the co-construction of the rules defining their own work and in the control from below of hierarchical power.

Understood in terms of democracy as a social ideal, the democratization of workplaces thus requires tackling inequalities that do not appear problematic to many republicans. The argument bears also on the conception of what is meant by democracy, or democratization, as a procedure of collective deliberation, which ties in to the second dimension we extracted above from Dewey's seminal statement. What is involved in '*producing* and *managing*' collective rules in workplaces?

As far as the work institutions are concerned, the democratic imperative means that the prescriptions framing work activities should be co-constructed between workers. This is again rooted in the reality of the work process itself. As already noted, when work collectives are fulfilling their functions, they are de facto contributing to the co-construction of work prescriptions. This co-construction might be partly hidden, but there is no reason why it could not be promoted organizationally. This would mean reducing hierarchical power to a mere instrument at the service of work collectives. Management would be there solely to help solve the collective problems that are too complex to be solved horizontally, notably those linked to co-ordination with other work collectives. This is precisely the management function envisaged by Marx in *Capital* with reference to the directors of orchestras.

Similarly, the co-construction of the prescriptive aspects of work—rooted in the reality of the work process and the recognition of the worker's actual knowledge, skills, and contributions—would also challenge the structures of power based on expertise. As with management functions, there is no denying the role of specialist knowledge and skills in complex work processes. But there is often a large gap between the reality of the contributions provided by experts, or indeed the exact reality of the alleged expertise, and the power experts are allowed to exert as a result of their status. Democratic co-construction of work activities, by making visible all the contributions involved in a work process, would in many cases equalize the values attributed to particular kinds of contribution. And as with management, it would restrict expert power to its role in production.

Another important point to note is that the deliberative communication operating in functioning work collectives displays a mode of democratic practice with features that are neglected by republican approaches. First, the scope of topics and issues open for discussion in workplace-republican models tends to be limited to control of arbitrary power and to participation in decisions on employment and wages.³ However, deliberations in work collectives concern a much broader set of issues.

Second, republicans tend to think of worker participation on the model of participation at the level of the polity. In other words, they think of workplace deliberation through the model of a deliberative democracy in which deliberative practices are reduced to procedures of decision-making. However, work collectives present potentials for a different kind of democratic practice.

In a well-functioning work collective, a small-case model of participatory democracy is demonstrated, which illustrates the contrast between participative and deliberative models of democracy (Pateman, 2012). Participation does not mean only participation in firm-level deliberation, but also sharing experiences and forming collective habits of equality, solidarity, and horizontal, collective autonomy, notably through dialogical interaction at the level of work collectives. Deliberation has a role to play in the model of participative democracy, but it is only one of the factors of democratization and it fulfils other functions than the one highlighted in the deliberative model.

A further difference with the standard conception of deliberative democracy is that the democratic contestation that work collectives harbour is not limited to 'voice', but also based on doing or refusing to do. When workers down their tools or 'work to rule', thereby stopping or slowing production, a different modality of democratic struggle therefore comes into play.

We have talked about individual work experiences and work collectives as *potential* sources of democratization. Clearly, the reality of capitalist work is that many individual work experiences and many work collectives in fact present opposite characteristics. In them, individuals experience domination, inequality, and injustice in multiple forms. They experience the opposite of what a truly democratic social life should look like. This fact, however, is not an objection to our argument. Indeed, it is part of our argument: precisely because work activity and cooperation in work collectives can provide important sources for democratization, for the reasons stated, the obstacles that hinder the realization of their full potential, notably as a result of current neoliberal managerial practices, should be criticized and opposed.

4 Democratization inside and outside work

The understanding of democracy as a way of life implies that all institutions should be democratized, and that democratization not only concerns the mode of governance of institutions, but also the various power relations and hierarchies operating in them. Another implication of such an understanding recasts the significance of workplace democracy: just as the democratic or undemocratic

habits generated by working activities produce deep effects on democratization in the rest of social life, so, too, do the democratic or undemocratic habits formed outside work deeply impact working activities.

There are several kinds of social obstacle to the democratization of workplaces that are caused by processes external to them. First, there is the reality of economic life under capitalism, which entails that workers, under a survival constraint, have little choice but to accept some form of labour contract, and one which therefore becomes a form of subjection for them. Second, there are the cultural representations surrounding occupations and professions and their respective prestige, in particular the separation between intellectual and manual labour. Third, intersecting significantly with these cultural professional norms are general relations of domination based on gender and ethno-racial identity. Fourth, class hierarchy remains, even if it is no longer reducible, as was tendentially the case in the 19th century, to ownership of the means of production. The ruling classes are not just composed of capitalists and rentiers, but also of well-paid salaried workers. The social prestige of these classes is not just economic, but also cultural.

It is easy to see how these four kinds of domination have effects directly within workplaces: domination by management arises directly from capitalist subjection, and hierarchies based on expertise rely on general value judgements about social contributions. These two forms of domination, in turn, intersect with gender and racial domination inside workplaces, as well as with deference towards the members of the ruling class and its counterpart, namely social contempt towards members of the working classes.

What is less often noted, however, is that the causal relationship also goes in the other direction: the experience of domination at work can play a decisive role in entrenching domination outside work. This was already a point made by Dewey, notably in *Democracy and Education* (1980 [1916]), when he argued that it is highly unlikely that the habit of obeying unintelligently during working hours will metamorphose into a habit of questioning power and social prestige after hours. Dejours's research has corroborated these Deweyan insights. He has shown, in *Souffrance en France* (Dejours, 1998) in particular, that the behaviours and relations that emerge in enterprises under neoliberal management directly impact on democratic life outside work. Due to individual performance assessment, prescribed competition between workers within the work collectives, and the fear of being laid off, individuals learn to distrust each other and actively engage in undermining or even destructive behaviour towards others. This notable result of neoliberal management has probably as one of its primary goals the dissolution of strong work collectives. Conversely, in other parts of his work, Dejours (2009a, 2009b) has made the case for the positive circle between democracy at work and outside work. We characterized this earlier as the ethical learning enabled by working collectives: in a healthy cooperative environment, individuals learn to trust others, listen to others' perspectives and their reasons for action, and present their own reasons, thereby establishing a collective that is able to co-construct prescriptions, to question power and social prestige, and to resist

domination and social injustice. These democratic habits can impact life outside work and thus support dynamics of democratization outside work, which, in turn, could retroact on life at work.

Republicans are, of course, equally concerned with domination at work and outside work. However, their approach to addressing workplace domination prevents them from fully seeing the ‘circle’ between workplaces and society at large. As a result, their conceptions of democratization fall short of the dynamic and expansive sense the notion takes in participative conceptions (Pateman, 1970, 2012). This is problematic from both a methodological and a strategic point of view.

First, as the above ‘circle’ suggests, the problem of freedom and justice in workplaces is not just a special problem, but part of the general problem of democracy. Republicans would not disagree with this statement, but they lack the conceptual tools needed to reveal the structural links between domination inside and outside work.⁴ For them, any social space in which domination exists needs to be addressed, but they fail to register the specificity of work as a distinct social space for the dynamics of democratization or indeed of de-democratization. Work is a *privileged* social space given the amount of time it involves and the subjective impact it has: work operates as an especial vector for learning democratic or undemocratic life habits.

In turn, this translates into more precise strategic recommendations. On our conception, in order to democratize workplaces, it is not enough to tighten up legal frameworks, to strengthen mechanisms for regulatory oversight, and to give voice to workers. It is also essential to undermine hierarchies on which all kinds of domination rest and which devalue the very meaning of democracy. Because these hierarchies find their ultimate source of legitimacy outside the workplace in the economic system, in social relations of class, gender, and race, and in cultural representations, these are also part and parcel of a program of workplace democratization. Since the workplace is a privileged locus for learning cooperative habits (Pateman, 1970), there is thus a strategic circle between workplace and social democratization, one that is not a vicious, but a virtuous one. In essence, attention to this circle retrieves what emancipatory movements have known for a very long time: the struggle for workers’ rights must be more than a sectoral struggle, since it cannot achieve its goals without being also a general struggle for social and political emancipation.

Notes

- 1 See Clot (1999, 2008), Dejours (2000, 2009a, 2009b), and Schwartz (2012). For a synthesis, see Deranty (2009).
- 2 See Breen (2017) for a meticulous reconstruction of their arguments.
- 3 Only some workplace republicans, like Breen (2015) and González-Ricoy (2014), as well as the labour republican Alex Gourevitch (2013), argue for broader worker control, but their arguments typically lead them to take a critical stance towards the majority thinking in the very tradition within which they base their initial arguments.
- 4 See Krause (2013), Markell (2008), and Thompson (2013) for similar points.

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12

A JUST TRANSITION TO A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY

Green political economy, labour republicanism, and the liberation from economic growth

John Barry

1 Introduction

One of the key and long-standing concerns of green politics and green political economy has been around ‘limits to growth’. The basic argument is that it is ecologically impossible to have endless orthodox (gross domestic product [GDP]) economic growth on a finite planet: a sub-system (the human economy) cannot infinitely expand within a larger system that is not growing. Greens have long rejected as ecologically irrational and a form of ‘wishful thinking’ the idea of growth as a permanent feature of the human economy (Barry, 2016, 2019). Permanent economic growth is both impossible either extended infinitely into the future or extended to the world’s population as a whole; hence, growth is and has been unevenly enjoyed only by a minority of the human family. More recently, this green perspective has received support from over 13,000 scientists who in an open letter, ‘World Scientists’ Warning of a Climate Emergency’ (Ripple et al., 2020), have suggested that tackling climate breakdown will be all but impossible unless we overcome GDP growth:

Excessive extraction of materials and overexploitation of ecosystems, driven by economic growth, must be quickly curtailed to maintain long-term sustainability of the biosphere. We need a carbon-free economy that explicitly addresses human dependence on the biosphere and policies that guide economic decisions accordingly. Our goals need to shift from GDP growth and the pursuit of affluence toward sustaining ecosystems and improving human well-being by prioritizing basic needs and reducing inequality.

(Ripple et al., 2020, p. 11).

While this biophysical critique and rejection of endless growth has been prominent within green analyses, greens have also advanced and developed non-ecological,

resource, and pollution arguments against the ideology of growth. These include concerns about the link between growth and inequality (within and between nations), the delink (after a threshold) between human flourishing and continuing growth, and concerns around the negative impacts of the growth imperative on democratic politics and the further spread of democratic norms throughout society and the economy.

This chapter focuses on some of these non-ecological critiques of economic growth—as related ideas and practices of competitiveness, productivity, efficiency, and maximization—and offers a green political economy argument in favour of democratizing production. It also argues that from an ecological sustainability perspective, democratizing workplaces and production could, by enabling the realization of some of the internal goods of work, reduce ecologically damaging orthodox economic growth. These internal goods—comprising, *inter alia*, creativity, autonomy, and democratic decision-making—would, by constituting practices adding to human flourishing, decouple the sphere of production from being ‘locked into’ endless economic growth. A key issue here is to distinguish formally paid employment from work, and the chapter discusses how dominant growth-oriented measures of the economy only focus on employment and thereby exclude and normatively devalue unpaid work.

The chapter then proceeds to critically analyse the dominant conception of ‘work as disutility’ within both the history of modern political economy and, more importantly, within neoclassical economics. This (mis)conception of work is one that both neglects to recognize the internal goods of work and frames a ‘productivist and growth’ oriented view of human labour that is used to justify ‘despotic’ workplace-management practices. Here the chapter briefly looks at the historic and normative arguments for modern employment as a form of ‘wage slavery’, and why, from a green republican perspective, we should be concerned about it and supportive of attempts to reduce the undemocratic unfreedoms of this condition. Of interest here from a green republican political economy point of view is that the main justification used for maintaining (and extending) workplace dictatorships and denying democracy in the workplace is efficiency and the maximization of production. In a word, growth. The central claim advanced here is that if work is an undesirable activity, this may be because of how production is organized, who controls it, and how the benefits from it are distributed, not because of work *per se*. One needs to look therefore at how work and employment are organized and structured.

From a green republican and ecological sustainability point of view, democratizing employment could, by enabling the realization of some internal goods of productive labour, replace instrumentally orientated goals of output maximization, efficiency, and productivity with goals of sufficiency and optimization. Democratizing employment is thus a positive policy option in that it can reduce negative ecological and resource impacts of economic activity oriented toward growth, as well as expanding individual autonomy and creativity within that sphere. At the same time, a green republican political economy and the

transition from the ‘actually existing unsustainability’ (Barry, 2019) of contemporary carbon-fuelled consumer capitalism require us to distinguish formally paid employment from non-remunerated productive labour as work. This chapter sketches a green republican defence of the need to *democratize employment and recognize work*, including re-orientating debate and public policy away from a dominant focus on employment and economic growth. Enabling employment to be structured and oriented towards goals other than increasing productivity at the micro-economic level is thus an important element of achieving a ‘post-growth’ economy at the macro level.

2 Green political economy and consumption

Advertising has us chasing cars and clothes, working jobs we hate so we can buy shit we don’t need.

(Fight Club, 1999)

Do good lives have to cost the earth? Can we have high quality lives with low carbon and environmental impacts? These are some of the complex questions we need to ask in the 21st century—the ‘age of the Anthropocene’—with accelerating climate breakdown and exacerbating inequalities within and between societies. Providing answers and political/policy solutions—or more likely ‘coping mechanisms’—to these interlinked questions in the turbulent times ahead will (even if as yet we cannot see the urgency) dominate or at the very least profoundly frame and shape politics, economics, and culture in the decades ahead from local to global scales. Or we should hope that addressing the existential crisis facing life on this planet does dominate and frame human political thinking and acting, since if this does not happen, then, *ceteris paribus*, the outlook is grim for future generations of the human and more than human worlds.

A key focus for understanding and navigating a way through a climate-changed and carbon-constrained world has to be political economy (not be confused with its contemporary offspring, ‘economics’) and green political economy in particular. On the one hand, green political economy denotes the metabolism between the human economy and the much larger ecosystem and biophysical processes and systems on which it depends. That is, a green political economy focus draws our attention to the non-human energy, resource inputs, and pollution, *et cetera*, that are required, produced, and transformed as a result of human economic activities. On the other, green political economy, like other critical forms of political economy, such as drawn from Marxist, post-colonial, or feminist thought, foregrounds human relations of power, ownership, and control of human, and more-than-human, assets, capacities, products, and the institutionalized organization of the human economic sub-system.

Much work in critical green political economy has rightly focused on excessive consumption and consumerism in the minority/overdeveloped world. This work has revealed how the lifestyles, aspirations for and views of the ‘good life’, and

associated economic structures of globalized capitalism, which largely serves the interests of the minority world, have systematically locked the world into an ecocidal trajectory. This critical work on consumption and consumerism shows how, beyond a threshold, the ‘iron cage of consumerism’ within a growth-oriented economy creates dangerous ecological risks in increasing inequalities, status competition, ontological insecurity, and anxiety (Jackson, 2013). Consumerism can corrode solidarity and community and can, by orientating our attention inwards towards ourselves (notwithstanding the very social character of consumerism), reduce people from being citizens to individualized and privatized subjects, such as Foucault’s ‘entrepreneurial self’ under neoliberalism (Lynch and Kalaitzake, 2018). In short, consumerism as a permanent, as opposed to a transient, activity and goal is unsustainable, unfair, and undesirable. Just as the imperative of endless and infinite growth can lead to ‘uneconomic growth’—that is, cause more economic negatives than positives and imperil long-term economic development—so, too, can consumerism (a key engine of modern growth) pass a point where it reduces, not adds to, human well-being and flourishing.

Some of the green political economy research in this area demonstrates the multiple co-benefits of strategies to *socialize* and *decommodify* consumption and to separate ownership of goods and services from use and enjoyment. Other research stresses the need to recompose and reconstitute consumption in the minority world, such as Ian Gough’s (2017) argument for strategies and policies to recompose consumption (based on distinguishing needs from luxuries) by attending to ecological sustainability and social equity. Yet while such critical work on consumption and consumerism is important and needed, my aim here is to reflect on how green political economy should analyse and reconfigure the organization of production and human collective labour as part of any transition from ‘actually existing unsustainability’. Or, more specifically, any ‘just transition’ needs to integrate this, given the possibility of *unjust* transitions from high-carbon and high-consumption ways of life and political economic orders (Barry and Mercier, 2018).

3 Green political economy and republicanism

The production of too many useful things produces too large a useless population.

(Marx, 1959 [1844], p. 51)

In mainstream policy (and academic) discourse on the transition from our current unsustainable and ecocidal economic system, production figures largely in terms of finding technological solutions to ‘decouple’ increasing production from energy, pollution, and resource use. Within this discourse, the aim is to alight upon technological innovations so as to decouple endless economic growth and consumerism—as a permanent target of the human economic sub-system—from the non-growing, regenerative larger ecological and biophysical system of which

that human economy is a part. That is to say, ‘green business as usual’. I have elsewhere criticized this ‘techno-optimistic’ strategy as unrealistic (in fact some of the thinking and policy proposals informing this strategy space are mythical) and therefore dangerous (Barry, 2019). But it is also profoundly depolitical and depoliticizing (if not outright anti-political), hence its appeal to vested interests and those supportive of the political economy status quo, or those who have lost hope or faith in political and democratic solutions to our ecological dilemmas. However, such techno-optimist magical thinking on the human economic sub-system does not exhaust how we should approach analysing the sphere of production and the organization of human labour. For reasons that will be clearer below, I wish to maintain an important distinction between *employment* and *work*. I view employment as a sub-set of human productive labour or work, a key characteristic of which is that it is remunerated, that is, it is a form of wage labour. This common distinction between employment and work tracks another important distinction for green political economy between ‘formal’, money-based, and measured economic activities—as captured by GDP most importantly—and what are variously termed practices, activities, relationships, and exchanges within the ‘core’, ‘convivial’, ‘care’, and ‘reproductive’ human economy (Coote, 2010; Escobar, 1995; Illich, 1973).

I wish to make the argument that from a green *and* republican political economy perspective on the just transition away from an ecocidal growth economy, there are ecological, sustainability, and socio-ethical reasons for democratizing formally paid employment. We can begin this argument by asking whether a democratic society truly exists when the vast experience of the overwhelming number of its citizens is ‘wage slavery’ in formal, undemocratically organized employment. Consistent with long-standing green political arguments for greater democratization of economic and political life (Barry, 2019; Bookchin, 1982; Doherty and de Geus, 1996), the green republican asks ‘Why should democracy end at the factory/office/classroom door?’ Here green republicanism can be seen to echo older socialist and Marxist critiques of the exploitation of labour under industrial capitalism, critiques that themselves express recognizably republican political concerns about domination and the curtailment of human freedom. For example, Quentin Skinner notes the republican tenor of Marx’s description and condemnation of wage slavery:

I am very struck by the extent to which Marx deploys, in his own way, a neo-Roman political vocabulary. He talks about wage slaves, and he talks about the dictatorship of the proletariat. He insists that, if you are free only to sell your labour, then you are not free at all. He stigmatises capitalism as a form of servitude. These are all recognizably neo-Roman moral commitments.

(Skinner, in Marshall, 2013)

Some of the conceptual points of interest to this resistance to ‘wage slavery’, as well as the deep connection between socialist or labour-based struggle and

republican self-government extended to the productive sphere, can be seen in the emergence and development in the early-19th-century USA of a distinct ‘labour republican’ politics, to which I turn next.

4 Labour republicanism

Historical resistance to waged employment on the grounds of involuntary dependence and hence vulnerability to domination can be seen in many statements by 19th-century American radical labour leaders. For example, we have Thomas Skidmore, founder of the Workingmen’s Party of New York, who noted that:

For he, in all countries is a slave, who must work more for another than that other must work for him. It does not matter how this state of things is brought about; whether the sword of victory hew down the liberty of the captive, and thus compel him to labor for his conqueror, or *whether the sword of want extort our consent, as it were, to a voluntary slavery, through a denial to us of the materials of nature.*

(Skidmore, 1829, in Gourevitch, 2015, p. 81, *emphasis added*)

Or consider even Abraham Lincoln, speaking at the Wisconsin State Fair in Milwaukee in 1859, describing wage labour as an unfortunate necessity only for the ‘penniless beginner in the world’. He goes on to note that ‘If any continue through life in the condition of the hired laborer, it is not the fault of the system, but because of either a dependent nature which prefers it, or improvidence, folly, or singular misfortune’. In contrast to hired labour, Lincoln laid out a vision of respectability that required avoiding a job:

In these free States, a large majority are neither hirers nor hired. Men, with their families—wives, sons, and daughters—work for themselves, on their farms, in their houses and their shops, taking the whole product to themselves, *and asking no favours of capital on the one hand, nor of hirelings or slaves on the other.*

(Lincoln, 1859, *emphasis added*)

This ideal of rural land-based and craft-based self-sufficiency, though historical, is an obvious point of connection between republican political economy and a prefigurative green politics, as Dodsworth (2019) has argued. This prefigurative green political economy has been attractive as a vision for a minority of green thinkers and activists and ‘proto-green’ thinkers such as Alasdair MacIntyre (Barry, 2013; Breen, 2007). However, its agrarian, craft-based, localized, and small-scale vision is problematic as a normatively attractive and politically feasible political economy strategy for a just transition beyond unsustainable economic growth in the 21st century. Rather than an ‘anti-industrial’ strategy, what is

needed for such a transition is a ‘post-industrial’ one; one that aims towards the ‘preservative transcendence’ of the many benefits of industrialism while ‘letting go’ of its many other negative dimensions. These negative dimensions include endless economic growth as a permanent feature of the human economic sub-system and, as argued in the next section, a view of human labour as ‘pain and toil’ that is to be minimized and only engaged in for its external benefits, such as wages.

In line with the sentiments expressed by Skidmore and Lincoln, one could posit that each citizen’s independence depends upon everyone possessing equal and collective control of and access to productive resources, that is, the means of modern industrial production, not just land. However, land and access to it (if not individual ownership of it) via practices such as ‘usufruct’ are historical examples of ‘commons regimes’ that can be used to inform modern defences of and extensions of various types of commons, common goods, and common assets and resources. This shift from a focus on land to other resources can be observed in green political defences of the contemporary commons (Wall, 2014). This contemporary commons includes democratic control over productive assets (industrial or informational, for example), resources (renewable or non-renewable), and access to (decommodified) goods and services via the welfare state or provision in the ‘core economy’. As such, greens can see themselves as inheritors of both the radical anti-enclosure movement and labour republican traditions.

The argument from wage slavery rests upon the idea that under capitalism workers ‘assent but they do not consent, they submit but do not agree’, as George McNeil, one of the most prominent members of the Knights of Labor, argued (in Oestreicher, 1986, p. 42). The voluntarist language is very important. It seeks to express how, though they were not legally slaves, workers, because they lacked property, were compelled to sell the only thing they possessed—their labour (themselves for a period)—and work for others. Modern civic republicans and contemporary greens reject the liberal-capitalist *confusion* of voluntarist action with human freedom. In this, they share the sentiments of the early labour republicans in their resistance to wage slavery under industrial capitalism.

Removing the compulsion to enter into employment—something contemporary greens have promoted via policies such as a universal basic income, for example—or democratizing employment via worker self-government would not only help realize the republican goal of freedom as non-domination. Democratizing employment could also enable the realization of goods internal to human collective labour, especially in a post-growth context. However, one of the obstacles intellectually and practically standing in the way of reconfiguring employment along more democratic lines—an obstacle that is functionally useful both for the growth-obsessed capitalist political economy, and for the despotic, non-democratic organization of employment—is a profoundly narrow and negative view of work.

5 The shadow of 'Adam's Curse': the ideology of work as disutility

To Adam he said,

Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, "You must not eat from it", cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.

(Genesis, 3: 17, *The Bible: New Revised Standard Version*, 1995)

Pain for women in childbirth and 'painful toil' for men is the Christian God's gendered punishments for humanity daring to eat of the tree of knowledge. This negative view of work still holds in common-sense, ordinary, and intellectual discussions of work. These discussions have been dominated by political economy (later economics) and its view of 'work as disutility', something essentially negative and for which one requires an *external* reward in the form of wages.

While defenders of capitalism—Weber's analysis of the Protestant 'work ethic' comes to mind—saw work as 'necessary pain' for gain and/or salvation, even progressives and revolutionaries formed their utopian political alternatives to industrial capitalism in terms of minimizing human labour through machinery and technology and presented non-work as central to the 'good life'. Some of the roots of this lie in ancient Greece. The Greek word for labour was *douleía* and, like the Latin *poena*, meant sorrow. Manual labour in both Greek and Roman culture was for slaves and women in the domestic sphere. Free men did not do work, their leisure and status as free citizens being directly proportional to their freedom from work, allowing them the resources and time to pursue the higher goals of warfare, philosophy, poetry, large-scale trade, architecture, sculpture, or politics.

Fast forward to the late 19th century and Marx's son-in-law Paul Lafargue writing in praise of idleness and leisure, and making the argument that it was capitalism that was preventing humanity from being liberated *from* work. Interested in profits and exploiting workers, the capitalist system entails that '[t]he blind, perverse and murderous passion for work transforms the liberating machine into an instrument for the enslavement of free men. Its productiveness impoverishes them' (Lafargue, 1907 [1883], p. 30). Alternatively, consider more recent anti-capitalist, technologically utopian workless proposals such as *Inventing the Future: Postcapitalism and a World without Work* (Srnicek and Williams, 2015) or *Fully Automated Luxury Communism: A Manifesto* (Bastani, 2019). For this strand of anti-capitalist politics, it is not the truth, but machines that would set humanity free ... from work.

In this way, both defenders of capitalism (notably classical and later neoclassical economists) and critics of capitalism agree in some measure on this essentially negative view of human labour. This thus leads to a narrowly *instrumental* view

of work, especially work qua employment, most commonly found in neoclassical economics. The very language mainstream economics uses to describe employment and wages is revealing: wages ‘compensate’ for the painful disutility of labour. To compensate someone is to recognize a loss of something valuable that needs to be replaced with something else—‘free time’ for ‘wages’. Against this view, one of the main green republican reasons for democratizing employment is that this would allow the realization of some of the *internal* goods of human labour, such as autonomy, authenticity, creativity, cooperation, and self-realization (Barry, 2016). Yet all of these are summarily discounted in most mainstream political economic models and thinking with their ‘compensating wage’ model of work. A related issue here, and problematic from a sustainability perspective, is that both common-sense and dominant neoclassical economic thinking present increasing consumption as the main ways in which workers’ lives can be improved. In this way, we can posit a connection between work as disutility and consumerism, and all the latter’s attendant negative ecological and social consequences (Jackson, 2017). As David Spencer puts it, within orthodox economics:

there is a lack of hope and indeed outright pessimism about the prospects of erasing the disutility of work. The sense is that workers are destined to live out their days enduring work as a pain. Missing is any reform agenda that seeks to bring meaning and pleasure to work.

(Spencer, 2014, p. 282)

Hence, there is a pressing need to challenge neoclassical/orthodox economic views of employment as ‘disutility’—that is, primarily only engaged in to secure wages. What are the origins of this claim, assumption, or, more correctly, ‘axiom’ in orthodox economics—a value judgement ‘smuggled in’ and present and perceived as a ‘fact’ (Barry, 2018)? Apart from ancient Greek and Christian views, a main source are classical political economists such as Adam Smith who defined work as ‘toil and trouble’ (Smith, 1979 [1776], 1.5.47), or early utilitarian philosophers such as Jeremy Bentham who noted that ‘[i]nsofar as labour is taken in its proper sense, love of labour is a contradiction in terms’ (Bentham, 1983 [1814–31], p. 104). Even a liberal proto-green such as John Stuart Mill opined that ‘[w]ork, I imagine, is not a good in itself. There is nothing laudable in work for work’s sake’ (Mill, 1984 [1850], p. 90). Dutiful Christian political economists to a man, this was the prevalent view of work—or more specifically manual labour—in modernity (see also Arendt, 1958). Work or human labour was, in short, a ‘necessary evil’ that simply had to be endured, not something that could or should be enjoyed, and if possible done by someone (or something) else, and ideally done by someone else the fruits of whose labour could be enjoyed by those who did not do the work. That is, just as in antiquity, modernity under capitalism viewed outsourcing and owning the fruits of labour, not labour itself, as the goal that should be pursued: human freedom consisted not in work but *from it*. This was a view enthusiastically promulgated by neoclassical economics,

but with a new twist: not only was work a disutility, but it should be also managed and organized for the purposes of maximizing productivity and profits.

Conceptualizing work as a ‘disutility’ also forms the basis of another problematic assumption found in both neoclassical economics and ‘common-sense’ views of the economy, the sphere of work, and production generally. This is the pervasive view, primarily from a ‘management’ perspective but also found beyond this, of workers as actual or always potential ‘shirkers’, a view providing the justification for the types of intrusive surveillance outlined in the next section. From a republican perspective, concerned as it is with freedom as non-domination, there is something suspicious and paternalistic, if not patronizing, about viewing work as something only motivated by and organized around external rewards. Not least since these rewards/compensations for employment leave the worker dependent upon another agent to determine and deliver them (leaving aside for the moment the bargaining power of the worker vis-à-vis whoever hires her). Such an instrumental view of work necessarily leads to—as well as being caused by—dependency on the will and power of others. Moreover, such dependency, of course, creates the conditions for vulnerability and unfreedom as discussed below. If work is a disutility, painful, toilsome, and so on, it is rational and ‘natural’ to assume workers will seek to avoid it. In this way, we move from Marx’s ‘wage slaves’ to ‘work-shy idlers’, and a corresponding need to put in place employment-based processes to monitor employees and limit their default tendency to shirk.

6 Wage slavery and productive unfreedom: growth through discipline

The slave is sold once and for all; the proletarian must sell himself daily and hourly. The individual slave, property of one master, is assured an existence, however miserable it may be, because of the master’s interest. The individual proletarian, property as it were of the entire bourgeois class which buys his labour only when someone has need of it, has no secure existence.

(Engels, 1925 [1847], p. 9)

Non- or anti-democratic forms of management and governance, such as we find in most, if not all, forms of modern employment, are, from a green and republican point of view, forms of domination and alienation—despotic experiences of non-autonomy on a daily and mass basis. We have already considered and dismissed the fiction of workers ‘voluntarily’ submitting themselves to such forms of ‘despotic power’, and associated ideas of unevenly based contractual relations between employees and employers. We can also note in passing that neoclassical economics assumes that individuals ‘choose’ whether to work or not, going so far as to view unemployment as ‘voluntary leisure’ (Osberg et al., 1986, p. 13).

Notwithstanding the limits of the paradigmatic republican case of unfreedom in the ‘master-slave’ relation, let us take modern employment as a form of

wage slavery and ask why green republicans should be concerned about it and supportive of attempts to overcome the undemocratic unfreedoms of this condition. Consider some facts about how American employers control their workers. Anderson points out that Amazon prohibits employees from exchanging casual remarks while on duty, calling this ‘time theft’. Apple inspects the personal belongings of its retail workers, some of whom lose up to a half-hour of unpaid time every day as they wait in line to be searched. Tyson prevents its poultry workers from using the bathroom. Some have been forced to urinate on themselves while their supervisors mock them (Anderson, 2017). She goes on to argue that:

About half of US employees have been subject to suspicionless drug screening by their employers. Millions are pressured by their employers to support particular political causes or candidates. Soon employers will be empowered to withhold contraception coverage from their employees’ health insurance. They already have the right to penalize workers for failure to exercise and diet, by charging them higher health insurance premiums.
(Anderson, 2017)

While one cannot say this is true of every workplace, the point is that these ‘private governments’ control individuals qua employees, often (especially amongst non-unionized workforces) without any or much inclusion of the voice of workers, with little countervailing worker power, and limited transparency and accountability in managerial decision-making. The scope of unelected, arbitrary power and authority that bosses have over workers and, thus, the real danger of causing multiple forms of on-going and sustained harms—dominating people, denying their liberty and dignity, and so on—is such that it should be of pressing concern for all republicans.

Of interest here from a green republican political economy viewpoint is that the main justification used for maintaining (and extending) workplace dictatorships and denying democracy in the workplace is efficiency, labour productivity, and maximizing production: in short, maximizing output growth while minimizing inputs. Introducing democracy and worker voice into the workplace could lower productivity (think here of the constant media, government, and orthodox economic research pointing out ‘productivity gaps and weaknesses’ that hold back a firm, a sector, or a region from producing more and growing). But what if such a linear and instrumental focus on enhancing productivity and orthodox efficiency were less dominant? Indeed, what if this were seen as both ecologically irrational and socially deficient?

For straightforwardly ecological reasons around ‘limits to growth’, we could envisage a green republican policy preference for a less productivist and growth-orientated policy, or at least viewing growth as a temporary and contingent, not a permanent, feature of economic activity (Barry, 2019). Relaxing or abandoning altogether the demands of productivity, efficiency, and growth at the micro level of the firm could, *ceteris paribus*, contribute to the ‘in-built

redundancy' or 'head room' (a key characteristic of any resilient system) at a macro-economic level required to ensure the human economy stays within the sustainability parameters of planetary boundaries. That is, introducing non-productivity goals and associated practices—such as those related to the realization of some of the internal goods of collective human labour—within the productive sphere could contribute directly to a transition to a more resilient and sustainable macro-economy. To the oft-asked question as to whether the transition to a green, less unsustainable economy and society necessarily requires more or less democracy (Doherty and de Geus, 1996), we can say that the progressive democratization of the productive sphere could directly create a less unsustainable economy. Released from the imperative of productivity and the maximization of output, greater workplace democracy is more likely to result in less macro-economic unsustainability. However, it needs to be stated that the conceptual or normative linking of workplace democracy and sustainability, like the larger connection between democracy itself and sustainability (Doherty and De Geus, 1996), will always be contingent and contested, especially if one operates with a narrow ecological/climate perspective on sustainability. This is because it is always possible for undemocratic and unjust forms of achieving 'brute' ecological sustainability. As Arendt (1963, p. 94) noted, '[t]he cry for bread will always be uttered with one voice'—you do not need freedom for mere life. However, in terms of empirical evidence we are perhaps on firmer ground, with multiple examples of democratic workplaces, especially worker cooperatives, committed to sustainability outcomes. Perhaps one of the most well-known and dramatic in its 'swords into ploughshares' narrative is the Lucas Plan, where workers and trades unions produced an Alternative Corporate Plan for Lucas Aerospace. Based on their intimate knowledge of and careful analysis of skills, machinery, work organization, and techno-economic potential, workers proposed the production of over 150 socially and ecologically useful products, including heat pumps, solar cell technology, wind turbines, and fuel cell technology (Lucas Aerospace Combine Shop Stewards' Committee, 1976).

Equally, more opportunities for freedom within employment are possible once we unshackle the organization of production from the goals of efficiency, labour productivity, output maximization, and the ideological imperative of economic growth. While we cannot say for certain that workplaces organized towards achieving goals of sufficiency rather than maximization will somehow automatically lead to more democracy, creativity, autonomy, et cetera, the achievement of those internal goods of labour is made much more possible in a 'post-productivist' workplace.

If Marx was in awe of, as well as in thrall to, the productive power 'slumbering in the lap of social labour' under capitalism, then the liberation of social labour from growth and productivity can also be viewed as a liberation from capitalism, since capitalism is inextricably bound up with endless growth and capital accumulation. Democratizing employment (which I also think a precondition for attaining some of the internal goods of employment such as autonomy, self-direction,

creativity, and collaboration) is an obvious policy choice from a republican point of view for both realizing equal citizenship and cultivating its associated virtues and reducing forms of domination and unfreedom.

7 From employment to work

Having real control of our work and time not only means improving the quality of work, it also means expanding the proportion of our lives when we do not have to do paid work at all.

(New Economics Foundation, 2016, p. 25)

A strong case can be made that a post-productivist, post-growth political economy is also a 'post-employment' (whether market or state-based) one, and one in which unpaid, non-remunerated forms of work increase, even as formally paid employment is progressively democratized. Alongside the long-standing green economic proposal for a universal basic income, the reduction of the working week is another policy that restructures the economy to enable it to become more sustainable and meet non- or more-than-economic human ends. As the New Economics Foundation puts it:

A 'normal' working week of 21 hours could help to address a range of urgent, interlinked problems: overwork, unemployment, over-consumption, high carbon emissions, low well-being, entrenched inequalities, and the lack of time to live sustainably, to care for each other, and simply to enjoy life.

(New Economics Foundation, 2010, p. 2)

A shorter working week could help break the habit of 'living to work, working to earn, and earning to consume'; help distribute paid work more evenly across the population, reducing ill-being associated with unemployment, long working hours, and too little control over time; and enable paid and unpaid work to be distributed more equally between women and men. It could also enable the 'core economy' to flourish by making more and better use of uncommodified human resources in defining and meeting individual and shared needs outside the market economy and welfare state systems.

The 'core economy' is the non-commodified set of assets, resources, and relationships that sustain human life and the 'common good' of human sociality. It is related to what others have termed the 'life world' or the 'social economy', as well as associated (but problematic) terms such as 'social capital'. These assets, resources, and relationships do not have a market price, are produced for free—though not without human labour and work—and are not profit-directed or aimed at fulfilling bureaucratic state objectives. The core economy's most important component is *time*. Hence, the positive impacts that restructuring the existing money economy via a basic income or reducing the formal working week would

have in allowing more time for the core economy to grow, deepen, and develop. Thus, while the formal, capitalist money economy, which includes the state sector, would be governed by a ‘post-growth’ imperative macro-economically (even while allowing distributed growth between micro-economic sectors, that is, differentiated as opposed to undifferentiated growth), a post-growth sustainable economy would allow and indeed necessitate the expansion and growth of the core economy. And while this calls for a much more complicated story than is possible to relate here, the basic idea is that beyond the social and ecological limits of the quantitative economy lies the limitless qualitative economy: the end of more and the start of better.

8 Conclusion

If ye love wealth better than liberty, the tranquillity of servitude better than the animating contest of freedom, go home from us in peace. We ask not your counsels or arms. Crouch down and lick the hands which feed you. May your chains set lightly upon you, and may posterity forget that ye were our countrymen.

(Adams, 1776, pp. 21–2)

We have enough evidence that orthodox economic growth beyond a threshold undermines human well-being and is corrosive of community cohesion and social solidarity. There comes a point where in answering the political economy question ‘What is the economy for?’ a threshold is reached beyond which economic growth becomes ‘uneconomic growth’. For this reason, we need to remember that while limiting economic growth is a major problem for capitalism, it does not automatically translate into a problem for individuals or communities. Yet this is only so if we adopt a green republican political economy perspective and begin to politically and creatively imagine ‘economic policy’ beyond ‘neoclassical economics’, an ‘economy’ beyond the ‘market’, and ‘work’ beyond ‘employment’.

Viewing productive work as a ‘disutility’ and workers as ‘skivers’ serves the capitalist state’s core imperative of capital accumulation/economic growth (Barry, 2018). The widespread ideological belief in endless and permanent economic growth as the only means to progress explains how undemocratic and unfree workplaces are both organized *and* legitimized within capitalist socio-economic orders. The productivity imperative within non-democratic workplaces results in macro-economic, ecological unsustainability, as well as illiberty-producing and unfreedom-reinforcing practices at the micro-economic level. Thus, what has been briefly sketched in this chapter strongly suggests that a new ‘macro-economics of sustainability’ (Jackson, 2017; Nadal, 2011) also requires what might be termed a ‘micro-economics of democratization’.

A green republican political economy needs to challenge the ideology of growth within the consumer capitalist economic system, including moving

beyond the latter's carbon energy basis and employment focus. In the interests of human (and non-human) flourishing, the transition to a sustainable economy could create a more democratic and democratizing society and economy—a new social order that enhances the sphere of human freedom via replacing the 'live to work, work to earn, earn to consume' treadmill of contemporary despotically managed production and over-consumption. And key to this is envisaging political economies beyond orthodox, undifferentiated growth as a permanent feature of the human economic sub-system and as the measure of progress. As Ivan Illich noted, '[w]herever the shadow of economic growth touches us, we are left useless unless employed on a job or engaged in consumption' (Illich, 1978, p. 10). It is time to step out of the shadows.

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13

DEMOCRATIC WORK

Grounds, models, and implications

Alexis Cukier

1 Introduction

How can we conceive of the conditions and possible forms of ‘democratic work’, in which work would be put at the service not of the accumulation of profit but the democratization of society?

The focus here on ‘democratic work’ and on democratization intends to overcome the blind spots of the workplace democracy debate (see also Deranty and Renault in this volume). Two issues are brought together under this focus that are usually considered separately: the democratization of work itself, which entails democratic control over the conditions, means, and purposes of productive activities, and the contribution of work to democracy. The aim is to examine the institutional conditions that would allow the ‘frontiers of democracy and citizenship rights’ no longer to stop ‘at the firm’s doorstep, before what is the “heart” of the separation and conflict between rulers and governed’ (Trentin, 2012, p. 413), and to show, in turn, that this extension of democracy would also transform the conditions under which democratic activity is organized and carried out throughout society. I will use an ordinary definition of democracy—the participation of all individuals in the collective activity of deliberation, decision-making, and organization in order to solve the problems encountered in the course of social life—and defend a simple thesis: if we want to radicalize democracy, we must give priority to democratizing work.

I will first argue that taking this perspective of democratic work is socially legitimate, because it is based on the ordinary normative expectations of workers, as well as on actual democratic experiments (2). Then I will show it is theoretically conceivable, provided that one overcomes the contradiction between ‘bottom-up’ and ‘top-down’ approaches to the democratization of work, and one also integrates into the latter the issues of social reproduction and the reproduction of natural ecosystems (3). And, finally, I will claim democratic

work requires new rights for ‘worker-citizens’ and new institutions in order to engage in democratic activity during working time (4).

2 Two real possibilities underpinning democratic work

What are the empirical grounds justifying the reference to a project of ‘democratic work’? In this section, I will argue the ‘centrality of work’ (Dejours and Deranty, 2011) for democracy can be verified on the basis of two real possibilities: the everyday criticisms workers level against the neo-managerial organization of work and democratic experiments at work, such as cooperatives, self-managed workplaces, and workers’ councils.¹

2.1 *Everyday criticisms of neo-managerial work organization*

Much recent research in France has reported and analysed the critical voices of workers vis-à-vis the contemporary organization of work, highlighting in particular the themes of voluntary servitude (Dejours, 1999), impeded quality of labour (Clot, 2008), or the breakdown of solidarity amongst workers (Linhart, 2009).² Overall, this research shows that a large proportion of workers object to the fact that ‘employees are always asked for more’ while ‘they are rarely consulted on the organization of their own work’ (Linhart, 2009, p. 159). This criticism reflects the facts that by fostering competition between employees, neo-management undermines the conditions of collective deliberation at work; that by strengthening shareholder power, finance tends to neutralize workers’ participation in decision-making; and that by multiplying managerial standards for controlling and determining the work process, bureaucracy deprives workers of the possibility of a consensual implementation of their decisions.

These everyday criticisms concern, firstly, the obstruction by neo-managerial devices of deliberation about the organization of work, which remains a central practice, value, and requirement in most workplaces. For example, in a sociological study of the ‘modernization’ of the French Post Office, the concern about hindered deliberation is uttered repeatedly: ‘we can no longer listen to each other’, says one teller, with bitterness (Hanique, 2004, p. 177). This is the result of a reorganization of postal agencies that favours direct contact with customers rather than discussion between tellers: ‘modernization results in a change in collective operations, the definition of what is done and what is not done can no longer be the matter of deliberation’ (Hanique, 2004, p. 275). The same diagnosis emerges from a clinical intervention in the accounting department of an aerospace company: the multiplication of ‘reports’ required by general management makes it harder to discuss ‘work priorities’ that would allow them to become ‘the matter of a collective debate or deliberation where every worker can effectively give their opinion according to their place in the work process’ (Dejours, 2015, p. 153). Such criticisms reveal obstacles, but at the same time a democratic-normative

expectation of deliberation amongst workers in the organization of their own activity.

The neo-managerial organization of work is also criticized for hindering workers in decision-making itself, whether collective or individual. The multiplication of reporting and IT controls accelerates decision-making rates, while the generalization of individualized assessment and the imposition of 'total quality' standards replace decision-making procedures with rigid requirements. The combination of these devices leads to paradoxical injunctions such as 'be autonomous, but do not take a decision' (De Gaulejac, 2011, p. 240). Yet senior managers (Bouilloud, 2013, p. 47), as well as workers in the least qualified professions, such as cashiers (Benquet, 2011, p. 135), extensively contest this neo-managerial work organization insofar as it prevents their taking decisions in an autonomous, relevant, and informed way. What is required here by workers are the time and organizational, as well as informational, means to participate in collective decisions in the workplace.

Finally, a significant proportion of workers share the sense of a loss of cooperation in work collectives that can take the form of an individualization of the relationship to work or the collective de-skilling of workers (see, for a synthesis, Deranty, 2011, pp. 85–6). In one French mineral water bottling centre, for example, it is common for older employees to refer nostalgically to an earlier period that was characterized, as one worker put it, by 'powerful unions' and by 'extensive collective participation with amazing consensus' (Linhart, 2009, p. 71). Yet the weakening of solidarity amongst workers is very often coupled with another form of disintegration of collective action: the objectives of the different categories of employees now constantly diverge, due to the imposition by managers of purely financial and accounting logics (see, for example, the case of the French telephone operator France Telecom discussed in Zarifian, 2009). Instead of constituting a 'means for the development of each individual' (Clot, 2008, p. 155), the work collective becomes an engine of competition, alienation, and serious suffering at work.

Against all this, it has been shown that the better functioning of work collectives depends on the effective possibility for all to participate in organizing their activity. This was demonstrated, for instance, in one aeronautical maintenance workshop, preserved (temporarily) from managerial reorganization: 'Its members explained to me under what conditions this [effective cooperation] is possible: work organization left partly to their own initiative—temporal organization, choice in the adaptation of tools and design of operating procedures' (Bègue and Dejours, 2009, pp. 99–100). The requirement for a work collective to control the production process is often implicit but can become explicit during a strike or social mobilization (see, by way of illustration, the case of a supermarket strike discussed in Benquet, 2011). These moments of explicit work politicization are experienced and constructed in the daily relationship to work, and the 'modest' democratic expectations arising within that shared relationship: to deliberate, decide, and act collectively in order to participate in the control of the work process (for further arguments, see Cukier, 2017).

2.2 Cooperatives, self-management, and workers' councils

It is also on the basis of real experiences—however rare, isolated, and inchoate they may be—that possible forms of democratic work can be conceived. We can distinguish three general forms of such experiences: *cooperatives*, which limit the economic and political power of owners—for example, under the SCOP status in France³ workers hold at least 51 per cent of the capital and 65 per cent of voting rights (Borrits and Singer, 2017); *self-managed companies*, which aim to abolish the economic and political power of owners (Collectif, 2015); and *workers' councils*, which seek to extend workers' control beyond the workplace (Azzellini, 2015). In *Le travail démocratique* (Cukier, 2018), I examine many past or ongoing examples of cooperative, self-managed, and councilist experiments, notably in Europe and Latin America, but in this chapter I will only consider one specific example: the firm recovered by its self-managed workers *Vio.Me* in Thessaloniki (Greece). I will focus on two issues: the transformation and politicization of the labour process, and the cooperation between workers and non-workers.

The workers of *Vio.Me*, a building materials factory, started to occupy their workplace during the summer of 2011, as they had not been paid since May 2011, when the owner decided to abandon the factory. A general assembly of workers resolved to run it under their democratic control. After a one-year struggle, including a local mobilization (demonstrations and fundraising involving neighbours and activists within and beyond Thessaloniki), they restarted production in February 2013, now producing only certified 'organic' household products rather than building materials and chemicals. Despite serious economic and political difficulties, the workers' assembly has met on most working days since 2013, every week for strategic decisions, and regularly in common with a local group—'Solidarity with *Vio.Me*'—that gathers workers, activists, and customers together and which plays an important role in the sale of products, but also in promoting self-management at the local, national, and even international level.⁴

With regard to the transformation and politicization of the labour process, it should be noted first of all that, like many other self-managed work collectives, *Vio.Me* workers 'face constant machinations from their former employers, empty promises from the authorities, lack of funds to finance production, lack of demand for the plant's products in an economy in deep recession, and an endless bureaucratic labyrinth' (Karyotis, 2014). The urgent challenge of reappropriating know-how and tools, particularly in the plant's chemistry laboratory, led them to call on the skills available not only among workers but also among activists mobilized within the city of Thessaloniki (including, for example, two engineering students from the local university in 2016). But the most remarkable fact is the decision to radically change production from building materials to household products. Workers first faced hostility from some of the former customers who, in solidarity with the former boss, no longer filled the order book, necessitating a fundamental rethink of the factory's business plan. Yet, and decisively, the change in production was primarily initiated and driven by

the network of volunteers in Thessaloniki and Athens. This explains why production now mainly consists of organic household products, which are sold at low prices. And it also explains why the members of ‘Solidarity with *Vio.Me*’ regularly participate in deliberations over product quality and trade policy. Thus, the slogan of the initial mobilization in favour of the takeover—‘Occupy, resist, produce!’—now also sustains a vision of the workplace as a common place, open to all and oriented towards social needs. As in many other cases, this democratic experiment at work came about not primarily through a systematic and planned democratic reorganization of work, but instead through a gradual politicization of the work process.⁵

The transition to self-management set in motion a remarkable departmenting of the workplace and cooperation between workers and members of the solidarity network, as well as, more broadly, between consumers and citizens. In order to face the threat of state liquidation and expulsion proceedings, and also to secure the support of the local community, the workers and solidarity network decided to increase the number of their activities directed towards communal goods and the public interest. For example, the workers decided to open a self-managed social dispensary for occupational medicine several times a week and to make the factory available to a local migrant and refugee solidarity network. As a result, the factory is now a focus not only for other self-management projects (for example, a bakery project that meets ‘organic’ criteria), but also for various activist activities in Thessaloniki. In addition, the workers and members of ‘Solidarity with *Vio.Me*’ committed themselves to supporting other self-management projects in Greece, in particular the takeover of the Roben carpentry factory in Veria, and the organization of the second ‘Euro-Mediterranean Meeting of the Workers’ Economy’, thus contributing to the ongoing construction of an international self-management movement.⁶

Such experiments, past and present, furnish an image of democratic work collectives that is very different from the image of self-centred workerism—obsessed with a defence of existing production practices—sometimes attributed to cooperativism and, especially, self-management and councilism. Consideration of such democratic experiments allows us to propose two more general hypotheses. First, they suggest that self-management tends to abolish, through its very activity, the separation between the economic function (the production of goods and services) and the political function (the production of institutions and social relations) of work. Second, they show that what makes it possible to envisage a more democratic workplace and the democratization of other social relations, is very often cooperation between an informal solidarity association or collective (composed of consumers and activists) with cooperatives or self-managed companies; a territorial-based community in which workers’ representatives are integrated; and the experience of social struggle involving workers with other stakeholders, for example a trade union, a neighbourhood council, or a political party. In addition, these cooperative, self-managing trade-union and workers-council experiments can also contribute to a broader process of class struggle for the full realization of democratic citizenship within and outside the workplace.

3 Theorizing the democratization of work

Which theoretical models can best help us to conceptualize the possibility of democratic work? The above empirical arguments raise a number of classic theoretical questions about the potentially contradictory relationship between democratic socialization ‘from below’ and ‘from above’. It is therefore necessary, on the one hand, to seek theoretical resources to overcome the potential contradiction between these two perspectives and, on the other, to renew these perspectives through harnessing recent and important contributions from materialist feminism and political ecology.

3.1 *Resolving the contradiction between class struggle and industrial democracy*

Two paradigms can be identified for sketching out a democratic work theory (Cukier, 2016a). In the class-struggle paradigm (for example, that of Marx and Lenin), the workers’ struggle towards a political and institutional revolution constitutes the main means of democratizing labour. The aim is to abolish state-based obstacles to democratization and, more fundamentally, the private ownership of the means of production, which together prevent the autonomous, democratic control of labour. In the industrial democracy paradigm, by contrast, the democratic transformation of work must precede the democratization or abolition of the state. This was defended, for example, by Proudhon, for whom work should become coextensive with the democratic exercise of power, but also by Sidney and Beatrice Webb (2011 [1897])—the main inventors of the notion of ‘industrial democracy’—and by John Dewey (1980 [1916]).

It is the potential contradiction between these paradigms that the Marxist philosopher and jurist Karl Korsch proposed to overcome in a series of texts arising from his participation in the Commission for Socialization and the Meiningen Workers’ Council during the German Revolution of 1918–1919. For Korsch, the workers’ councils were a decisive element in the class struggle for the emancipation of workers and the anticipation of a future communist society. However, his involvement in the German workers’ councils led him to propose the legal institutionalization of this brief experience, which he theorized mainly in *Arbeitsrecht für Betriebsräte (Labour Law for Factory Councils)* (Korsch, 1980b [1922]). In that text, he advances a number of normative arguments for a ‘constitution of work’ and thereafter sets out its main features based on the experience of workers’ councils.

In *Arbeitsrecht für Betriebsräte*, ‘industrial democracy’ refers to a system that aims to radicalize and systematize the existing forms of worker participation in workplaces, trade-union collective-bargaining practices, and codetermination of economic policies at sectoral, regional, and national levels. The aim is to fully articulate new democratic political rights for workers as members of workplace governance, and, on that basis, as members of society as a whole. For Korsch,

since workers' struggles, unionism, workers' councils, and all kinds of democratic experiments in the workplace should be seen as means towards this same end, the paradigms of class struggle and industrial democracy must not be conceived as contradictory but as necessarily complementary. This could be realized in a 'system of councils' based on a new constitution of work. In the second part of the book, he outlines 'workers' council legislation (*Betriebsrätegesetz*)' based on the political right of every worker to participate in decisions concerning working conditions, organization regulation, and enterprise strategy within his or her workplace. With regard to the 'immediate rights of workers who are members of the enterprise' in the various decision-making bodies he calls for—workplace councils, workplace committees, and workplace assemblies—the main right constituting the workers' status is the right of decision in the representative bodies of the enterprise' (Korsch, 1980b [1922], p. 414). For Korsch, such new rights would be the key foundation for workers' control 'from below' over the labour process. But his system of councils also proposes to renew trade-union activity so that it could assume control over the organization of the processes of worker decision-making at the sectoral and territorial levels.

A text written three years earlier, 'Was ist Sozialisierung? Ein Programm des praktischen Sozialismus' ('What is Socialization? A Programme of Practical Socialism' (Korsch, 1980a [1919])), specifies the distribution of political control over production at different levels. The basic level is that of the workplace, with a workers' council enabling workers to decide on the quality and quantity of what must be produced, the selection of materials, production procedures, and the conditions of their activity at the level of the workplace. However, Korsch also argues for two other levels of decision-making, organized by 'industry unions', that is, sectoral trade unions. There are, thus, three levels to his industrial-democracy project: that of the workers who are members of an enterprise; that of the workers of a specific industrial sector (and of the trade unions in this sector); and that of a trade union of all workers in the community, which gathers the various sectoral bodies into a central body. While he does not specifically consider the delimitation of the areas of decision-making in the last two levels, he clearly defends the principle of 'industrial autonomy', which posits that each level of industrial democracy must have specific prerogatives and remain autonomous within its own democratic process, while its decisions should be subordinated to the higher levels of the system of councils.

There are obviously many 'internal' blind spots in Korsch's approach, among which are the articulation between his envisaged work constitution (and associated rights) and other rights and domains of the law, the concrete means to secure effective subordination between the three levels of councils, and the relation between the councils' complete sovereignty over labour and the other democratic institutions that would remain necessary to control other domains of social life. To these are to be added 'external' blind spots concerning notably the relation between labour and social reproduction, as well as the reproduction of natural ecosystems. Nevertheless, his understanding of industrial democracy, of a

‘constitution of work’ granting political rights to workers, and of the replacement of capitalist and state control over work with a tri-partite system of councils does suggest a way for the theoretical and practical overcoming of the contradiction between the paradigms of class struggle and industrial democracy and a plausible outline of a democratized economy and society.

3.2 The crucial contributions of materialist feminism and political ecology

To democratize work, it is necessary not only to reduce the gap between the workplace and political institutions, but also to transform the transversal social relations that regulate the relationship between the two (see Deranty and Renault in this volume). In addition, recent social movements have now definitively made the case that labour struggles cannot be separated from feminist and ecological struggles. A proper theoretical approach to the institutional conditions of democratized work therefore must also consider the contributions from materialist feminism and political ecology that are decisive in this regard.

Materialist feminism demonstrates that democratic work requires a thorough criticism of the separation between wage labour and domestic and social reproduction activities, which are not counted as work in our capitalist and patriarchal societies and which are systematically invisible and devalued. Integrating gender relations and the sexual division of labour makes it possible to question the very definition of work by including domestic work and social reproduction within the concept of work. In the words of Galerland and Kergoat:

If work is understood in terms of the sexual division of labour, it refers to all human activities dedicated to the production of life in society. This redefinition contains a particularly subversive potential, which renews the criticism of political economy, in line with research that has shown since the 1970s that there is insufficient understanding of work, leading to the exclusion of all unpaid work from the purview of the wage society: household tasks, physical maintenance, health or care work for family members, maintenance of friendship and family networks, child-rearing, et cetera.

(Galerand and Kergoat, 2014, my translation)

The deconstruction and reconstruction of the concept of work carried out by materialist feminism is, thus, not only about taking into account domestic work and the gendered character of wage labour. It is not only a question of integrating women’s unpaid work into the generic concept of work, but also and above all of highlighting the central political issues of modern work: the ‘capture of time’—that is, the exploitation of work time and the alienation of free time—and ‘production of life’—that is, the domination exercised over

social reproduction—that affect women predominantly (Hirata and Zarifian, 2000). The analysis of gender relations reveals the essential role of women's work (paid and unpaid) in the production of life in society, thus challenging the ideological separation between the domains of private, professional, and political life. Based on the concepts of domestic work (Delphy, 2013), the sexual division of labour (Kergoat, 2012), and the social reproduction of the labour force (Federici, 2014), materialist feminism reveals that the distinction in capitalist and patriarchal societies between political (the state), social (the family), and economic (the market and the firm) institutions leads to the theoretical opposition of two functions of work that must be viewed together: the economic function of producing goods and services, and the political function of reproducing and transforming social relations. For my purposes, the fundamental contribution of materialist feminism is, thus, to place at the heart of the democratization of work a call for new institutions and forms of life allowing everyone to decide what is instituted, or not, as work, and to chart the path towards the abolition of social relations of domination based on gender, as well as class and race (Cukier, 2018, pp. 122–35).

Additionally, democratic work cannot be conceived today without taking into account the urgent need for a transition to a new production system that would no longer be destructive of human health and natural ecosystems and that could restore them both. Political ecology sheds much needed light on two main blind spots of the classical paradigms of class struggle and industrial democracy: the contradiction between relations of production and their ecological conditions (O'Connor, 1988), and the centrality of ecological issues in social struggles around work (Malm, 2016). Moreover, when it radically criticizes the illusions of 'green capitalism', political ecology helps specify ways of responding to the questions raised under democratized work: 'What goods and services do we need? What should we produce, how, in what quantities? Who decides that? In what environment do we want to live?' (Tanuro, 2012, p. 19). Ecological concern for the 'internal nature' of workers (in particular their health), as well as for the 'external nature' of the environment (in general countering and reversing the destruction of the biosphere), is therefore a fundamental component of democratic work. Even more, as the contemporary ecological challenges require a radical transformation of the productive infrastructures and ways of production, this ecological concern must become a foundation for specifying the means and ends of a sustainable form of democratic work.

Indeed, beyond the necessary abolition of harmful productive activities—highlighted in particular by André Gorz (see, for example, Gorz, 1978)—a democratic and ecological form of work would clearly also necessitate a planned, global economic transition. However, democratic planning for ecological transition cannot be satisfied with the transformation of political institutions separate from a redesign of the productive system, nor with an ecological transformation of the production process separated from planning at the political level. Instead, it requires the articulation of class struggle and industrial democracy within the

framework of a democratically planned ecological transition. As explained by Löwy:

Only a collective and democratic approach would make it possible to meet real social needs, reduce working time, eliminate unnecessary and harmful production, and replace fossil fuels with solar energy. This implies a deep incursion into the capitalist property regime, a radical extension of the public sector, and free access to all services—in short, a coherent eco-socialist plan.

(Löwy, 2011, p. 11, my translation)

In other words, democratic and ecological work must therefore succeed in integrating, within the time socially defined as work, a democratically planned ecological transition with a view to transforming working conditions and production systems according to the criteria of workers' health and a flourishing environment. Hence, against the Gorzian separation between 'autonomy at work' and 'cultural, moral, and political autonomy' (Gorz, 1997, p. 72), which postulates that no autonomous political activity can ever take place in work and leads to the conclusion that only militant activity can effectively transform society, we should plead for a democratic internalization of the required ecological transition within the process, the organization, and the division of labour itself.

On the basis of materialist feminism and of political ecology we can therefore conclude, on the one hand, that it is necessary to create new institutions that would make it possible to democratically decide not only on the conditions and organization of work, but also—and first and foremost—on the social definition of work; and, on the other, that it is desirable to internalize the moments of investigation, deliberation, and decision-making within working time (significantly reduced and redeployed) in order to allow all 'worker-citizens' to take part in the decisions about the conditions, means, and ends of their work.

4 What rights and institutions allow for democratic work?

Finally, on that basis, what might be the rights and institutions required for a democratic form of work aiming to overcome the divide between the democratic rights of workers and of citizens?

In *Le travail démocratique* (Cukier, 2018), I have argued that the implementation of a 'democratic mode of production' would need specific institutional innovations to address the following three problems: how can we jointly democratize the process, organization, and division of labour; how can we decompartmentalize the relationship between the workplace's internal and external relations in order to support already existing or new forms of transverse democratic cooperation; and how can we abolish the separation between economic and political

activities, between worker and citizen? The legal and institutional innovations required to address these problems can be summarized as follows:

- a A right to work for all at the age of political majority, accompanied by a significant reduction in working time, a high minimum threshold of remuneration for work that makes it possible to live well, and a right to initial and continuing training.
- b A new legal status and understanding of the firm, transforming it into a political institution in which all workers are autonomous members and in which each member has an equal right of decision.
- c The articulation and political institution of a ‘worker–citizen’ status and role, equal for all and replacing the employment contract, conveying and guaranteeing in particular a right to decide in three new institutions: *workplace councils* at the level of each economic entity, whose decisions would concern the recruitment, remuneration, organization, and quality of work; *economic councils* at the level of the industry or service sector, composed of representatives of the workers involved, whose decisions would prevail over those of the workplace councils and concern the coordinated objectives of production in the sector; *social councils* at various territorial levels, with the participation of representatives of all workers residing there, whose decisions would prevail over those of the other two councils and concern the aims of work and, therefore, the classification of specific social activities as work or not, as well as, for example, the decommodification of specific goods and services.

Of course, we also need to consider what a democratic working day could look like, organized around collective moments of training and investigation, deliberation, decision-making (in the three councils), and production. Full consideration of this is beyond the scope of this chapter (but see Cukier, 2018, pp. 233–5), so I will instead conclude with three theoretical claims. First, the ‘workplace democracy’ debate is currently too narrow: it fails not only to examine the social relations that concretely affect activity in the workplace, but also the practical processes of impeded or developed deliberation, decision-making, and collective action by work collectives (often linked to other collectives outside the workplace). Second, the political centrality of work for democracy requires clarification. Generally speaking, the political centrality of work can be understood as a *geometric centrality*: the process, organization, and division of labour constitute a central political issue in capitalist societies; as a *constitutive centrality*: work provides the foundation and organizational structure of systems, institutions, and political practices; and as a *dynamic centrality*: work is the main vector in the reproduction and transformation of social relations, and, therefore, the main instrument of political action (Cukier, 2016b). As follows from my discussion above, dynamic centrality is decisive for understanding the conditions of possibility of democratic work, in which a radically reformed workplace would become the basic entity of

a renewed democratic system. Third, the broader debate about the necessary radicalization of democracy should take into consideration the political significance of working collectives. In this respect, a thorough analysis of democratic experiments at work—of their potential and specificities, as well as of their obstacles and limits—should become a key moment and opportunity not only to enrich contemporary theories of work but also to renew political theory.

Notes

- 1 See Dejours et al. (2018, p. 17) for a theoretical justification of the method consisting in the analysis of ‘expectations of how work ought to be as they are revealed in the negativity of the work experience’.
- 2 For further developments, see Cukier (2018, pp. 28–52).
- 3 In France, SCOP refers to the status of the *Sociétés coopératives et participatives*, which sets up a majority ownership of capital and control of decision-making power by employees. In 2018 there were circa 3,000 such cooperative societies in France with around 60,000 employees overall.
- 4 For a discussion of democratic processes in larger firms and workplaces, see Cukier (2018, pp. 179–83, 217–21). For proposals combining direct forms of democracy at the level of the work collective and more representative forms of democracy at a bigger scale, see also Cukier (2018, pp. 203–6, 226–35), as well as the third part of this chapter.
- 5 For the examples of SCOP-TI in France, Catalan Integral Cooperative in Spain, Rimaflo in Italy, and Zanon in Argentina, see Cukier (2018, pp. 173–206).
- 6 See the website of *Vio.Me* (www.viome.org) and Fuori and Goument (2019).

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14

PROLETARIAN DEMOCRACY

What can we learn from the Soviet experience?

Paul Gomberg

1 A personal experience

Soon after being denied tenure on my first academic appointment, I began a nearly six-year stint as a postal worker at the main post office in St. Louis, Missouri, 16 months as a manual mail clerk, a two-month detail as a mail carrier, and four-plus years as a clerk at the Postal Data Center, mostly as a bookkeeper. The most skilled work required mastering an adding machine keypad, which took about a month; other tasks took only an hour or a day to master. Sometimes, I unloaded trucks or sorted sacks of mail coming down a slide. I was subject to the will of a supervisor who could intervene in any task and re-assign me to a different task.

I felt alienated from my labour for several reasons. While I would endorse the importance of personal letters, they are a tiny fraction of the mail; most of it is advertising, catalogues, or bills. Engagement with any task could be interrupted by a reassignment; it was better not to care (in carrying mail, I had an eight-hour shift to complete a well-defined task, not alienating in this way). I had little understanding of the overall process or my role in it. I was an instrument of the wills of other people. At its worst, then, I was alienated from my labour in three ways: I didn't endorse the overall project; I didn't care about my task; I had no effective will in my labour.

My experience was not unique, and scholars have noted the ill effects that labour can have on the worker: specifically, repetitive labour tasks that lack complexity can make the worker less intelligent; being subject to close supervision can make workers passive and less capable of planning (Kohn and Schooler, 1983). Moreover, being at the bottom of a labour hierarchy creates stress for the worker that shortens her life (Marmot, 2004). Professionals engaged in complex, self-directed work whose purpose they endorse do much better and are most satisfied with what they do (Lane, 1991).

In *How to Make Opportunity Equal*, I addressed the harms of repetitive simple labour; about issues of *control* over one's own work, I wrote a little about participation in planning the labour process both locally and globally, but closed that discussion with the thought that doing justice to issues of workplace democracy is 'another book—at least one' (Gomberg, 2007, p. 80). The present essay is a first stab at understanding the issues. Unlike most philosophical writing about work, I ground my thoughts in the experiences of workers' movements and in the efforts, especially in the Soviet Union, to empower workers. Neither movements of workers' resistance nor the Soviet experience offers anything close to a final or ideal model of workers' democracy. Still, I believe that philosophers err if they address these issues in ignorance of what working-class and revolutionary movements can teach us.

The argument of this essay is as follows: both John Rawls and market socialists believe that workplace democracy is possible within constraints imposed by a market economy, but the discipline imposed by markets severely limits the scope of choices; alleged democracy is largely meaningless, and workers soon become passive, leaving profit maximization to the experts. More important, being subject to market discipline tends to reorient our ways of thinking: it can make egalitarianism seem illogical or immoral. Hence, it is worth exploring planned economies and the possibilities for workers' democratic power within them. I explore the Soviet experience offering not a balanced view of it but instead the most promising precedents for workers democracy; still, the Marxist compromise of socialism instead of communism undermined workers' power. I conclude by offering tentative suggestions about what proletarian democracy entails.

2 Workers' democracy in market economies?

John Rawls wrote that a just society would end servile, monotonous, and mind-numbing labour; all workers could engage in meaningful labour 'as they so incline' (Rawls, 1999, p. 464). In a just society, labour is not a burden but a central form of self-realization, 'a vital need' (Marx, 1974 [1875], p. 347). This tendency in Rawls's thought is Marxian: the good life is an active life that includes labour, which gives life meaning (see Gomberg, 2018a). We do better to maximize people's opportunity for meaningful work than to maximize the material resources available to people. Samuel Arnold (2012) shows how the difference principle, when applied to work, requires that opportunity for complex and self-directed labour be maximized for those with the least such opportunity.

Servility before a boss is part of what makes labour oppressive. So, Rawls's views about labour suggest that workplace democracy must give the worker control of the conditions of her work—Arnold's (2012) essay gives a Rawlsian justification for this idea. How might this be effected institutionally? Nien-hê Hsieh's (2012) 'Work, Ownership, and Productive Enfranchisement' provides the most careful defence of the idea that workers' power on the shop floor would result

from Rawls's favoured institutional realization of justice: property-owning democracy.¹ Wide distribution of productive assets, achieved by curtailing inheritance of wealth and granting to all citizens a share of productive wealth, would give all an alternative source of income, make them less dependent on income earned from work, therefore more able to leave oppressive work environments, creating pressure on employers to humanize work and empower their workers (Hsieh admits that a guaranteed basic income might have a similar effect but is incompatible with Rawls's overall view). Hsieh defends a very weak form of workers' power, basically facilitating exit from a bad job. How much power would workers have, even with wide dispersal of capital and options to exit oppression? The answer is unclear.

Rawls (2001, p. 176) suggests worker-managed cooperatives as a way forward, as with, perhaps, the Mondragon cooperatives in the Basque region of Spain (Whyte and Whyte, 1991). But the results of such cooperative efforts are mixed, to say the least, as cooperative enterprises compete on international markets. Sharryn Kasmir's (1996) anthropological study of Mondragon, involving interviews with workers and comparing results in cooperative and conventional enterprises, showed little worker participation and democracy. While the culture and ideals endorse cooperation and worker participation, workers' representatives on the Social Councils she studied (Social Councils are bodies of workers' and management's representatives that meet to discuss how to run the firm) had little time to discuss relevant issues with the workers they represented, and such brief discussions as they were allowed (45 minutes per month for one representative she interviewed) had to take place on the shop floor during production with much background noise and were limited to one economic issue and one social issue (Kasmir, 1996, p. 136). Why so little time? Why were the workers' representatives not given time and resources (lawyers, economists, and other experts that unions and Workers' Councils in private firms employ)? The cooperative firm had to make a profit; to allot time for these discussions, to stop production or provide a meeting place for a group to meet, to pay for experts to advise workers what best served their interests—all of this would cut into profits. In any event, workers had neither the information they needed nor the time to discuss the issues the firm faced, and tended to be passive about and uninvolved in management decisions.

There are two deeper reasons why workers' democracy is unlikely to flourish in cooperatives. First, democratic discussion and decision-making ordinarily takes place in a context of shared aims. For example, in national political campaigns, the aim of advancing the supposed 'national interest' is assumed as shared, and—ideally, at least—debate is about how to do that. In the case of a cooperative, the shared aim is the good of the firm, its economic flourishing, the same as with a privately held company, but here the owners are the workers. There is no antagonistic conflict of interest between the aims of management and those of workers, as there is in a private firm. But management's full-time job is to discover through research and discussion what will advance the good of the cooperative. Why should a worker who runs a drill press or other machine think

she can know better than management what will promote the good of the firm? Hence, an attitude of 'they know best' is likely.

Second, cooperatives compete on national and international markets; workers—here assuming they are actually involved in the decisions, as the workers Kasmir studied were not—would be forced to make decisions pretty much like any other capitalist manager. In effect, they are forced by the market system to decide how best to exploit themselves. In capitalist economies, workers sometimes compete for jobs with other workers by agreeing to work harder for less and not make problems for the boss.² Why should workers in a cooperative firm be different? In fact, as Kasmir (1996, pp. 133–43) emphasized, in private firms workers and the syndicates that represented them often took an antagonistic attitude toward management, defending workers' interests against management. In cooperatives, the workers are the owners; management represents the owners as a collective. Whatever benefits the firm benefits its owners, the workers. The workers are pushed to think like capitalists: how can I exploit and oppress myself to make profits for the firm I own? What is so liberating about this?

These problems might be solved, it may seem, by an aggressively socialist society with worker-controlled firms competing on markets. David Schweickart (2012) proposes this. Excepting very small businesses, which would operate as now, firms would be owned by the state, but would be run democratically by their workers, each having one vote. Workers' income would be not from wages but from a share of the firm's profits (after subtraction from these of a tax on the firm's capital), giving each an incentive to work efficiently and encourage the same in co-workers. Large-scale capital would be owned by the state, and finance would be by way of banks owned and controlled by the state. Investment capital would be distributed based not on expected profits but on population: regions with more people would get more capital. This provision is intended to minimize *regional* inequality within the state's territory, a provision perhaps inspired by the fragmentation of Yugoslavia, as wealthier regions, particularly Slovenia and then Croatia, broke off in order to resist any tendency to equalize across Yugoslav territory. On the issue of workers' democracy and the sorts of decisions workers might make, Schweickart writes:

There is no reason to suppose that workers would always give top priority to maximizing income. If they can reorganize their work processes so as to make them more satisfying, more skill enhancing ... they may well choose to sacrifice a bit of 'efficiency', and hence income, to do so.

(Schweickart, 2012, p. 210).

This passage gives a clear sense of how Schweickart conceives workers' democracy. Still, questions persist. In competitive markets, mightn't workers be *forced* to sacrifice *both* income and job quality (maximizing efficiency)? In competitive markets, price-cutting, facilitated by lower wages and brutal jobs,

might be necessary to survive market competition. If Schweickart thinks competition would not be so intense, why does he believe this?

There is a deeper problem. Many systems can be *described*, but it is another issue whether they would be *stable*. In *How to Make Opportunity Equal*, I wrote that philosophers sometimes ‘write as if they were addressing God’, as if it is not important to address why people, in daily life, would naturally support their proposed system (Gomberg, 2007, p. 158). Ideals closer to current social organization often *combine* practices with which we are familiar (such as working for pay and purchasing our needs as commodities) with egalitarian institutions that would seek to create conditions more-or-less equal for all (such as prohibitions of bequest and wide distribution of capital or state ownership and control of capital so as to equalize conditions across regions of a nation). These ideals *retain* practices which tend to make people focus narrowly on their own good and that of their families while supposing some form of egalitarian redistribution. An all-powerful God might be able to impose such a system, but egalitarianism will not make sense to people whose conceptions of their interests and their relationships to others are shaped by market norms. Both Rawls’s property-owning democracy and Schweickart’s market socialism are vulnerable to this criticism. People focused on accumulating income and wealth and creating advantages for their children will experience redistributive norms, which make it impossible to leave their wealth to their children, as unjust. After all, ‘it’s my property, and I earned it’, a norm assumed and reinforced by market relationships. Schweickart’s system of equalizing wealth between regions and retaining state ownership and control of capital will not make sense to people whose daily lives are structured by market norms, as the Yugoslav experience shows.

So, let’s discuss Yugoslavia. As Slovenians pushed for policies that favoured the more industrially advanced regions, Serbs pushed for policies that favoured the more populous but poorer areas. Vladimir Unkovski-Korica, after reviewing the history of Yugoslav socialism through its various stages, gives this summary:

The rise and fall of the Yugoslav model does not prove the infeasibility of socialism. Rather the reverse, it shows that any system hoping to provide an alternative to capitalism needs to begin from the premise of the progressive elimination of the market. Self-management in Yugoslavia was linked to the market from its inception. As such, it was devoid of emancipatory potential from the beginning. Rather than worker participation increasing across its successive phases of implementation, the opposite was the case. ... Quick returns on investment became a priority, and the marriage of worker collectives and market incentives stressed the competitive nature of the enterprise. In a diverse country like Yugoslavia, this inevitably fuelled regional struggles, easily translatable into inter-ethnic rivalries.

(Unkovski-Korica, 2015, p. 42)

Schweickart might reply that Yugoslavia did not equalize capital investment across regions as he proposed. But why didn't Slovenian leaders support that? They were thinking as the market encouraged: pursue what is in *my* (or our) economic interests, not in the interests of the working class generally. So, while the Yugoslav plan was developed by communists with origins in the anti-fascist partisan movement of World War II, their immersion in a market economy fostered the development of nationalist/capitalist motivations rather than communist ones. To them, egalitarianism did not make sense. What happened to their communism, to their commitment to the working class irrespective of nationality (I am not doubting that it was at one time sincere, at least for many)? The market experience fostered something else.³

Rawls's and Schweickart's proposals suffer from the same fatal flaw: they try to marry egalitarian norms to market economies. The marriage will not endure. Markets win, and capitalism re-emerges, with all its inequalities and erasure of workers' power and control.

Schweickart claims that without markets and prices, there is no rational way to guide production and distribute resources. Objecting to the proposal that housing be free, Schweickart writes that to allocate housing rationally, we would need to know people's preferences: 'planners would need to know *how important* the various features are and what tradeoffs individuals would be willing to make' (Schweickart, 1998, p. 173, emphasis in original). Prices provide that information; there seems no alternative.

This is the heart of the issue. For Schweickart, economic activity aims to satisfy preferences. This is the bourgeois view: life is good when we acquire the things we prefer. The communist tradition provides an alternative view: human nature is social and rational. We flourish when we develop and use our rational abilities in cooperative labour that provides for everyone's needs. In order to flourish through labour, each worker's needs must be met. Hence, Marx wrote 'From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs (Marx, 1974 [1875], p. 347). No economy could satisfy all the consumer preferences people might come to have. But people can get what they need in order to contribute their abilities and flourish through labour (Gomberg, 2007, pp. 148–67). The good life is one of constructive social labour, not preference satisfaction.

What does this have to do with proletarian democracy? Decisions aim at something. Capitalist-minded experts are better than workers at advancing a firm's marketplace position; if that is what decisions aim at, then there is no point to *proletarian* democracy. However, to create conditions where all can flourish through labour, workers need debate and discussion.

3 Some Soviet experiences⁴

This section reviews two things: a factory trial described by Lili Körber and the Stakhanovite movement, both in the Soviet Union in the 1930s. This is not a

history of Soviet factory life; my purpose is to clarify what workers' control and power might require.

In *Life in a Soviet Factory* (1933), a diary of her two months as a machinist at Leningrad's huge Putilov complex, Lili Körber describes a 'Comrades' Court' held in her building, at which workers' attendance was compulsory. The building's storekeeper, Fima Ivanova, was charged with neglecting her duties and thereby undermining the workers' project of providing tractors for peasants on collective farms. Two workers sat as judges to consider the accusation of factory worker Malyshkin that, 'Whenever one comes to her for an instrument, she is always so busy with her powder-puff or her novel that she forgets where she is'. Vedeneyev, a communist and one of the judges, charged:

And did it not occur to you, Ivanova, that while you were powdering your nose the imperialist powers were arming for war against the Soviet Union? Why are we developing our industries? For fun, or because we want to make ourselves independent of the foreign capitalists who wish us ill? All the class-conscious workers are united with the peasants to exert themselves to the utmost, but you, a Young Communist, just sit there and powder your nose.

(Körber, 1933, pp. 157–8)

The other judge pointed out that, as a Young Communist, more was expected of Ivanova. The judges withdrew from the room, then returned with a verdict that, in light of previous failures, Ivanova was to be admonished and made an apprentice.

Many workers disagreed with this judgement; an older worker reminded Vedeneyev of a film that showed how orphan children were made useful workers by showing them 'patience and sympathy'. Valya Shimko, a respected communist, spoke next:

It is not our task to punish Ivanova, but to educate her. I therefore propose that she shall be removed from her isolated position in the store where she cannot see how our tractors are made and placed at a work-bench. The work done by the others and the joy of production will be stimulus to her, while the piece-work system will enable her to gain an idea of her own output.

(Körber, 1933, p. 159)

While Vedeneyev objected that she already had failed as a machinist, Shimko persisted that Ivanova had to be given a chance to do better. Körber comments that everyone could see that Vedeneyev was wavering, and Shimko added that they would discuss the issue further at their Communist Party cell meeting that evening. Vedeneyev and Shimko continued the argument in the hall, and as Körber passed, she heard her tell Vedeneyev, 'That is a deviation to the left. Such a

severe, unjust sentence can only weaken our authority and nullify the educative effect of a Comrades' Court' (Körber, 1933, p. 160), a sentiment Körber endorses, pointing out that Ivanova had become a martyr in the eyes of other workers. While we are not told how this was finally resolved, Shimko's argument seemed to prevail.

This court took place in August 1932 at the end of the first of the Soviet Union's five-year plans for developing the economy. In 1931, at a meeting of business executives, Joseph Stalin reviewed the history of invasions and defeats Russia had suffered from stronger powers; the same would happen to the Soviet Union if it remained 50 years behind the advanced capitalist powers. That economic gap had to be made up in ten years: 'Either we do it or they will crush us' (Stalin, 1954 [1931], p. 41).⁵ According to John Scott (1973 [1942]), this understanding was widespread among Soviet workers. The development of industry was deemed vital to defence against invasion, leading to industry being increasingly centred in the Ural Mountains, far removed from where an invading power would reach it. Then, after the 1939 non-aggression pact with Nazi Germany, the Soviets moved much industry from the Soviet west to the Urals. All of this proved vital to the Soviet defeat of the Axis invasion, as Soviet tanks, other armoured vehicles, and trucks played a crucial role in crushing Nazi forces at Stalingrad, Kursk, and elsewhere.

Many Putilov workers, Communist Party members but also many others, understood their work as part of this effort to build and defend a society that belonged to the workers. Körber's building was part of tractor production; over the door, a sign proclaimed, 'Tractor proletariat, into thy hands is given the fight against the kulaks. Fight valiantly for every tractor, for every component part of a tractor!' (Körber, 1933, p. 2). In 1932, the Putilov complex produced 32,000 tractors for collective farms, enabling poor peasants to escape domination by kulaks. The court proceeding and ensuing discussion—as well as ubiquitous wallboards where workers could post criticisms of others' behaviour—must be understood in this context. What response to Ivanova's failures as storeroom manager would advance their shared mission? We will return to the question of what this shows about proletarian democracy.

In August 1935, Aleksei Stakhanov cut 102 tons of coal with a pneumatic pick in a work shift of 5 hours, 45 minutes—a world record. His achievement—soon followed by production records set by many others—was probably a response to Stalin's 4 May 1935 speech calling on workers to master technique in production (Stalin, 1978a [1935]). Here's how it came about. Twenty-seven-year-old Konstantin Petrov was party organizer at the Central Irmino mine where Stakhanov was a skilled coal hewer. Assigned to the mine in 1933, Petrov surveyed the miners for ideas about how to improve production and made some changes, particularly ensuring that workers had the materials they needed. In late August 1935, the party committee at the mine decided to have a contest for best coal hewer. On 29 August, Petrov and Stakhanov's section supervisor visited his home. Stakhanov identified problems in cutting coal through an entire

shift: lack of air pressure for the pneumatic pick, overcrowding, and insufficient timber. Petrov and the supervisor told Stakhanov that they would arrange ideal conditions for a work shift to be held late at night when other miners would not sap pressure for his pick; they secured sufficient wood and workers, some to timber newly cut areas and others to load the coal onto cars and remove loaded coal cars from the area. Stakhanov had only to cut coal (Siegelbaum, 1988, pp. 67–70).

Records were set by Stakhanovite workers by developing improved tools and better organization of the work area and the work process. Bricks were placed at a level close to the level of the work so that bricklayers needed to do less bending and lifting; tasks were divided so that some workers mixed mortar, others maintained a supply of bricks, while others laid bricks (Markus, 1936). When Stakhanovite brigades were formed, workers organized and coordinated the work of a team to increase productivity; for example, Aleksandr Busygin rearranged ‘the schedules of his brigade members such that he would not have to wait for the metal to be heated or brought to his steam hammer’ (Siegelbaum, 1988, p. 80).

Many innovations—assigning each worker a separate task, as in the bricklaying example, and the separation of tasks and workers that enabled Stakhanov’s record—would have drawn Adam Smith’s approval; he pointed out how specialization of labour tasks improved productivity by saving time moving from one task to another and improving skill (Smith, 1979 [1776], 1.1.15). The changes themselves show nothing about workers’ empowerment. What empowered workers was the Communist Party’s encouragement of workers to challenge or even defy management if these would help the Soviet project of building industry. As Siegelbaum observes, the Soviet image of the Stakhanovite worker was of someone who ‘did not unthinkingly follow instructions, but on the contrary dared to defy them’. Stakhanovite workers pressured ‘engineering-technical personnel [to exhaust] themselves providing requisite materials and service’ (Siegelbaum, pp. 150, 164). British economist Maurice Dobb, much influenced by Soviet thought, wrote, ‘What was novel about [Stakhanovism] was that it ... arose from the initiative of individual workers themselves; and as such its achievements came as a definite surprise to the management of industry’ (Dobb, 1966, p. 468).

Soviet labour official, B.L. Markus, reviewed the Soviet emphasis on technical education, which mushroomed in the early 1930s as workers ‘vie[d] with one another as to who will best master the theory of his trade’ (Markus, 1936, p. 20). The Stakhanovites overwhelmingly had mastered the ‘techminimum’ examinations for their trades. The Stakhanovite movement developed from Stakhanov’s coal cutting record on the night of 30–31 August 1935, which was surpassed in early September. By mid to late September, Stakhanovite workers were setting records in other trades throughout the Soviet Union. The movement was encouraged from the centre, the Communist Party facilitating the November All-Union Conference of Stakhanovite Workers in the Kremlin (Siegelbaum, 1988, p. 82).

Western workers in Soviet factories observed Stakhanovism on their jobs. The Briton Peter Francis worked in a plastics moulding facility for ten months in 1937, and John Scott, from the United States, worked in the huge iron and

steel complex in Magnitogorsk, on the eastern slope of the Ural Mountains in western Siberia, from 1932 to the end of 1937. Francis noted that Soviet workers tended to be carefree and happy, secure in extensive social services, working only a seven-hour day (Francis, 1939, pp. 101–2). The Soviets relied on piece-rates and other financial incentives to encourage workers to raise their productivity and skills. Stakhanovism did the same. At the factory where Francis worked, it raised production: 70 per cent of its workers were classed as Stakhanovites, fulfilling the piece-rate norm by at least 110 per cent. Workers looked down upon their mates when they did not surpass production norms. At Magnitogorsk, the movement for productivity was hailed in banners and other propaganda, with Scott writing that the ‘Stakhanov movement ... produced very marked results during the latter half of 1935 and almost all of 1936’ as ‘everyone nos[ed] around his department trying to find new sources of productivity’ (Scott, 1973 [1942], p. 162). He also detailed large production increases, apparently the result of workers’ initiative.

Soviet leaders gave Stakhanovism a remarkable interpretation. At the November 1935 Stakhanovite conference, Stalin said that one significance of the Stakhanov movement lay ‘in the fact that it is preparing the conditions for the transition from Socialism to Communism’. He went on to explain this distinction: in socialism workers receive consumption goods corresponding to their contribution (as represented by the piece-rate system). In communism, however:

each works according to his abilities and receives articles of consumption, not according to the work he performs, but according to his needs as a culturally developed individual. This means that the cultural and technical level of the working class has become high enough to undermine the basis of the distinction between mental labour and manual labour.

(Stalin, 1978b [1935], p. 92)

He added that productivity had created such abundance of necessities that the Soviet Union could soon move to free communist distribution.

Markus emphasized that work was becoming a vital need for workers. Doing so, he noted that Soviet workers were eager to master their trades and learn the theory behind them. They participated in theatre and music and enjoyed theatre, movies, and literature. Their nutrition improved; access to healthcare and schools increased; and Markus noted that labour became easier with improved methods, and workers loved their work.⁶ At the end, he suggested that the rising level of technique at work and culture outside work was ending ‘differences between manual and intellectual work’. He concluded that ‘work is on the way to becoming a continuous creative activity, the source of higher joys, and of a fruitful expansion of the human personality’ (Markus, 1936, p. 33).

It is easy to be sceptical of Stalin’s and Markus’s claims: communism and the abolition of the division of mental and manual work never were realized. Work never became a vital need. Still, it is unlikely that there was no truth at all to their

claims; I believe that they represented important, but secondary, elements of the expansion of production in the mid-1930s.

However, they were undercut by important weaknesses. There were cults of labour heroes and material rewards for higher production. The productive achievements of Stakhanovites were the result of a *cooperative* effort, other workers providing the materials and services. Prestige and money went to the *skilled* workers; other workers resented this focus on the skilled for what was a *team* effort, a point emphasized by Siegelbaum (1988, p. 199). Material rewards for production convey the message that labour is a burden and undermine communist incentives—building Soviet society, finding joy in constructive work—shared by many workers (Gomberg, 2007, 2016). Moreover, constant repetition of the same task harms the worker mentally and physically (Adam Smith was well aware of this). Rotating auxiliary work and skilled labour among workers—encouraging all to acquire skill—would have been far more communist.

4 General characteristics of a stable proletarian democracy

What follows are tentative conclusions about proletarian democracy. Democracy is a form of rule or government over the actions of people. Marx (1975 [1852], p. 64) called workers' power 'the dictatorship of the proletariat'; Lenin (1976 [1918]) explained that it was simultaneously a class dictatorship of the workers over their would-be oppressors and an expansion of democracy to the poor and the working class.⁷ However, at the level of national or broader government, this cannot mean that each worker has a significant voice in determining overall policy for the entire polity. At its best, the Soviet Union carried out broad democratic discussion of policy, with millions debating alternatives—for example, the debate over pace of industrialization and how to conceive the Soviet project in the mid-1920s.⁸ That discussion is the background of the trial at the Putilov complex and Stakhanovism. So, proletarian democracy could mean widespread rational debate about national or broader policies where each has opportunity to discuss and where decisions are made based on the ideas and arguments that emerge in these discussions. Such debate elevates participants as part of the polity and should lead to the best policies.

But what does 'best' mean here? Best for whom? In bourgeois democracy, people often seek what is best for themselves and camouflage their proposals as advancing the national interest (tax cuts for 'job creators', for example). The resulting 'debate' degrades our intelligence—think of election advertising. For collective deliberation to be genuine and honest, 'best' must mean 'best for all of us collectively'. But who is 'us'? In proletarian democracy that should mean the workers. But which workers? When the Soviets adopted a policy of striving to build and defend socialism in the Soviet Union, regardless of when proletarian revolutions might occur elsewhere, they also believed, not unreasonably at the time, that Soviet socialism advanced the cause of the *world's* proletariat.

Earlier, in discussing the trial Körber observed, I wrote that it was important that many workers shared a sense of common purpose; the trial could proceed based on an evaluation of how the treatment of Ivanova would advance or hinder that purpose, Shimko arguing that severe punishment would hinder the socialist project, Vedeneyev that it would advance it. The sense of a common purpose seems generally to be assumed by rational democratic conversation, not just proletarian democracy. In bourgeois democracy, the pretence is a common national interest.

But why call it a ‘pretence’? It is dishonest to appeal to a ‘national interest’ in bourgeois nations; the term hides the fact that some are benefitted hugely while others are deeply exploited and oppressed (for elaboration, see Gomb-erg (2018b)). Inequalities are immense, some living lavishly, others homeless or insecure in employment, housing, nutrition, and access to health services. By the same token, as membership in the Communist Party in the Soviet Union became an avenue to privilege, the sense of common purpose in building Soviet society was undermined. By 1991, many Soviet citizens could see no difference between exploitation by a capitalist and by a so-called ‘communist’ elite. The material inequalities among workers of the Stakhanov period helped to create this situation; other practices—special stores, vacations, country homes, access to better food and schools, and higher pay for Communist Party officials—were more important.

5 Conclusion

Let us draw together this chapter’s argument. Attempts to empower workers within a market economy—whether in the actual Mondragon cooperatives and Yugoslavia or the speculative Rawlsian property-owning democracy or Schweickartian market socialism—won’t lead to workers’ power: even if workers have the ability to influence decisions, the market so limits the possible choices that workers cannot decide in their interests as workers. This led me to examine the Soviet experience, which retained markets but gave a much larger role to centralized planning. Where workers partook in widespread policy discussions, such as those in the 1920s, they could identify with the policies and society that emerged from those discussions—as long as they believed they were in a common struggle to build a world where they lived as equals. This identification with projects of industrial development, collectivization of agriculture, and defence of the Soviet Union from invasion—as well as, for a minority, the project of advancing proletarian revolutions worldwide—set the context for both the trial Körber describes and the ubiquitous wallboards in factories which, like Rousseau’s censor, served to hold workers to a shared morality of commitment to production (a worker might be shamed on the wallboard for getting drunk and missing work the following day). This identification also set the context for many workers’ commitment to developing innovations in production that would enhance efficiency while easing the burden of labour; they could feel that their

innovations contributed to a project of development from which they all benefited. These innovations, arising from discussions like the one between Petrov and Stakhanov, were an exercise of workers' power and control over production, another element of proletarian democracy. However, for such innovations to be exercises of proletarian democracy, they must advance a common project from which all workers benefit—ideally benefit equally. Inequalities that set Stakhanovite workers apart from others undermined the conviction among workers generally that they were all benefitting equally from the innovations, since skilled workers received greater money and glory for what had been a team effort.

If these speculations are correct, they suggest a rather remarkable conclusion: proletarian democracy requires communist equality. It is undone by privilege for a 'communist' elite and even privilege for workers who innovate in a way that potentially could benefit all. If instead workers receive what they need, the incentive for disciplining one another—a common practice in Soviet factories in the 1930s, whether through 'trials' such as the one Körber relates or through wallboards—and innovating for the common good and the project of developing communist production could be naturally shared. This incentive is grounded in the shared sense that social organization benefits them all equally, but that would only be true in a communist society. And if it's not true, then eventually workers won't believe it.

Notes

- 1 Others have defended the same conclusion—for example, O'Neill (2008).
- 2 See Gomberg-Muñoz (2011) for examples of how undocumented Mexican immigrants to the United States bragged that they would outwork white workers.
- 3 There were also regional differences of language and religion; regions had distinct histories, and people had different ethnic identities. Market fragmentation was experienced through ethno-nationalist rather than individual identities.
- 4 My discussion of the Soviet Union does not take for granted that Joseph Stalin was a cruel dictator with unchallenged power. It was reasonable for the Soviet people to believe that the Soviet Union was likely to be invaded again, that to defend itself the Soviet Union had to build up basic industry, that this project required an agricultural surplus to support an urban proletariat, and that this surplus required the mechanization and collectivization of agriculture, which in turn required defeating the power of the kulaks. Collectivization was painful and difficult, particularly during the famine years of the early 1930s; by the mid-1930s, collectivization and mechanization were succeeding. In addition, I believe the evidence of the Great Purge Trials is not easily dismissed; by the mid-1930s, there seem to have been active conspiracies against the Soviet government. At the same time, I acknowledge that horrible crimes were committed by the NKVD under Yezhov's direction. For limits on Stalin's power, see Furr (2005a, 2005b). Furr has published many articles and books rebutting, based on archival evidence, other elements of the anti-Stalin paradigm.
- 5 The official translation renders the Russian as 'or we will go under', but Grover Furr assures me that 'or they will crush us' (the translation John Scott (1973 [1942], p. 270) gives of the same words) is much closer to the Russian. The difference is important because Stalin's words—and the way that Scott indicates they were widely understood—emphasize the danger of military invasion. Also, Stalin's review of the many previous invasions carries the same message.

- 6 John Scott's (1973 [1942]) experience in Magnitogorsk supports what Markus writes.
- 7 In contemporary usage, the word 'dictatorship' is pejorative and represents the opposite of democracy. This is not so in Marxist usage, where it refers to the thesis that state power arises only in class-divided societies and is always the power of one class over another. In bourgeois dictatorship, the capitalist class makes laws in its own interests and controls the other arms of the state. In proletarian dictatorship, the working class makes the laws; the power of the state is exercised in the interests of the working class.
- 8 The central issues were industrialization, the peasantry, and the need for a food surplus to feed industrial workers. There were competing proposals from Leon Trotsky and others. Harry Haywood, a student in Moscow 1925–27, reports that Trotsky's writings and competing views of Stalin and others were available, read, and discussed in schools, factories, and among peasants, as well as within the party. After five years of discussion (1922–27), Trotsky's proposals were decisively rejected in votes among party leaders (Haywood, 1978, p. 182). The party soon embraced the five-year plans of collectivization and mechanization of agriculture and development of heavy industry.

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15

OPEN BORDERS AND (POST-)WORK

James A. Chamberlain

1 Introduction

The issue of work has recently regained attention as a topic of critical inquiry in the social sciences and humanities, as well as in leftist politics more broadly. Beginning with the publication in 2011 of Kathi Weeks's *The Problem with Work*, subsequent texts of note include David Frayne's (2015) *The Refusal of Work*, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams's (2015a) *Inventing the Future*, Peter Frase's (2016) *Four Futures*, and my own contribution to these debates, *Undoing Work, Rethinking Community* (Chamberlain, 2018). This literature casts a critical eye on the current hyper-valuation of paid work and questions the viability and legitimacy of the work society, broadly understood as one that treats employment as central to individual and collective existence. To varying degrees, these studies also envision post-work and/or post-capitalist futures. At one end of this spectrum, Kathi Weeks deliberately avoids the description of a concrete post-work society and focuses instead on what she calls utopian demands. At the other end, Peter Frase (2016, p. 24) engages in what he calls 'social science fiction' to imagine four possible scenarios for the future, varying according to the scarcity of resources and their degree of egalitarianism.

With limited exceptions, however, these critical studies of the work society and projections of what might come after it consider neither the function of borders in maintaining the work society, nor what role borders should have in a possible post-work society. Indeed, these examples tend to confirm Harald Bauder's observation that utopian thought has largely failed to address and challenge borders. As he puts it, '[i]ronically, while borders tend not be problematized in utopias that envision concrete alternative worlds, the imagination of open borders has been labeled "utopian"' (Bauder, 2012–2013, p. 2).

Yet this lack of attention to borders comes as a surprise for at least two reasons. First, work and migration, and the relationship between the two, remain at the forefront of political discourse. When anti- and pro-migration arguments

are couched in terms of the impact of migrants on employment—they are either ‘job stealers’ or ‘job creators’—both, consciously or not, assume that we ought to try to maintain the work society. One task of this chapter will be to show how existing border and migration policies concretely and intentionally assist in the maintenance of the work society. The second reason for surprise at the lack of attention to borders within the post-work literature arises from the simple fact that both work and borders are vulnerable to criticism on the basis of similar values, such as freedom, equality, and inclusiveness. Just as the material necessity and social pressures to work constrain freedom, and the work society excludes those who do not work from social respect and full citizenship, so, too, do borders limit human mobility while also helping maintain and reinforce legal distinctions between citizens and various categories of (less worthy) migrants.

While this conceptual affinity between critiques of the work society and of borders does not establish a necessary relationship between the two, it does call for further thought on how post-work politics ought to relate to borders and especially to demands for open borders. Indeed, in a world of transnational flows and processes and in which societies are neither self-sufficient nor hermetically sealed, post-work societies would encounter a number of questions relating to migration and borders. One such question that this chapter will explore in particular is whether, assuming post-work societies adopted an unconditional basic income (hereafter simply ‘basic income’), migrants should be eligible for it.

This chapter thus aims to bring the question of borders to the forefront of the analysis of the work society and of post-work theory. In doing so, I show that post-work politics ought to ally with those advocating for open borders and for a global basic income. The chapter is structured as follows. I begin by briefly explaining the idea of the work society and post-work politics, including demands for basic income, before analysing the role of borders with respect to the work society. Next, I turn to Joseph Carens’s (2013) famous proposal for open borders as a response to the unearned privilege of being born in a wealthy society. While Carens makes a powerful case for open borders, he proposes to *restrict* citizenship to those who have become members of society over the course of several years’ residence, thus leaving more recent migrants vulnerable to domination by citizens. If a post-work society were to adopt this version of open borders, this would mean excluding non-members from redistributive programs, including a basic income (assuming this had been adopted), thus maintaining a work society for migrants inside the territory controlled by a ‘post-work’ society.

To avoid self-contradiction, I thus advocate what I call *fully* open borders, meaning freedom of movement combined with citizenship based simply on presence on a territory. Yet recognizing that this could draw an unmanageable number of migrants, which in turn could lead to support for hardening borders, in the penultimate section I propose the adoption of a global basic income. In the Conclusion, I consider the fact that both basic income and open borders enjoy support from free market thinkers and activists who are not committed to post-work politics, but argue that a combination of the two can nonetheless serve progressive political ends.

2 Borders and the maintenance of the work society

The terms ‘work society’ or ‘work-centred society’ refer to the confluence of ideology, discourses, and practices that ensure that full citizenship and social inclusion depend on gainful employment, and which treat employment as the bedrock of a just, stable, and harmonious community (Beck, 1992; Frayne, 2015; Gorz, 1989; Weeks, 2011). In earlier work (Chamberlain, 2018), I join a number of critics of the contemporary work society, perhaps most prominently André Gorz and Kathi Weeks, in recognizing the effects that the discourses and ideology of work have on the construction and disciplining of individual subjects. However, my analysis also shows that work acts as a mechanism that fabricates a social order from individuals who are presumed to exist prior to it (Chamberlain, 2018, pp. 18–42). Work performs this integrating function so readily not only because most work is cooperative and requires social interaction with others. In addition, work plays this role, I suggest, since we view society and more broadly civilization as the *product* of various forms of work. In other words, a view of society as an association of individuals who come together for mutual benefit fits hand in glove with the normative expectation placed upon members to perform work, since the latter is seen as constituting and building society itself.

Various criticisms have been levelled against the work society. For example, Albenaz Azmanova (2020) argues that despite the existing societal and technological potential for us all to work less, we tend to work more and to rely increasingly on paid employment to meet our material needs. Importantly, this structural contradiction generates social suffering not only for the unemployed and the underemployed, but even for labour market insiders who once enjoyed the secure labour contract, meaning that the condition of precarity has been universalized across society. My own critique of the work society centres on the various ways in which the structural coercion to earn money through wage labour constrains our freedom and generates injustice. In addition to an unevenly distributed amount of freedom concerning the precise job that a person performs, many workers suffer incursions on their freedom at work, for example, through restrictions on their right to organize and join unions or authoritarian management practices. Moreover, the time that we spend at work, together with the hypervalorization of work, makes it difficult to devote as much time as we would like to other activities that might more fully reflect our values, desires, and needs. Meanwhile, what counts as valuable work penalizes racial minorities, women, and less highly skilled labour, despite their vital contribution to social reproduction. Finally, the work society marginalizes and stigmatizes those who do not or cannot work for pay, such as elderly or disabled persons, residents of economically disadvantaged areas, and full-time parents and carers.

Post-work politics and the notion of a post-work society respond directly to such concerns. Broadly speaking, post-work refers to a shift that would take place in the position of work in our lives. When authors invoke the ‘refusal of work’ (Frayne, 2015; Weeks, 2011), they do not advocate indolence and passivity, but

instead call for a rejection of the current social model that focuses so heavily on paid work to the detriment of other valuable activities. André Gorz's (1999, p. 72) 'multi-activity society' provides a concrete illustration of one possible post-work society, in which people spend significantly less time performing paid work than at present, thus leaving more time for autonomous unwaged activities. Many post-work thinkers advocate the provision of basic income as a means to reduce our dependence on wage labour (Gorz, 1999; Hardt and Negri, 2000; Weeks, 2011), although this measure can be justified on both pro-work and post-work grounds (Chamberlain, 2018, pp. 73–100), as I will discuss in the Conclusion. Later in this chapter, we will also consider basic income from an international perspective. Having established the meaning of the work society, as well as outlined some post-work critiques and alternatives, we can now turn our attention to the question of how borders relate to the work society.

While globalization has enhanced the free movement of capital, information, goods, and services, since the 1990s borders have proliferated and policies regulating the movement of people across them have become increasingly restrictive, particularly in a climate of heightened concern about terrorism in the post-9/11 world (Pécoud and de Guchteneire, 2006). To be clear, the growing restrictiveness of immigration policies has not led to a reduction of border crossings (Anderson et al., 2009). On the contrary, since 1990, the total number of international migrants in the world has risen by over 77 million to 258 million (UN, 2013, 2017), while the immigrant population in the United States has grown to over 43 million people (López and Radford, 2017). Meanwhile, the number of unauthorized migrants in the United States reached a peak of 12 million in 2007, before dipping to under 11 million in 2016 (Passel and Cohn, 2018). If border regimes have become increasingly restrictive and even militarized, how can we account for the continuing growth in the number of migrants?

First, no amount of militarization can completely seal off a border. But, second, we should not mistake the function of borders as simply to exclude unwanted migrants. Rather, states use migration policies to maintain the work society by constructing domestic labour markets, coordinating the supply and demand of labour, and mitigating the negative social, economic, and political consequences of temporary imbalances between the two (Block, 2005; Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013). In this sense, borders act as mechanisms that 'select and filter people and different forms of circulation' (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2013, p. 7). Thus, neoliberal 'managed migration' policies differentiate between desirable and undesirable migrants, identifying the former as 'a productive force to be harnessed or managed' and the latter as a 'destructive force to be controlled or restricted' (Squire, 2011, p. 2). Moreover, as we will see below, the construction of illegal migration, itself dependent on borders, helps create a docile and exploitable labour force (Arnold, 2011, p. 5; De Genova, 2011, p. 94). Indeed, Milton Friedman was as honest to admit that 'illegal' immigration solves the problem of how to import people purely as labourers, while effectively excluding them from social services (Friedman, 1978).

Unsurprisingly, among the most desirable immigrants are the wealthy. For example, as Lea Ypi (2018) notes, a number of countries offer visas to investors, often with a fast track to citizenship. In the United Kingdom, an investment of £10 million allows a migrant to apply for permanent leave to remain after two years, compared with five years for those claiming this status on the basis of family ties to UK citizens (Ypi, 2018, p. 143). A similar program exists in the United States, known as the EB-5 Immigrant Investor visa, which was created ‘in 1990 to stimulate the US economy through job creation and capital investment by foreign investors’ (USCIS, n.d.). Here the required investment is \$1,000,000 or half that figure if the investment is in a high-unemployment or rural area (USDOS, n.d.). Moreover, foreigners who qualify for such visas receive permanent residence on a conditional basis until their investment yields at least ten new jobs, at which point, they qualify for a green card (Simmons, 2018).

Another way that several states, including Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United Kingdom, use borders to filter migrants is by adopting points-based programs, which, as Ypi (2018, p. 144) puts it, privilege ‘prospective immigrants with higher skills, more money, and a demonstrably greater capacity to adapt to the host environment’. While the United States does not have a points-based immigration system, it has constructed an elaborate regulatory framework that demonstrates significant preference for skilled and temporary migrants. We can make sense of the preferential treatment accorded to skilled migrants and the enthusiasm with which politicians of both parties in the United States speak of attracting them to this country by noting their common portrayal as ‘job creators’. For example, President Barack Obama explained in a speech in January 2013 that ‘If you’re a foreign student who wants to pursue a career in science or technology, or a foreign entrepreneur who wants to start a business with the backing of American investors, we should help you do that here. Because if you succeed, you’ll create American businesses and American jobs. You’ll help us grow our economy. You’ll help us strengthen our middle class’ (Obama, 2013). Moreover, advocates of immigration also often emphasize that all migrant workers contribute to the economy not only through their work but also as consumers, and that in the latter capacity even the lowest paid migrant workers can also stimulate job creation, especially in services.

The preference for high-skilled workers does not mean that migrants lacking special skills have no place within the US labour market: unskilled workers may apply for either permanent (EB-3) or temporary visas (such as H-2A and H-2B) (USCIS, 2015, 2019a, 2019b). This reflects the fact that the United States still needs workers willing to take ‘3D jobs’: those that are dirty, dangerous, and difficult. Migrant workers, whether legally authorized to work or not, provide a ready supply of this kind of labour as they cross borders in search of a better life, lacking many of the rights of domestic workers. Indeed, the ambiguous legal status of low-tier workers—wherein even guest workers are ‘abandoned by the law’ on account of their position outside ‘normal labour regulations’—makes it

easier to subject them to dangerous working conditions and exploitation with impunity (Arnold, 2011, p. 49).

The growing restrictiveness of immigration policies mentioned earlier therefore refers not to the *number* of border crossings, but to the use of borders to select and filter migrants, as well as to the combined effects of the legal vulnerability of authorized temporary migrant workers, and the construction of ‘illegality’ through the extensive use of detention and deportation (Anderson et al., 2009; Arnold, 2011). The effects of the detention/deportation regime are not only felt by those immediately caught in its web. Rather, the ‘illegality’ of undocumented workers, and hence their susceptibility to abuse and exploitation, is sustained by the ever-present threat of deportation (De Genova, 2004).

Not only do borders enable this differential inclusion of migrant workers within societies (Fiedler, 2013). In addition, they help to establish and maintain differential labour markets in the global economy, thus allowing transnational corporations based in the global North to increase their profits through a higher rate of exploitation of labour in the global South. For example, John Smith (2015) cites a report by World Bank researchers that finds that ‘for many countries, the wage gaps caused by barriers to movement across international borders are among the largest known forms of wage discrimination’, and that increased labour mobility is therefore a more effective poverty reduction measure than most other ‘*in situ* antipoverty interventions’ (Clemens et al., 2008). This situation thus paves the way for what a former chief economist (Stephen S. Roach) at Morgan Stanley has called ‘global labour arbitrage’. As Foster et al. (2011) explain it, global labour arbitrage refers to ‘capital’s earning of enormous monopolistic returns or imperial rents by shifting certain sectors of production to underdeveloped regions of the world to take advantage of the global immobility of labour, and the existence of subsistence (or below subsistence) wages in much of the global South’. It is worth noting that, according to John Smith’s own definition of global labour arbitrage, firms seek to cut costs through both emigration of production *and* immigration of labour, although Smith too points out that ‘militarization of borders and rising xenophobia’ have not prevented migration but reduced it and reinforced ‘migrants’ vulnerable, second-class status’ (Smith, 2015).

A final aspect of the relationship between migration and the work society to note concerns the disciplining effects of migration on the domestic population. Anderson et al. (2009) point out the persistent stereotypes of migrants as hard working and domestic workers as lazy. Yet, as they note, ‘it is immigration controls that give employers greater power over migrants, particularly new arrivals or those who are dependent on them for their visa status, a power they do not always have over citizens’. Rather than being based in culture, the divisions between domestic and migrant workers are ‘directly produced, and have the additional merit of serving a disciplinary function over citizen-workers, fostering resentment and competition rather than solidarity’ (Anderson et al., 2009, p. 7).

As we have seen in this section, current immigration policy is deeply invested in the maintenance of the work society. The overriding goal of employment-based

immigration policy is to harness the productivity of migrant workers without jeopardizing—and ideally boosting—the employment prospects of domestic workers. In other words, employment-based immigration policy aims to perpetuate the type of community that we inhabit—the work society—by selectively including individuals from outside its boundaries. Given the central role that borders play in maintaining the work society, and considering that open borders and post-work politics share an ethos of freedom and inclusiveness, in the next section we turn our attention to the question of whether post-work politics can and should also advocate open borders, and if so, in what particular form.

3 Open borders and post-work societies

To see why open borders ought to be a core post-work demand, let us begin by considering why a post-work society might wish to *exclude* migrants. Two major variables in post-work societies are whether and to what extent paid work remains at all, and whether and at what rate a basic income would be paid to citizens. Assuming paid employment still played some role, albeit significantly reduced, in socio-economic life, a post-work society might be tempted to continue using borders to filter migrants so as to ensure sufficient work for its citizens. Leaving aside the empirical question of whether this policy would be effective, the fact that the impact on a society's employment prospects would be a decisive factor in determining whether and on what terms to admit migrants makes this a dubious policy for a post-work society to adopt. In other words, we should ask whether such a society would really qualify as 'post-work' at all.

Instead of adopting restrictionist border policies to maintain sufficient levels of paid work for existing members of society, a post-work society might try to limit immigration to defend the conditions that enable its citizens to work relatively *little*. Srnicek and Williams suggest that, if only the most developed countries established post-work, they would become 'a large attraction for migrants' from less developed countries, while 'the influx of people would spark off xenophobia and harsh state responses', including even tighter borders (Srnicek and Williams, 2015b). In addition to the familiar worries about the strain migrants place on infrastructure and services, a society that had implemented basic income might fear its collapse under the increased demand (Srnicek and Williams, 2015b). In response, some might be tempted to limit access to basic income to full citizens, as does Rutger Bregman (2016, p. 227), or to adopt generally restrictionist border policies as a way to maintain civic solidarity sufficiently high to support programs like basic income.

While political sovereignty gives nation-states the right to unilaterally control their own borders (Abizadeh, 2008), albeit with the limited exception of the international legal duty to allow refugees to seek and enjoy asylum from persecution, as set out first in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 14(1) (UN General Assembly, 1948), this approach rests on an unjustified and unjustifiable prioritization of the interests of existing members of the

post-work society. Given that where in the world a person is born has a profound impact on his or her life chances, and given that one's place of birth reflects nothing other than luck, Joseph Carens (2013, p. 226) persuasively compares the discretionary control of migration to an unearned privilege characteristic of the feudal age. This characterization would only become more apt when applied to post-work societies that maintained exclusive borders. Indeed, by excluding migrants from basic income but allowing them in to work there would remain a kind of shadow work society within the territory of the post-work society, while excluding migrants altogether would likely result in confining them to societies in which *they* must continue to work. While not strictly speaking incompatible with the goal of post-work politics, only in extremely bad faith could members of the post-work society claim to have overcome work.

As an alternative or complement to restrictionist borders, post-work societies might seek to maintain themselves from the perceived threat of excessive migration through a more solidaristic program of global poverty reduction. While the distinction between economic migrants and refugees is problematic, the number of persons who fall more obviously in the former category would clearly be reduced if significant inroads could be made on global poverty. This is a complex problem, the intricacies of which I cannot explore here, but it is worth noting that a central plank of the World Bank's (2018) current anti-poverty strategy is the promotion of economic growth 'in an inclusive, labor intensive way'. But not only would it be hypocritical of post-work societies to try to insulate themselves from migration by promoting labour-intensive economic growth in less affluent parts of the world. In addition, it is questionable whether enough jobs could in fact be created. For example, Foster et al. (2011) note that if peasant production became capitalist, as promoted by the World Trade Organization (WTO), the World Bank, and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), then instead of three billion peasants, there would be 20 million 'new modern farmers'. Having been 'depeasantized' but also becoming superfluous to modern farming practices, the new surplus population of only just under three billion people would then need to find alternative employment, largely in urban industry. According to one estimate, even 50 years of seven per cent growth across the whole of the global South would only create jobs for a third of the former peasants (Foster et al., 2011).

Whether or not open borders would eliminate global poverty as Bregman implies (2016, p. 214), I tend to agree with Joseph Carens (2013, p. 234) that 'freedom of movement is an important moral goal because of its contribution to equality of opportunity'. For Carens (2013, pp. 226–28), fulfilling the modern commitment to the equal moral worth of all persons, and recognizing the importance of freedom of movement to the exercise of freedom more generally, especially in a world of starkly unequal opportunity, entails that we residents and citizens of wealthy societies open our borders. Trying to maintain the post-work society by selecting only those migrants who would boost the labour market, excluding those admitted from basic income, promoting job-creation overseas so as to dissuade immigration—all such measures undercut the idea of the equal

moral worth of all human beings by prioritizing the interests of the globally privileged over everyone else. Post-work societies need to open their borders.

As powerful as Carens's argument is, though, he proposes to restrict citizenship to those who have become members of society by living and working in a country for several years. In other words, everyone would be free to cross borders, but upon arrival migrants would not have access to the full rights of citizenship, although they would continue to enjoy basic human rights (Carens, 2013, p. 96). This is because, according to Carens, existing practices of granting citizenship are underpinned by a theory of social membership, according to which people become members of societies over time and through the development of various social ties with existing members. Carens (2013, pp. 288–97) is clear, moreover, that a society with open borders would retain this practice, such that just being lawfully resident on the territory would not make migrants automatically eligible for the rights of citizens.

Yet, as I argue elsewhere (Chamberlain, 2019), the exclusion of these migrants from political and social rights would leave them vulnerable to domination and subordination by citizens, meaning that all present on the territory ought to enjoy the full rights of citizens. Given that borders not only regulate movement onto a state's territory, but also enforce rules for participating in economic activities and becoming a member of the political community (Kukathas, 2011), I thus use the term 'fully open borders' to refer to the absence of restrictions on mobility combined with the rejection of differentiated legal statuses of citizens and various classes of migrants. While Carens's version of open borders would hinder global labour arbitrage—indeed, part of his justification for open borders is that it would help tackle global inequality (Carens, 2013, p. 235)—it would not fully address the differential inclusion of migrants into receiving societies. The adoption of fully open borders would resolve this problem, yet it raises once again the challenge that unrestricted migration with truly unconditional access to basic income would be fiscally and perhaps politically unsustainable.

Fortunately, the concern about the pressure that migration would place on basic income can be answered in two ways that do not contradict the values of the post-work society. First, even though calculations of the cost of basic income show that, without significantly increasing existing social spending, the amount paid out would not allow most people to give up paid work altogether (Fitzpatrick, 1999, pp. 38–9), and even if immediately implementing basic income at the sum of 2,500 Swiss Francs per month would be 'politically irresponsible' and possibly not 'economically sustainable' in that particular case (Van Parijs, 2016), this does not mean that it could not be introduced more gradually over time. Moreover, Gorz points out that, over time, basic income might relieve people of their dependence on money and commodities, and that as we enjoy more and more time to make and maintain the things that we need and want, so basic income could shrink without detrimentally affecting quality of life (Gorz, 1999, p. 83; see also Chamberlain, 2018, pp. 76–7). Still, such a social transformation would not occur overnight, and it remains likely that the higher the level at

which basic income was provided, the more it would entice migrants from parts of the world that have not yet implemented such a scheme. The solution to this problem, which would deliver the post-work society from self-contradiction as well as radically reduce global poverty, is to introduce a global basic income.

4 A global basic income

According to Philippe Van Parijs (2000, p. 4), 'in most proposals, the basic income is supposed to be paid, and therefore funded, at the level of a Nation-state'. Yet unless the demand for a basic income is expressed in global terms, it risks a lack of sensitivity to matters of transnational justice and remains anchored to an exclusionary logic, reproducing the work society outside its boundaries. Among other groups at the global and regional levels, the UK-based organization World Basic Income (WBI) was established in 2016 precisely to 'campaign for the introduction of a universal and unconditional basic income, provided regularly to every person in the world, to spend as they see fit' (WBI, n.d.). While recognizing the desirability of what the organization calls 'full basic income' (which would effectively make paid work a matter of choice), WBI campaigns for the more modest 'survival basic income' set at a 'starting figure' of ten USD per person per month. In addition to the fact that such a figure would be harder to dismiss on the basis of the common criticism that it gives people 'something for nothing', the group also recognizes that the sudden injection of large amounts of cash into less developed economies could cause inflation and harm the most economically vulnerable by making goods too expensive for them to purchase. A more gradual approach would thus have the virtue of allowing local economies to adjust more slowly.

A global basic income of \$10 per person per month would cost \$75 billion per month plus the expenses of administering the scheme, yet WBI estimates that introducing a suite of global taxes on carbon emissions, aviation and shipping, financial transactions, intellectual property, land, and wealth, as well as introducing collective shares in global corporations, could generate sufficient revenue to provide every person in the world a much larger basic income of \$71.09 per month. The largest source of revenue in the WBI proposal comes from the 'land value tax', which the group estimates would fund a global basic income of \$37.22 per month by itself, based on a 0.5 per cent tax on 'land holdings worth more than \$5000'. Even at the significantly higher rate of five per cent proposed by Martin Farley (2016) to fund national basic income schemes, the average US household would receive \$7,986 per year more from basic income than they paid into it through the land value tax. Of course, the 0.5 per cent tax proposed by the WBI would be significantly more feasible politically, but it is worth noting that, since the proceeds of this tax would be shared globally rather than nationally, it is likely that this would decrease support for the measure.

The other major source of revenue in the WBI proposal comes from a tax on carbon extractions, which it estimates could fund a basic income of \$22.94 per

month. This calculation is based on the International Monetary Fund's suggested charging rate of \$59 per tonne of carbon dioxide. While this would have the virtue of also helping address global climate change, WBI recognizes that as the extraction of fossil fuels reduces (ideally to zero), so the carbon dividend would dry up. This is therefore best seen as a 'temporary measure that can act as a bridge to a world global income' (WBI, n.d.). Of course, as with any such projections, it is possible to question whether this revenue would in fact materialize even if there were support for the necessary measures. Moreover, generating enough support to adopt them would not be easy, especially given the power of vested interests in the political process as well as a general aversion to taxation in many parts of the world. As Alex Gourevitch (2016, p. 25) points out, 'any basic income high enough to threaten existing relations of economic domination would likely only be feasible if there were already a substantial movement among workers'. Based on the above discussion, we can see that such a movement needs to be internationalist in orientation.

5 Conclusion

Basic income and open borders share the interesting feature of attracting support from thinkers and activists that span the political spectrum. While this fact might make their eventual adoption more feasible, it is important to recognize the diversity of motivations for supporting these measures. In the case of basic income, while I have emphasized its potential to help bring about the post-work society, some advocates support it precisely because they believe that it will *promote* employment, suggesting that it will undermine the unemployment and poverty traps, enable people to retrain or start businesses, or effectively subsidize low-wage work and make the economy more efficient (for a more detailed overview of these arguments, see Chamberlain, 2018, p. 93). Indeed, according to the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health in Finland, which conducted a two-year experiment from 2016 to 2018, 'the primary goal of the basic income experiment is related to promoting employment' (Kentish, 2016), although at the end of the trial the Minister of Social Affairs and Health acknowledged only a minor impact on employment (Reuters, 2019). As I have argued elsewhere (Chamberlain, 2018, p. 74), if we defend basic income on the grounds that it will help people into work, this reinforces the very discourses that uphold the work society.

In his critical assessment of basic income, Gourevitch (2016, pp. 22–3) shows that the democratization of workplaces promises several benefits. Of these, reduced working time and enhanced enjoyment of leisure time (by reducing 'overwork, frustration and stultification of one's powers' while at work (Gourevitch, 2016, p. 21)) are particularly complementary to the broader goals of post-work politics. Just as Gourevitch (2016, pp. 23–4) argues that basic income is insufficient to democratize the economy, so I have argued that the implementation of basic income without a significant shift in the way we think about and value work will not result in the development of a post-work society. Both of

these broader goals—the democratization of the economy and the development of a post-work society—would undoubtedly require significant political organization, not least because a truly post-work society in my account cannot be capitalist (Chamberlain, 2018, pp. 132–7).

A similar set of complexities riddles the debate about open borders. For example, while we saw above that the construction of immigrant illegality and deportability, along with practices that generate differential inclusion more broadly, serve to discipline migrant workers and thus facilitate exploitation, some free marketers find open borders appealing because of its ability not only to save money (by no longer enforcing borders) but also to make money, by giving ‘employers new access to talented human capital’ (Miron, 2018). In this regard, US Senator Bernie Sanders was not entirely wrong when he characterized open borders as a ‘right-wing proposal’ (Eskow, 2015). Indeed, a current of left nationalism has arisen in recent years, such as *Aufstehen* (‘Get Up’) in Germany (Connolly, 2018), which challenges what it sees as excessive immigration introduced by neoliberalism. At the same time, as we have seen above, there are strong arguments in favour of open borders grounded on freedom and equality and a broader concern to address global injustice. Moreover, the post-work society cannot try to protect itself from outsiders by closing its borders without undermining its own values. Sanders might be right that the open borders aspiration appeals to free marketers but that does not disqualify it as a left-wing project, provided it is combined with a progressive politics of redistribution and economic restructuring at the global level.

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