THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO

THE LIMITS OF WORK

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE HUMANITIES

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

AUGUST 2022

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INTRODUCTION

The forthcoming is a contribution to the complex moral and economic calculus involved in thinking about the amount of market and household work a society should encourage or demand of its members. Work, paid or unpaid, plays a substantial role in most waking adult lives. The question to be addressed is whether, or to what extent, it ought to do so.

The question is approached through an analysis of the relationship between work and individual well-being. At the most general level one can think of the connection between work and well-being along two dimensions. The first and most obvious is the instrumental value of the goods and services that result from work; the gained or foregone output at various levels of economic development. From this standpoint, the value of work is that it supplies us, whether in the form of income or goods and services, with the all-purpose resources that make possible our pursuit of various life plans and conceptions of the good. At the most basic levels of production, work supplies us with the nutrition, care, infrastructure, and so on, that make any decent life possible. Above such levels, work can provide resources for the pursuit of ever more expansive and particularized projects. Not all goods and services will improve—or improve equally—our chances of pursuing whatever is our conception of the best life, but the general relationship holds. Part of what is at stake, then, in expanding or shrinking the standard working day or, say, the years of subsidized

retirement, is a potential increase or decrease in the total pool of these all-purpose resources (material or otherwise).

Alongside the value of outputs, one must consider another dimension in which work affects well-being: namely, the value of the activity of work itself in an individual life. Here we must ask what life plans, capabilities, opportunities, and so on are opened up or constricted by varying the size of the portion of life that must contain or typically does contain work. We have a relatively clear sense of what it means to enjoy less or more goods and services. Further examination is needed of what it means for our lives to be occupied to a greater or lesser extent by the activities necessary to produce such goods and services.

Assessing the appropriate boundaries of the working day and working life—the amount of work we should allow economic, social, and legal forces to compel—is partly a matter of asking whether work ought to be relied upon to play the various social and political roles we often set for it. The more our lives are taken up with work, the more our chances of living a good life depend on how it goes with us at work—on the opportunities and limitations inherent in both the activity of work and in the dominant institutions in the context of which work is performed. Partly as a function of the amount of time we spend engaged in it, work will play a major role in shaping who we are and can be.

There are reasons to believe that work should not be relied upon or required to play such an expansive role. The arguments developed here identify a set of evaluative considerations that ought to be included on the cost side of the ledger of work. They

provide reasons to believe that work is not the sort of thing to which we should allow individuals to be compelled to devote a substantial portion of their lives. What is more, these arguments lend some weight to the stronger conclusion that the amount of work we are compelled to perform should be reduced, as economic conditions permit, so as to fill an ever-decreasing portion of our lives.

The capacities and activities promoted and made possible by such a reduction are crucial to a more complete development of our potential for human flourishing. While work may encourage (at best) or allow (at least) the development of *some* human capabilities and forms of activity central to our potential for flourishing, work is inhospitable to the pursuit of other core capabilities.

There is, in other words, only so much we should expect of work. There are capabilities and forms of action that are either neglected or simply prevented from being developed while engaged in work, and having robust opportunities to develop and exercise these capacities and activities is crucial to living well. On this basis, there is a compelling public interest in promoting a progressive reduction of the standard working day, workweek, or working life. We ought to welcome, and wherever possible to hasten, a society that provides to each individual a realistic choice to pursue a life plan currently available only to the fortunate few: to lead a life in which work plays an ever more marginal role.

This naturally raises the question of trade-offs. While part of the task of expanding individuals' choices to work less will entail a *redistribution* of work time—particularly in the case of household production—it will also inevitably include an

overall societal reduction of work time, and therefore a potential reduction in output of the associated goods and services. In evaluating the thresholds at which such costs would become problematic, the situations facing both the developing and developed economies will be considered. However, a disproportionate amount of attention will be paid to the United States, particularly in terms of its existing regimes of market and household work (the institutional and social contexts in which paid and unpaid work are embedded) and the space for policy alternatives. The United States combines the features of being one of the wealthiest societies in human history—that is, at an *aggregate* level, if any country could afford to forego additional output for more hours away from work, it is this one—while providing to *individuals* relatively few options to reduce hours of paid and unpaid work.

"Work" or "labour," as I will be using the terms (they will be used synonymously throughout),[1] is that activity encompassed by the categories of paid market work and unpaid household production. In marking out the boundaries of these categories, I follow some of the conceptual groundwork laid in government statistical agencies' efforts to construct more comprehensive measures of economic activity that include household work.

Paid market work includes remunerated activity in the private, public, and nonprofit sectors. As paid employment is one of the predominant modes of market work in contemporary societies, particularly in the more developed economies, it will

[1] For an argument that "work" and "labour" ought to be distinguished, see Arendt, "The Human Condition."

play a significant role in many of the arguments that follow. However, self-employment, gig work, and other modes of earning income fall under the concept of work as I am using it—the "market" in question can refer to either the labour market or the market for the products of one's labour. The relative harms and opportunities associated with different types of market work will be part of this investigation—we might say, for example, that being under the thumb of another on a daily basis is not as relevant for the self-employed.[2] Nevertheless, I will argue that the ethical limitations of work apply to all these categories of market work. We would not escape the critiques of the work-consumed life I will be developing by, for instance, establishing societies of smallholding farmers and craftpersons. That is, there are reasons to provide robust options to limit the amount of work we need to perform, whether we are employed or self-employed.

The concept of household production requires some specification. Not all activities undertaken within the household should be understood as "household work" in the sense intended. To distinguish between work and non-work activities in the household, I will use a variant of the "third-party criterion" developed by economist Margaret Reid in the 1930s, which has been influential in attempts to incorporate household production in systems of national accounting.[3] In Reid's words, "if an activity is of such a character that it might be delegated to a paid worker, then that

[2] Although one could quite easily think of examples in which the self-employed are worryingly vulnerable to the arbitrary will of their customers—the perils of sex work being a paradigmatic case.
[3] Goldschmidt-Clermont, "Household Production and Income."

activity shall be deemed productive."[4] More broadly, household production is activity that produces a good or service that could be provided by a third party, whether through market substitutes or public provision. In the reading of the third-party criterion I will be using, the actual presence of a market or public substitute is not necessary.[5] What is necessary is that it is the *type of activity* that could be carried out by a third party (whether one purchases the product or directly employs someone to provide a service). Sleep does not count as work (we cannot hire someone to sleep for us), but caring for an ill household member does count—even if, for whatever reason, there is no robust market for paid caregiving services of this type (say, because of a strong social censure of the outsourcing of such care). Play purely for its own sake—versus play that is only or also for the sake of educating one's child—does not count as work, nor does reading or listening to music. As with sleep, what we are after when we listen to music or play cannot be even partly replaced by hiring someone to listen or play for us, whereas if we are playing with a child for the purposes of development or education, there is a productive purpose here that could be fulfilled by a third-party worker. Examples of household work include: meal preparation and cleanup, laundry and clothes care, indoor cleaning and chores, repairs and maintenance, childcare, healthcare for all household members, paperwork, and so on.

[4] Reid, *Economics of Household Production*, 11.
[5] Goldschmidt-Clermont, "Household Production and Income," 4. There is an alternative formulation of Reid's third-party criterion in which the existence of a market substitute is necessary to designate a given household activity as "productive."

Whether on any given occasion a household labourer wants to avail himself or herself of a substitute is irrelevant. If someone would foreswear a substitute even if one were available, either because they are deeply interested in the activity, or because they feel pressured to perform it themselves (though they loathe it), in either case we are talking about work in the sense I intend. Note that this definition of work is compatible with work involving activities done for their own sake.[6]

Furthermore, the idea of a third-party substitute does not entail that the substitute would deliver the same level of use-value with respect to the relevant product or service. A purchased meal may not have the same love and care as a home-cooked version (or it may provide a great deal more use-value). A parent caring for a sick child may provide more solace and comfort than a hired professional.[7] In these cases, interpersonal relationships may add value to the good or service, but the core of the product can still be delivered by a hired hand. On the other hand, there are cases in which these interpersonal elements cannot be excised from the product if something approximating a "substitute" is going to be provided. Writing poetry for another can conceivably fall outside the category of work, even though poems can be bought. Purchasing a greeting card, for instance, may not amount to even a subpar substitute in some cases; not because we would be providing a less valuable product, but a different

[6] This is an issue that will be dealt with in Chapter 2. It will be argued that, although it is possible for work to involve autotelic activity, there are tensions inherent in work such that it should not be regarded as a reliable means of providing this good—particularly not when the work is performed under compulsion.

[7] This familial premium does not apply in all cases of care work. Children may benefit more, for instance, from being cared for by a non-family member.

product entirely: where what is being replaced is not "poetry" *tout court*, but perhaps something more like "poetry written by me for you." These are cases in which the interpersonal elements do not just add to the use-value of the core product, but are inextricably bound up with what the service or product is.

Although there will be cases in which it is not clear whether a given activity should be deemed market or household work in the senses outlined above, together these categories capture a significant portion of our waking adult lives. And while there are important differences between paid labour and household production, there are also worrisome commonalities among our everyday occupations and practices embedded in the workplace and household. Both paid and unpaid work are unsuitable or unreliable venues for immersing oneself in activities performed for their own sake (autotelic activities); they are both commonly undertaken in contexts that involve dependence on the arbitrary will of another; they are both ill-suited to developing certain capacities that are necessary to active participation in civic life; and they can both be stultifying with respect to exercises of practical reason. Each of these claims will be developed further in the chapters that follow. Collectively, they are meant to justify a greater distribution of "free time"—time in which we have meaningful choices to refrain from paid or unpaid work.

Providing more options to work less requires addressing the sources of compulsion related to market work and household work. This means addressing pressures deriving from potential deprivations in the material foundations of a decent life (deprivations for the worker herself or for those depending on her income or care)

and from the social norms, ideologies, and power imbalances by which we induce people to engage in this work.

Increasing free time in the case of paid work means providing choices to limit work time that do not result in one's standard of living falling below some particular level. For those whose paid work leaves them hovering around the level of income necessary to live a decent life, leave policies would have to provide *paid* time off—whether for vacation or more extended sabbatical periods—in order to meaningfully enlarge free time. We might say that in one sense an individual near the minimum threshold would still have a choice between taking time off and staying above the threshold, but this is not the sort of choice ("your money or your life") we would want fellow citizens to face. The sense of "free" in free time is tethered to such judgements about what having a meaningful option would amount to.

Income subsidies could also, in principle, allow individuals to reduce the amount of work they need to perform without falling below some income threshold. However, this would require the ability to adjust one's work schedule in ways that are closed off to most workers. The employed often face an "all or nothing" scenario in which, even if their full-time job provides a standard of living above and beyond what we would deem conducive to a decent life, moving to a shorter-hours schedule is not an option.[8] This can be the case because employers simply do not allow shorter or part-time

[8] The prevalence of this scenario is revealed in the phenomenon of "overemployment," which applies to workers who would prefer to shorten their hours even if doing so would reduce their income. Some surveys show rates of overemployment in the United States as high as 50 percent. Golden and Gebreselassie, "Overemployment Mismatches," 19.

schedules, or because dropping below full time would mean losing essential benefits (such as health insurance, in the US case).

One way to empower the employed with respect to their ability to adjust work schedules is to increase labour power in general. This might be accomplished through greater unionization (in the United States, only around 6 percent of the private-sector workforce is unionized) or through policies that support full employment (the lower the unemployment rate, the greater workers' bargaining power in relation to employers). With respect to the latter, a public job guarantee program—which would offer a paying job to all who are willing and able to work—would strengthen bargaining power by weakening the threat of unemployment.[9] Much as it effectively establishes a minimum wage through the publicly provided jobs, a job guarantee would also enable the government to influence minimum standards in terms of weekly hours and flexible scheduling.[10]

For household production, increasing time free from compulsory work offers a different challenge, given that there are elements of some such work that do not lend themselves easily to productivity improvements. Technological advancements in the form of washing machines or online shopping can enable us to reduce our hours of household production. Care work, however, changes the calculus somewhat. In many cases, the entire point of care labour involves *spending time* with those being cared for, thus defeating the logic of productivity growth: of providing the same "output" in less

[9] Wray et al., "Public Service Employment."
[10] Employers offering jobs closer to the minimum or job guarantee wage would need to compete for workers by offering comparable terms for working hours and flexibility.

time.[11] Nevertheless, free time in such hard cases can be increased, or even just redistributed, by replacing the primary caregiver's work with someone else's. This might mean freeing other household members from some of their paid work so that they can help share unpaid care burdens; here, policies enabling (market) workplace accommodations, in the form of flexible scheduling and paid family leave, are essential.[12]

In addition to expanding this range of options to redistribute household production, we would need to address gender norms and structural inequalities that leave women with the bulk of the household workload. The internalization of gendered assumptions about proper household roles distorts the ability to make meaningful choices.[13] But even for those individuals not wholly captured by gender norms and social pressures, the gendered division of labour can create a self-reinforcing cycle, to the extent that it restricts women's access to sources of income and thereby increases their dependency on the whims of a "breadwinning" partner. As Nancy Folbre puts it,

> the more that women specialize in child rearing, the more dependent they become on adult men for assistance. As a result, fathers generally acquire power along with the responsibility for caring for their families. The biological division of labor sets the stage for an array of social and cultural forms of control over women …[14]

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[11] Diemut Grace Bubeck, "Justice and the Labor of Care," 161-162.
[12] In the United States, the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) provides 12 weeks of *unpaid* leave to care for a newborn or one's own or a family member's medical condition. Even with this narrow scope, only around half of the working population are eligible (and of those eligible, many cannot afford to give up the income). Workplace Flexibility 2010, "Family Security Insurance," 90.
[13] Rose, *Free Time*, 115.
[14] Folbre, *Invisible Heart*.

In addition to exacerbating women's vulnerability to coercion and domestic violence, this reduces their bargaining power within the household unit. In other words, the ability to renegotiate the division of household production can be constrained by the extent to which one already carries a disproportionate burden of that household work. This could be ameliorated by expanding sources of public income and provisioning that are not tied to employment. It would also require breaking down employment discrimination and other barriers to labour market entry—including the aforementioned workplace accommodations—for women and mothers.

Beyond redistributing care work within the household, caregiving time can be redistributed within society at large to expand free time for some. Through the subsidization or direct public provision of childcare, eldercare, or care for the disabled, work can be shifted—for all adult caregivers—from household to market production. In some cases, this might mean less overall societal time devoted to care work (to the extent public or private childcare settings increase the parent/worker-to-child ratio, for instance). But it can also enable an expansion of free time for those who might otherwise find themselves burdened with higher-than-average total working hours—particularly those with a double load of market and household work.

However, there are barriers to free time that cannot be broken down by traditional models of government policy like paid vacation and subsidized daycare. Compulsive consumption and inflated norms of cleanliness and care can also stand in the way of expanding the sphere of free time. Skewed notions of what an acceptable

standard of living really amounts to can prevent us from believing that we are free to reduce, or to refrain from increasing, our work time.[15] There is a difference between someone believing that on balance he or she would prefer a given increment of income over refraining from paid work, and someone believing that he or she "has no choice" but to pursue that income. The former is a case of voluntarily opting to fill free time with paid work, while the latter is a case in which the individual does not feel free from the economic compulsion to work.

Similar dynamics operate in the realm of household labour. Overly-obsessive standards of cleanliness might prevent us from seizing opportunities to reduce such work.[16] Absurdly demanding ideas about how much time is necessary to devote to children may prevent us from believing that we are free to lessen workloads. And (typically gendered) ideas about how much time the parent him or herself needs to spend with a child can blunt the effects of spreading access to affordable daycare. In this vein, Joan Williams mentions the persistence of the unhelpful belief that taking advantage of daycare amounts to irresponsibly leaving one's child with a "stranger."[17]

A society concerned about expanding free time should take all of these issues seriously. Given the ways in which distorted beliefs can prevent people from taking advantage of opportunities to limit their working time, we may need to do more than

[15] Schor, *Overworked American*, 107-138.
[16] *Ibid*., 83-84.
[17] Williams, *Unbending Gender*, 32. As Williams points out, one rarely hears similar concerns voiced about leaving children with schoolteachers for most of the day.

merely provide options: we may also need to encourage the pursuit of such options.[18] At the very least, governments should not encourage or subsidize the opposite: overwork. This last point is especially germane to societies whose economic model depends on the active encouragement of ever-expanding levels of consumption—inasmuch as this leads to longer working hours and foregone opportunities to reduce workloads.[19]

Free time does not, in and of itself, contribute to human flourishing. Rather, it is what free time allows us to do, and what it frees us from doing, that constitutes the value of free time. I will begin by laying out three common ways of arguing (or seeming to argue) for the value of expanding time off. I do not reject these standard arguments, but they either turn out not to be arguments about the value of time off *per se*, or do not go far enough in articulating the stakes involved.

To begin with, there are good reasons for reducing the amount of work in human lives that have little or nothing to do with the character of work or with the nature of the activities made possible by free time. Policies like the 30-hour or four-day workweek are often justified on the basis that they promote "work sharing." When work is scarce, so the argument goes, more people can be employed if each job is

[18] Maximum hours regulations, which exist in many developed economies (though not the United States—the Fair Labor Standards Act requires overtime pay for work beyond 40 hours per week, and does not apply to all workers), might be considered. Rose, *Free Time*, 138-139. Although the concern here is that the choices of those who wish to pursue a (market) work-filled life would be constrained, there may be ways to design these regulations to partially accommodate such concerns. See, for instance, Cass Sunstein's scheme for waivable employee rights: Sunstein, "Human Behavior and the Law of Work."

[19] Frank, *Falling Behind*, 2-4; 62-64; Schor, "The New Politics of Consumption."

capped at a maximum number of hours. Needless to say, this argument does not rely on any understanding of the ethical meaning or importance of the space opened up by a contraction of work; only that it is important that some be at leisure so that others might work. Moreover, the argument is conditional—it gives us no reason to object to removing the maximum limits should work cease to be scarce. There is nothing here that tells us how individuals who work less will live better lives. Their working less is merely a means to others working more. To give an account of the good of free time, of why it might be important to limit the dominance of work in our lives even if work is not scarce, one needs, for instance, an argument that at least addresses what it is that one *does* with one's life outside of work.

A simple yet incomplete explanation of the centrality of free time to a good life is that human beings need occasional rest from the strains of labour. To spell out the obvious: with too little sleep or relaxation we fall ill and are otherwise physically or mentally incapacitated. Although the point may be obvious, incidences of illness and incapacitating fatigue brought on by overwork are regrettably all-too-common; not only in the context of modern forms of slavery that shamefully persist,[20] but even in the course of legal employment in the wealthiest of countries.[21]

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[20] The ILO estimate that there are 12.3 million people in forced labour worldwide. International Labour Organization, "Combating Forced Labour," 13.

[21] The Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare has gone so far as to coin a term, "*karoshi*," to refer to phenomena in which otherwise healthy people, consistently logging upwards of 16-hour days, have quite literally worked themselves to death. Gini, *My Work, My Self*, 132.

One could go into great detail about the many and varied physical and psychological dangers that result from too much work and too little rest, but the general point is fairly straightforward: rest is vital, and without it one has no chance of living any kind of life at all, good or bad. Nevertheless, if rest is conflated with leisure this amounts to a fairly minimal defence of curbing the role of work. This is particularly so if "rest" is being used to indicate the minimum amount of recuperation necessary for good health. If one adopts a narrow definition of physical and mental health, this would only justify the provision of, as Marx put it, "the few hours of repose without which labour-power absolutely refuses its services again."[22] Once we have regained our full strength and are able to expend energy on our active lives, the case for additional rest seems to end. Although pressing, rest is of purely instrumental value. We must rest so that we are able to continue living; to live to work another day. If it were physically and psychically possible to live on one hour of sleep per night, one would not on this account be missing anything crucial to a good life in doing so.

In fact, if recuperation and health are all we are concerned about, one might argue that advances in modern medicine, pharmacology, and nutrition have actually *diminished* the need for a substantial limitation of working hours—and will continue to do so. Take for example the following argument, commonly deployed in debates over the future of Social Security benefits in the United States: the subsidized retirement age should be raised because we are now able to live much healthier, more active lives well into our old age. We no longer *need* to retire from the working life, so the argument

[22] Marx, *Capital*, 373.

goes, at the vigorous age of sixty-five.[23] With the aid of modern medical science, we now have more endurance and a greater ability to deal with the fallout when our endurance fails. If one relies solely on rest and health as justifications for reducing workloads, one is left without an account of what might be valuable about being able to spend additional, active, healthy years free from the burden of work.

Finally, one might favour placing limitations on working hours in order to allow "more time with the family." Among the problems with this argument is that it often amounts to a plea to restrict the demands of market work in order to make room for more housework. What is commonly referred to as the issue of "work-life balance" is actually largely a matter of work-work balance. As noted, not every activity that concerns the maintenance of a family can be considered work, but a significant portion should be. Sweeping floors, laundering clothes, scrubbing toilets, changing diapers, hauling garbage, basic healthcare for young and old dependents—none of these qualify as leisure. "Spending more time with one's family" is thus an ambiguous phrase. It includes both opportunities for work as well as opportunities for leisure.

This is not to say that limiting paid work to make room for more housework is not a worthy goal. First, it enables greater freedom in choosing a mode work that one might find meaningful. Second, as already noted, restricting the amount of market work individuals are expected to perform is essential to promoting a more equitable sharing of unpaid household work, the majority of which is performed by women. As Joan

[23] Put aside the fact that this may only apply to well-off segments of the population whose working lives do not involve constant physical strain.

Williams points out, we often define our paid work expectations around an "ideal worker norm" that presupposes or rests on the foundation of an unequal distribution of household labour.[24] The ideal worker norm refers to employers' expectations—backed by custom, public policy, and the gendered division of household labour—that an ideal worker is one who "works full time and overtime and takes little or no time off for childbearing or child rearing."[25] The norm operates on the assumption that there is someone else available to do the care work for the "ideal worker."

Targeting the customs, policies (or lack thereof), and social forces that bolster the current gendered distribution of paid and unpaid work is a worthy goal from the standpoint of distributive justice, but it is not necessarily grounded in a defence of expanding free time. For instance, one argument for why work-family balance should be a focus for distributive justice is that unequal household work burdens can restrict access to the benefits (particularly monetary) derived from market work. By articulating how free time relates to our ability to choose to exercise central human capabilities, we can further flesh out the stakes involved in the context of distributive justice—that is, to clarify why it matters when structural inequalities leave some with less free time than others.

Limiting market work to increase household work can be an indirect means of potentially reducing work for one party in a two-parent household. While someone who replaces some market work with household work may not directly increase his or

[24] Williams, *Unbending Gender*, 65.
[25] *Ibid*., 1.

her leisure time, the effect of this substitution may be that a spouse can perform less of the household work and therefore spend more time at leisure. In what looks like a reverse of the work-sharing schemes mentioned above, one parent works more at one type of work so that the other might work less overall.

However, we need to distinguish between two different arguments. Some people need more available time to devote to household labour, but we also need more time free from the demands of all kinds of labour, whether household or market. What is needed is an argument for a reasonable limitation of *total* working hours. For parents who put in a "double day," of both household production and market work, we should want to limit the amount of market work necessary to earn a decent living, not only to allow such parents to be able to spend more time with their children should they desire it, but also to allow them to spend more time (*any* time) engaged in neither paid work nor unpaid childcare. Despite the merits of proposals for allowing greater options for balancing market and family work, they do not necessarily address the question of what would be the good of that space in our lives opened up by a limitation of total working hours.

The primary aim in what follows is to address just that question. Developing initially out of a reading of Aristotle, I will be articulating three broad critiques of work; critiques that point to the cumulative harms of work, as well as to the value of the spaces opened up by a contraction of work. The first critique draws on a conception of leisure as bearing a special (though not exclusive) relationship to activity performed for its own sake, and argues that work provides inadequate or unreliable opportunities for

such autotelic activity. The second critique draws on two different strands of the republican tradition to investigate the extent to which employment and household work are compatible with "non-domination" and adequate opportunities for exercising political capabilities. The final critique traces the ways in which work as it is, and work as it could be, curtail the development of practical reason. The upshot of all three critiques is this: since there are limitations on the extent to which work can provide opportunities for the development or exercise of capabilities central to a good life, there ought to be limits on how much of it we are compelled to perform.

One might object that we ought to concentrate on ameliorating the scope for human flourishing *within* work, rather than limiting the scope of work itself. Work will not, in any foreseeable future, disappear from our lives. The most we can do, one might argue, is to ensure that work becomes (if it is not at present) the sort of activity that is conducive to, or at the very least consistent with, flourishing for all. Against this view, it will be argued that both courses of action—reforming and limiting work—are urgently needed. There is much we can do to reduce the harms of work as it is at present, and the three critiques of work that will be elaborated upon do help inform how this might be done and why it should. At the same time, there are limits to how far most work can be transformed so as to be consistent with the promotion of an adequate range of human capabilities. Moreover, I will highlight the ways in which these two goals can come into conflict, and identify cases in which we would be better off foregoing some efforts at "reform" if doing so would enable us to expand the availability of free time.

Sustained effort to produce goods and services for the market or household is unsuitable for the sufficient development of critical human capacities for all. While work is part of a good life, it is not hospitable to the development of a broader range of capacities and activities that are central to well-being. It is only by limiting the scope of work that we can both create the space necessary for the development of such capacities and activities, and in addition, reduce some of the ineradicable harms that accompany the activity of most work. Without providing to each individual this opportunity to reduce the dominance of work in his or her life, reforming work is insufficient. So while it is true that *some* amount of work will always be necessary, the question remains as to whether we can make work a smaller, less significant part of life than it is at present. The forthcoming arguments suggest that we would gain a great deal by doing so.

What do we stand to lose, on the other side of ledger, when individuals are provided with (and avail themselves of) options to work less? A thought experiment proposed by Juliet Schor (which is an updated version of a similar scenario envisioned by John Maynard Keynes)[26] can help frame our sense of the trade-offs involved and the contours of what is possible. As societies become more productive, the amount of labour that must occupy the average human life in order to create levels of social wealth conducive to a given level of well-being can become smaller and smaller. Schor notes that productivity, understood as output per labour hour, doubled in the United States from 1948 to 1990. She invites her readers to imagine what sort of life pattern would have been possible if this productivity growth had been parlayed entirely into increased

[26] Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren."

leisure, while keeping living standards (in terms of marketed goods and services) constant: "We actually could have chosen the four-hour day," Schor writes, "or a working year of six months. Or, *every worker in the United States could now be taking every other year off from work – with pay*."[27]

This "productivity dividend" trade-off model is only a rough generalization of the options open to us.[28] Broadly speaking, however, productivity advancements present a society with the choice between increasing material standards of living and increasing access to time away from work.[29] As for how this choice can be made available to individuals, Schor recommends that employers give their employees the option of trading some or all of their future pay increases for more time off.[30] I have mentioned a number of other policy options that could enlarge free time; however, Schor's example raises an important issue in the context of the productivity dividend. Since the late 1970s, hourly compensation for the median worker in the United States has become disconnected from productivity growth.[31] In other words, the typical worker saw little of the benefits from productivity advances over the past several decades. This is normally framed in terms of how workers have been deprived of greater income, but we can also say that the unequal returns from broader economic

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[27] Schor, *The Overworked American*, 2. Emphasis in original.
[28] Any concrete plan for spreading access to free time may itself have variable effects on productivity.
[29] Although not included in this particular thought experiment, Schor does consider the need for reducing unpaid household working hours as well. *Overworked American*, 8; 83-105.
[30] *Overworked American*, 146-147.
[31] Mishel, "The Wedges between Productivity and Median Compensation Growth."

growth have meant the typical worker has been deprived of the opportunity to significantly expand his or her time beyond the world of work. There is, in other words, a need for thinking about how to more equitably distribute the gains from productivity growth—including in the form of options for more time off—throughout a society.

In reality, no country has opted for increases in free time that match Schor's imagined move to a 20-hour workweek. Nevertheless, within the developed economies in particular there are significant variations in hours worked as a result of political communities having made explicit policy choices[32] to give individuals more options to decrease their workloads, sacrificing per capita GDP increases for shorter working hours.[33] Differences over nationally guaranteed paid vacation and paid holiday policies, for instance, are stark—extending from a combined total of 31 guaranteed days per year in France to *zero* in the United States.[34] All told, US workers on average spend the equivalent of an extra two to three months per year engaged in paid work compared with their Western European counterparts.[35]

Moreover, it is important to note that even countries like the United States, featuring among the longest working hours among OECD nations, do not currently maximize the amount of labour time expected or required of their citizens. The status quo itself requires justification. Public retirement benefits like Social Security, statutory

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[32] Alesina, Glaeser, and Sacerdote, "Work and Leisure in the U.S. and Europe." The authors argue that these differences are not the result of unintended consequences (of differences in tax policy, for instance), but of explicit policy choices aimed at decreasing working hours.
[33] *Ibid*; Blanchard, "The Economic Future of Europe," 4-5.
[34] Ray, Sanes, and Schmitt. "No-Vacation Nation Revisited."
[35] Golden and Figart, *Working Time*, 1; Schor, *Overworked American*, 2.

overtime rules in the Fair Labor Standards Act (despite its significant limitations, in comparison to other countries' maximum hours regulations), and even the more informal institution of the two-day weekend represent real sacrifices of output and potential income growth for more time off. And in the context of the question of whether we can afford to expand free time, it is noteworthy that the decisions to make these sacrifices (e.g., Social Security Act in 1935; FLSA in 1938) were taken when the United States was much poorer than it is today.[36] Even the idea of an eight-hour working day is largely taken for granted. However, it only came about as the result of a long struggle by the labour movement, eventually sanctioned in law, regulation, and social expectation.[37] The arguments that will be developed here can serve to buttress existing policies and practices against attempts at scaling them back.

Beyond supporting the status quo, the evaluative considerations that will be articulated in the chapters to follow may also support extending free time to the point that work can eventually become simply one minor activity among many in the lives of human beings. With respect to actual practice, pursuit of this goal is best thought of as an extension of the logic of existing practical possibilities, rather than a radical break. As noted, the status quo, even in some of the most work-infested societies, already embodies the principle (whether explicitly endorsed or not) that potential collective output increases may be sacrificed for access to more time beyond the realm of work. The real issue, at least at the level of practice, is one of degree: of the extent to which

[36] Hunnicutt, *Work Without End*, 4. Hunnicutt chronicles the decline and eventual disappearance of the movement for shorter hours in the US labour movement.
[37] *Ibid*.

potential growth in material plenty may be converted into access to time off for all who desire it.

The *justifications* that I will be developing for these policies are another matter. The three critiques of work that will be articulated clash with some prevailing attitudes about the relationship between work and well-being. Prominent strains of belief that are at times so ingrained in our public culture as to be little more than background assumptions would have it that a work-dominated life is perfectly acceptable, if not outright desirable—because, for instance, work is taken to be the central locus of human flourishing.

With respect to the critiques of work that will be fleshed out, the role that the valorization of work plays in contemporary culture is one of occlusion. Work not only fills our days, it fills our social imagination. The motivation behind developing the three Aristotelian-inspired critiques is to highlight the tensions between work and the good life—tensions that can be hidden by the ideology of work in everyday life.

There is one version of the view that work is a substantive part (or the core) of what it means to live well that may militate against reducing the dominance of work in our lives. If work is regarded as not just *a* part of the good life, but as *the* prominent or most important element of human flourishing—a position one might associate with Thomas Carlyle[38]—then it is difficult to see why it would be essential to devote a substantial part of future material wealth to ensure individuals are able to shrink the role that work plays in their lives.

[38] J. S. Mill, "The Negro Question."

But aside from this more extreme variant of the valorization of work, the idea that work is in some way an intrinsic part of one's core capabilities is compatible with reducing the dominance of work in our lives. One can regard work as a core element of a good human life without being committed to the further belief that we need not be concerned when we have few meaningful options to reduce our working hours. If work is only *a* part of a good life, there is no necessary conflict here.

In fact, although it is somewhat peripheral to the main arguments, there will also be some discussion of the possibility that reducing the amount of work we are compelled to perform can enhance some of the goods of work: in other words, to the extent that there are intrinsic goods of work, they are more likely to be realized when work is performed under conditions in which it is more freely chosen.

Another broad assumption that occludes our sense of the limitations of the working life does not so much valorize work as push it into the background. Part of our ideology of work is the attitude that work (and market work in particular) is simply a neutral means by which we procure all-purpose resources for pursuing our conceptions of the good. In this view, work provides us with the basic resources that are essential to any particular conception of the best life. The three capabilities-centered critiques bring out the ways in which work can be more than a mere means. Work, to the extent that it fills our days and plays a large part in organizing our public spaces and educational systems, shapes us. The more we allow work to dominate our lives, the more we rely on it as *the* environment in which our capacities and opportunities for action are formed. As André Gorz writes:

> Working is not just the creation of economic wealth; it is also always a means of *self*-creation. Therefore, we must *also* ask apropos the contents of our work whether that work produces the kind of men and women we wish humanity to be made of.[39]

While work does provide us with many of the resources that are useful for pursuing a wide variety of life plans, there are limits to what it can provide or allow. By progressively broadening the amount of free time we guarantee to all, we rely less and less on work to "produce" men and women; we reduce the extent to which we allow work to set the limits of what we are able to be and do.

[39] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 80.

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CHAPTER ONE

THREE ARISTOTELIAN CRITIQUES OF WORK

Aristotle's generally hostile attitude towards the life of work is a helpful corrective to the contemporary dominance of the valorization of the working life. In *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor writes about an historical shift in a constellation of beliefs about the relationship between work and the good life that is bound up with what he calls "the affirmation of ordinary life." Market and household work are a central part (though only a part) of what Taylor intends by the concept of "the ordinary":

> 'Ordinary life' is a term of art I introduce to designate those aspects of human life concerned with production and reproduction, that is, labour, the making of the things needed for life, and our life as sexual beings, including marriage and the family. When Aristotle spoke of the ends of political association being "life and the good life" (*zen kai euzen*), this was the range of things he wanted to encompass in the first of these terms; basically that they englobe what we need to do to continue and renew life.[1]

For Aristotle, production and reproduction play a mere "infrastructural role," as Taylor puts it, in relation to the good life: they are necessary for the good life, but an existence dedicated to them "is not a fully human one." A fully human life is pursued beyond the realm of the ordinary, beyond work, in those "higher" activities that make

[1] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 211.

up the locus of the good life: chiefly contemplation and political participation, says Taylor.[2]

What Taylor calls "the affirmation of ordinary life" involves a dramatic transformation, beginning around the seventeenth century, of this Aristotelian structure.[3] What starts off being considered the mere infrastructure upon which the good life is built—work and family, "ordinary life," the "*zen*" in Aristotle's "*zen kai euzen*"—is eventually elevated to the centre of the good life itself. Or rather, the good life comes to be firmly placed within the ambit of the "ordinary" (production and reproduction). At the same time, those activities beyond production and reproduction previously considered higher or uniquely connected with the good become marginalized.

The details of this transformation and Taylor's particular reading of the intellectual history are not important for my purposes. Rather, the affirmation of ordinary life captures the broad strokes of the contemporary ideological landscape with respect to work and well-being. From the widespread valorization of work, or at least of paid work (valorization of the family is also common, and although this does extend to household work as I understand it, it is often not recognized as "work") to the dismissal of leisure as at best a means to rejuvenate oneself for another day of work, Taylor's story about placing the locus of the good firmly within the ordinary captures a great deal of the, often implicit, contemporary approach to work and well-being.

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[2] *Ibid*., 12.

[3] Taylor traces the transformation to spiritual developments coming out of the Reformation, but the details are not essential for my purposes.

Looking to Aristotle, to a thinker with such a stark distance from the affirmation of ordinary life, and therefore from our common beliefs about work and the good, helps us to see whatever might have been lost or covered over in this movement to locating the centre of the good life in the worlds of work. The point is not to return to Aristotle's pre-affirmation constellation of beliefs about work. We gained a great deal in coming seeing how elements of a good life are compatible with and can be carried out within the realms of "production and reproduction." But we also need to see the blind spots and the limitations of these assumptions about the hospitable relationship between work and human flourishing.

If, for instance, elements of citizenship conflict with the ways in which work does or does not shape those who are compelled to engage in it, then the answer for us is not the Aristotelian one of excluding from citizenship all who work for a living. Part of our solution should be to reduce as much as possible the ways in which the dominant institutions within which work is undertaken do damage to our capabilities for participating in political life. And to the extent that there are limits to how effectively these harms can be mitigated, we ought to reduce the amount of work our citizens are compelled to perform.

Aristotle's view of working lives stands in sharp contrast to some of our more zealous valorizations of work. He is embedded in a social and intellectual context in which the predominant view of work is a harshly critical one, and his distance from us in this matter is both problematic and promising. When looking to Aristotle for help in trying to understand the relationship between work and well-being, difficulties arise

from the moral beliefs and economic realities that held sway in his time. He upholds many positions that we would not want to endorse—particularly with regard to slavery, women, and qualifications for citizenship. Moreover, the organization and conditions of our working world are quite distant from those of classical Athens.

Despite these challenges, Aristotle can still be of some use in a critical investigation of the ethical limits of modern household and market work; of the degree to which such work is unsuitable for the development of certain capabilities that are part of a full understanding of human flourishing. I will divide his condemnation of work into three distinct themes, each of which will in later chapters be taken up and elaborated in a contemporary version of the accompanying critique. The three themes are: freedom (*eleutheria*), excellence (*aretê*), and leisure (*scholê*). Although these themes are intimately connected in Aristotle's thought, it is helpful for my purposes to distinguish them from one another so that they can later be treated as motivating three distinct criticisms of contemporary market and household work.

I will begin by considering objections to taking Aristotle's judgments of work and leisure seriously. The first objection is that Aristotle appears to be under the influence of a pernicious class bias. The second objection is that his targets, the activities of ancient Greek farmers, craftsmen, and hired labourers, are so different from the sort of work one finds in a modern market economy that Aristotle can provide no insight into our modern working lives. After responding to these objections I then turn to the articulation of the three critiques. The first critique, underpinned by a distinct conception of freedom, argues that those who work in the employ of others are

"slavish" or unfree and are rendered unsuitable to engage in the activities of citizenship. The second critique holds that some forms of work degrade capabilities and powers of self-directed choice without which one cannot live a full life. Finally, the third critique opposes work to a particular understanding of leisure: as a space in which one can pursue activities chosen for their own sake, or action which is its own end.

The general and challenging upshot of Aristotle's vision is that those who spend their days immersed in the world of work encounter obstacles to living a good life. Although Aristotle argues that farmers, craftsmen, and all those who work for a living ought to be excluded from citizenship in the ideal *polis*, accepting the validity of the three critiques does not require taking this position. *Our* response to his vision, if we accept it, should be an investigation into how to reduce the dominance in our societies of the forms of market and household work that have similar harmful effects on human lives. And to the extent that the flaws of such work cannot be entirely remediated, we ought to think about how to reduce the dominance of work by expanding access to free time: to provide to each individual the opportunity to spend his or her life to a greater extent beyond the realms of household and market work.

For various reasons, one may find the prospect of turning to Aristotle for enlightenment about our working world pure folly. Not only does he appear to be blinded by the preconceptions of an exploitative leisured elite—preconceptions which make him an apologist for slavery and a proponent of the civic disenfranchisement of all those who work for a living—but he writes about work in an economy that barely resembles our own. I will deal with these problems in turn.

When approaching Aristotle's views of work and leisure it is tempting to dismiss his position, a position heavily critical of the working life, as mere class prejudice. Aristotle provides the materials for a way of looking at work as fundamentally damaging to one's life—so damaging that it affects one's ability to live a good life, to live well. In his view, something crucial will be missing in the life of a human whose waking hours are consumed by work. This position, at least on the face of it, does not conform to contemporary intuitions regarding the equal worth of persons and their life choices—especially given that Aristotle relies upon this view to justify withholding citizenship from those who work in the identified ways.[4] Distaste with a view that is so heavily critical of the lives of the vast majority of people—particularly poor and underprivileged people[5]—may be one reason why one would want to dismiss the position as resting on nothing but a mere expression of arrogant aristocratic attitudes or biases. Although there are reasons to suggest that Aristotle's condemnation of the working life corresponded in its outlines with something like a shared view among the Athenian upper class, this should not rule out the question of whether what he said about work can be useful for a critique of our contemporary working world.

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[4] Although as Martha Nussbaum points out, even some notable contemporary liberal thinkers display a certain reluctance over extending the franchise to those for whom the necessity of all-consuming labour rules out opportunities for education: "Even John Rawls insists that the principle of one person/one vote should be applied only once a nation reaches a certain level of economic development; presumably this is because, as traditional liberal arguments observe, uneducated laboring classes may not be able to be the informed citizens we want." Nussbaum, "Aristotle, Politics, and Human Capabilities: A Reply to Antony, Arneson, Charlesworth, and Mulgan," 112.

[5] For whom, moreover, it is usually a bit of a stretch to talk about their labour as a "life *choice*."

As for attributions of class bias in general, it should first be pointed out that there has been a dispute among historians, most notably between G. E. M. de Ste. Croix and Moses Finley, over the appropriateness of "class" as an analytical tool for interpreting ancient society. Finley questions the usefulness of the Marxist concept of economic class when applied to the ancient Greek world, and prefers instead the much more amorphous "status."[6] I do not intend to arbitrate this dispute, the details of which make no serious difference to the present investigation.[7] I will be following de Ste. Croix, who argues that "the most important single dividing line which we can draw between different groups of free men in the Greek world" is that between "the common herd" and what he calls the "propertied class."[8] De Ste. Croix's propertied class encompasses the small group of wealthy Athenians who, by virtue of their control over land and slave labour, did not have to work for a living.

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[6] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 49; *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece*, 5. In *Economy and Society* Finley defines "status" as follows: "All men, unless they are Robinson Crusoes, are bundles of claims, privileges, immunities, liabilities and obligations with respect to others. A man's status is defined by the total of these elements which he possesses or which he has (or has not) the potential of acquiring." That this notion of "status" is drawn from Weber is suggested by de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, 91.

[7] Finley imagines that a class interpretation of ancient society would depend upon revealing conflict between those who own the means of production, and "wage-labourers" who do not—a distinction that is anachronistic when applied to the ancient Greek economy (*Ancient Economy*, 49). Even if the charge of anachronism is correct, Finley takes too rigid a view of the concept of "class." De Ste. Croix argues sensibly that the relevant division is not between owners of the means of production and wage-labourers, but rather between a land-owning "propertied class," who are wealthy enough to be able to live without working, and the labour of slaves. It was primarily from slaves, de Ste. Croix argues, and not from hired labourers, that the land-owning "propertied class" extracted the surplus labour that made their leisure possible (*Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, 39).

[8] de Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 114.

When moving from the question of ancient Greek society in general to explaining (or condemning) Aristotle's views of work in particular, one must keep in mind that Aristotle was not a landed Athenian aristocrat but a metic, a "resident alien" of sorts. He did not belong to what de Ste. Croix calls the "propertied class." Metics at Athens were required to pay a special tax, were submitted to "supervision" by a citizen (*prostâtes*), and did not enjoy the political privileges of citizenship—which included not only the right to speak in assembly and hold office, but also (crucially, for the task of assessing someone's "class" position in the ancient economy) the right to own land.[9] Although there were varying degrees of metic status, with some foreigners receiving by special decree a certain fraction of the rights of a citizen, and although it is likely that Aristotle enjoyed a more privileged standing than that of the worst-off *metics* (despite the fact that he was forced into exile twice), there is evidence that Aristotle did not possess the all-important right to land ownership. David Whitehead notes that Aristotle's will "disposes of no land," and that "he does not even know where he will be buried."[10]

Nevertheless, pointing out Aristotle's position as an inferior and an outsider does not rule out the possibility that he is simply parroting the received view, at least with regard to work, of the Athenian propertied class.[11] Indeed, when it comes to the general

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[9] David Whitehead, *Aristotle the Metic*, 94-95.
[10] *Ibid*., 96.
[11] Richard Mulgan insists that Aristotle "simply accepts without question the common assumption of well-to-do Greeks that virtue and the good life require a level of material wealth and leisure that must lie beyond the reach of many members of the community." Richard Mulgan, "Was Aristotle an 'Aristotelian Social Democrat'?" 91.

condemnation of the working life he is, to a significant extent, "preaching to the converted." Aristotle is by no means presenting his readers or listeners with extensive argument on this particular topic. Most of the arguments need to be reconstructed by connecting several different thoughts strewn about Aristotle's surviving literature. It is apparent that he is not arguing against some unknown interlocutor who holds that the working life is in fact a good life—the latter view was seemingly rare in Aristotle's world.[12] We can likely safely assume that the prevailing view—at least among the upper classes[13]—harboured a deep aversion to the working life.

It is sometimes suggested that agricultural work was excepted from the ancient propertied class's disdain for the working life.[14] Although the life of the independent farmer seems to have been held in much higher esteem than that of the hired labourer (and was so held by Aristotle, for reasons I will lay out later on) it is not always true that it was the actual work, the tilling and toiling of farming, that was valorized.[15] Oftentimes what seems like praise for the work of the farmer is actually praise for the absentee *landowner*.[16] Xenophon, a man, as de Ste. Croix puts it, "of unimpeachably orthodox and traditional opinions," is a revealing example.[17] In his *Oeconomicus*, he has

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[12] And perhaps even rare in the wider Greek, and then later Roman, worlds, as de Ste. Croix argues. *Class Struggle*, 122.
[13] Very little is known of the views of the lower classes. However, de Ste. Croix speculates that some elements of the anti-work stance, particularly the disdain of hired labour, were shared even by the lower classes.
[14] Herbert Applebaum, *The Concept of Work*, 32.
[15] And it is not at all true in the case of Aristotle, who along with Plato argued for the exclusion of farmers along with all other workers from political life.
[16] de Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 122.
[17] *Ibid*., 121.

Socrates argue that the one occupation fit for a gentleman is that of agriculture. However, it becomes apparent that Xenophon's gentleman does not have to work for a living, and only actually engages in the hands-on activities of farming more for reasons of occasional exercise, for a healthy ride in the country air. Even the task of supervising and directing those who actually till the soil is regarded as better assigned to a manager (*epitropos*)—who was usually a slave.[18]

Among the later Roman propertied classes, a notable exception to this worldview is the position of Musonius Rufus.[19] Musonius, the Roman Stoic, held that the practice of philosophy was compatible with the life of the farmer, and by the "life of the farmer" he did not mean the ownership of land and control of slaves, but actually labouring and tilling with one's own hands.[20] Extraordinarily, Musonius even allows that it does not matter whether one owns the land upon which one works.[21] Musonius argues that working in this way and providing for oneself is preferable to being dependent on others for aid: "not to require another's help for one's need is more dignified than

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[18] Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*, V. Technically, outdoor work was supervised by slaves, while the women in aristocratic families supervised the indoor work. Herbert Applebaum, *The Concept of Work*, 51.
[19] de Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 123.
[20] Cora Lutz, "Musonius Rufus 'The Roman Socrates'," 80-85.
[21] de Ste. Croix points out just how rare this position was: "Among all the ancient thinkers I know who belonged (like Xenophon and Cicero) to the propertied class, I have found but one [Musonius Rufus] who not only recommends the gentlemanly intellectual, the would-be philosopher, both to supervise the work on his farm and actually to take part in it personally and work with his own hands, but who also explicitly says that it does not matter whether the farm is his own property or not." *Class Struggle*, 123.

asking for it."[22] He also argues that farming and shepherding are uniquely compatible with the practice of philosophy because of the relative lack of exertion in such work:

> For while, to be sure, the occupations which strain and tire the whole body compel the mind to share in concentration upon them, or at all events, upon the body, yet the occupations which require not too much physical exertion do not hinder the mind from reflecting on some of the higher things and by such reasoning from increasing its own wisdom—a goal toward which every philosopher earnestly strives.[23]

One may feel that Musonius, an upper-class equestrian who most likely never "worked on the land" himself, was a little too optimistic about the ease of agricultural labour.[24] Most such work probably involved plenty of back-breaking, exhausting toil. But even if we ignore this it is noteworthy that his position only amounts to conditional praise for work: it is valued as a means to the practice of philosophy. "Valuing certain types of labour as an acceptable means of furthering philosophy," Birgit van den Hoven points out, "is very different from assessing that particular form of labour as being

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[22] Lutz, "Musonius Rufus," 83. It is not clear whether by "asking for help" he means begging/receiving support from a wealthy patron, or rather whether he is referring to a reliance on hired and slave labour (it would be odd to call the latter "*asking* for help"). Moreover, it is not clear what the relationship between the philosopher-labourer and the landowner is supposed to be.

[23] *Ibid*., 81-83.

[24] Birgit van den Hoven, *Work in Ancient and Medieval Thought*, 44. De Ste. Croix makes a similar observation: "One may suspect that Musonius was indulging in a flight of fancy and idealizing a situation of which, as a Roman equestrian, he had had no real, direct, personal experience." *Class Struggle*, 123.

valuable in itself."[25] At any rate, the fact that even such a limited praise for work was so rare in the Greek and Roman worldview is telling.[26]

It does seem that Aristotle's generally negative view of work was prevalent, one might say dominant, among the propertied classes.[27] Yet pointing out similarities between Aristotle's views on this particular matter and the received opinions of the propertied class does not justify dismissing his views as *mere* prejudice. Even if one concedes that there is a class or "status" bias at work here, this does not necessarily make the account false or mistaken. To claim that a position is clouded because of class interests first requires determining that it is in fact clouded. Instead of remaining satisfied with accusations of unreasoned bias, it is more interesting to examine *Aristotle's reasons* for his negative judgment of work, and hence to see if there might not be something enlightening or worthy of consideration in his position alongside the admittedly worrying aspects.

The potentially more troublesome obstacle to using Aristotle as a foil is not his purported ideological prejudice, but rather the question of whether the conditions of the ancient Greek working world are so distinct from the present day as to render Aristotle's judgement of them irrelevant for our purposes. There is not a tight overlap between Aristotle's targets and our notion of market and household work. And at times

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[25] van den Hoven, *Work in Ancient and Medieval Thought*, 43.
[26] Exceptions may also include Hesiod's *Works and Days* and Virgil's *Georgics*.
[27] Although on this particular question of the value of work he appeared to share the predominant upper-class view, on many other questions Aristotle in fact displayed a much more distanced and independent viewpoint. As Martha Nussbaum insists, "Aristotle is no complacent backer of wealthy propertied classes." "Aristotle, Politics, and Human Capabilities," 111.

Aristotle seems to conform to Herbert Applebaum's interpretation of the Greek conceptual landscape: "In ancient Greece, there is no idea of one great function of work encompassing all the trades, but rather each type of work constitutes a particular type of action with its own particular product."[28] So Aristotle talks often of "the life of the farmer," "the life of the craftsman," and "the life of the hired labourer" as if these are distinct modes of life.

Nevertheless, there are enough similarities between the features Aristotle picks out when talking about the lives of craftsmen, farmers, and traders that his critiques can also inform critical evaluations of modern market and household work. In any attempt to use Aristotle's normative vision for a critique of the modern working life, one must of course take into consideration the vast differences between ancient and contemporary working conditions. This was a primarily low-tech agricultural society with relatively little wage-labour. Nevertheless, I do not think that the three critical themes I will articulate are only valid for Aristotle's particular historical situation. In fact, there is reason to believe, as I will argue, that aspects of modern working conditions actually make the Aristotelian arguments *more* pressing in certain areas.

It is helpful to begin with Aristotle's distinction between "life" (*zên*) and "the good life" (*euzên* or *eudaimonia*) mentioned by Charles Taylor.[29] A *polis*, Aristotle tells us, "comes to be for the sake of living, but it remains in existence for the sake of living

[28] Applebaum, *The Concept of Work*, 31.
[29] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 211.

well."[30] Living encompasses activities whose aim is the securing of "everyday needs,"[31] whereas living well, which requires leisure (*scholê*), includes activities such as politics, contemplation, and friendship. For Aristotle, as Charles Taylor puts it, "you can't pursue the good life without pursuing life. But an existence dedicated to this latter goal alone is not a fully human one."[32] For example, the lives of the trader (*kapêlos*) and of all those who engage in *chrêmatistikê* (which includes hired labourers)[33] are dismissed because, in Aristotle's words, "they are preoccupied with living, not with living well."[34] Work was relegated to the domain of "mere living" and thus cut off from the realm of human flourishing, from *eudaimonia*.

In part, this is because the working life was regarded as a life that was in some sense compelled—a life not chosen. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, an investigation into what is the best life, the working life is not even accepted as a candidate. The reason given is that a worker's life, in Aristotle's words, "is in a way forced on him."[35] For Aristotle, those who spend their days immersed in the provision of life's necessities and luxuries do so because they *must*. When he discusses the hired labourer (*thês*), the craftsman (*technitês*), and the farmer, Aristotle is not thinking of someone who labours only

[30] *Politics*, 1252b29-30.
[31] *Ibid*., 1252b12-13.
[32] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 211.
[33] Scott Meikle argues for including hired labour as an instance of *chrêmatistikê*. "Aristotle on Business," 143.
[34] *Politics*, 1257b40ff.
[35] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1096a6. Technically, Aristotle was referring to the life of *chrêmatistikê*, but Meikle argues for understanding this as including not only traders and shopkeepers, but also all those who work for wages. Technically this does not include the life of the farmer, but the general point can also be applied to farmers who *must* work to live. Meikle, "Aristotle on Business," 138.

occasionally, for a friend, or in the form of what we might call a "hobby." Rather, Aristotle's targets must work to live, or as we would put it, to "make a living."

This division, between those who need to work for a living and those who need not, was significant in the worldview of the Greeks of Aristotle's period; their very terminology betrays this. The Greek terms *penia* and *ploutos*, although usually translated as "poverty" and "wealth" respectively, did not have the same connotations for the Greeks as they do for contemporary English speakers, according to Finley. As he explains,

> A *plousios* was a man who was rich enough to live properly on his income (as we should phrase it) [i.e. from property], a *penês* was not. The latter need not be propertyless or even, in the full sense, poor: he could own a farm or slaves, and he could have a few hundred drachmas accumulated in the strong-box, but he was compelled to devote himself to gaining a livelihood. *Penia*, in short, meant the harsh compulsion to toil.[36]

To be wealthy meant to possess enough resources to be able to live without working; poverty on the other hand meant one had to work for a living, even if such work was relatively lucrative. This way of dividing the "rich" from the "poor" is not exclusively ancient. Even up to the nineteenth century "the poor" in English meant those who needed to work for a living, while the label "pauper" was reserved for the truly materially deprived.[37] It is interesting to note that, on this understanding, the vast majority of present-day populations of even the richest nations, including presumably what we call the "upper middle-class," would be labelled as "poor."

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[36] Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 41.
[37] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 91.

Aristotle's disdain for the working life is partly explained by the fact that he viewed such a life as undertaken under compulsion. Those who worked needed to do so in order to live. However, to really get at the heart of Aristotle's concerns, we must go beyond observing that the working life was regarded as compelled. A member of the propertied class who freely chose to devote the majority of his waking hours to hiring himself out as a craftsman—although the prospect appears unthinkable to Aristotle—would not escape the harsh judgement that Aristotle imposes upon the working life. The central point is not about whether one freely chooses to work or is impelled by the prospect of pauperism, but about the work itself and the human relationships that inhere in work. For Aristotle, the working life is not bad because it is not chosen—it is bad because it is not choice*worthy*.

In fact, in a technical Aristotelian sense the working life *is* chosen, even by the poor. It is partly "voluntary" as Aristotle would put it, because the "origin" of the action is within the agent (versus Aristotle's example of an "involuntary" action in which an agent is forced off a cliff by a strong wind).[38] Work is better understood as falling under the category of Aristotle's "mixed" actions. The example of a mixed action is a sailor who must throw his cargo overboard in a storm in order to save the ship from sinking.[39] The sailor's action is "voluntary" in the sense that it originated from his will (i.e., the wind did not send him tumbling into the crates, thus knocking them overboard), but it is not fully voluntary. The reason for this is that throwing one's cargo

[38] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1110a.
[39] *Ibid*., 1110a10.

overboard is in itself, absent the conditions of the storm, not choiceworthy. As Aristotle says, "no one would choose any action of this sort in itself."[40] Aristotle's view of the working life is similar to his view of the sailor who must throw his cargo overboard: absent the compulsion of poverty, no one would opt for the working life because such a life is not *worthy* of being chosen. Aristotle's reasons for the unworthiness of a life of work can be divided into three distinct themes.

The first theme centres around an understanding of freedom. The Greek concept of *eleutheria*, or freedom, had many connotations, but primarily it meant the condition of not being a slave.[41] Slaves were unfree because their lives were wholly under the direction of a master; the master could do with the slave what he willed. The slave is the formal property of another person who has the legal power to direct that slave's life in almost all significant ways. Even if the master did not happen to intervene in his slave's life in each and every one of its details, the slave was unfree because the master could do so arbitrarily and at will, for any reason or no reason at all. This view of the condition of the slave involves a distinct notion of freedom, which is sometimes called the "republican" notion of freedom: the idea of not being dominated by or dependent upon the arbitrary will of another human being.[42]

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[40] *Ibid*., 1110a15ff. The point I take it is not just a matter of prediction of human behaviour (that no one would *in fact* act in this way), but that there is no *reason* to take such an action in itself, in the absence of mitigating factors.
[41] Richard Mulgan, *Liberty in Ancient Greece*, 8-9.
[42] Philip Pettit, *Republicanism*. Quentin Skinner prefers "neo-roman" as a label. *Liberty Before Liberalism*.

In Aristotle one finds the view that certain types of work make one unfree or, to use Philip Pettit's term, "dominated" in the same sense as the slave. "There are several kinds of slave," says Aristotle; in this list he includes hired labourers and "vulgar craftsmen."[43] To Aristotle, working for another, for hire, is inherently unfree. "It is the mark of a free man," Aristotle writes in the *Rhetoric*, "not to live at another's beck and call."[44] Moses Finley, referring to this passage, points out that, "his notion of living under restraint was not restricted to slaves but was extended to wage labour and to others who were *economically* dependent."[45] There was no problem according to Aristotle with simply knowing how to perform some of "those useful things that are really necessary"; in fact, Aristotle encourages "free" people, presumably members of the propertied class, to learn some of these crafts and sciences.[46] Nor was there any problem with actually *using* these skills, with two conditions: they must only be used occasionally, and the tasks must be performed "for one's own sake," to fulfill some occasional personal need, or "for the sake of friends."[47] Such occasional performances of mere "necessary" and "useful" tasks are not blameworthy, because, as Aristotle says, "it is no longer a case of one person becoming master and the other slave."[48] What makes such work degrading is doing it in the employ of another; this relationship renders

[43] *Politics*, 1277a36ff
[44] *Rhetoric*, 1367a32.
[45] Finley, *Ancient Economy*, 41. Finley's emphasis.
[46] *Politics*, 1337b2-3
[47] *Ibid*., 1337b15-20.
[48] *Politics*, 1277b5.

one's work "slavish" ("*thêtikon kai doulikon*").[49] These two adjectives, *thêtikon* (from the word for hired labourer: *thês*) and *doulikon* (from one of the words for slave: *doulos*) clearly had, in de Ste. Croix's words, "a very similar colouring in [Aristotle's] mind."[50]

Of course, the extent and degree of subjection to the other's will is not nearly as severe in the case of the non-slave worker as it is for the slave; Aristotle was willing to grant this. The hired craftsman is thus said to be in a condition of "delimited slavery."[51] The hired worker, after all, is not the legal property of his employer. His life is not in its entirety under the direction of another. Nevertheless, during periods of work he acts at the will of the person who is paying him, the person who "employs" his body and mind. To the extent that this worker depends on the employer for his income, his "living," he is subject to the employer's will. This is a weaker form of dependence than that of the slave because the worker can always refuse to perform some requested action, but it is still a form of dependence. The cost of refusal, of standing up for oneself or talking back—the loss of one's income—could be heavy.[52]

For Aristotle, as with later "republican" thinkers, this notion of unfreedom as dependence or domination is not just a matter of one's choices being constrained. It also a matter of the unequal status that inheres in the human relationship constituted by

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[49] *Ibid*., 1337b19-21.
[50] de Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 184.
[51] *Politics*, 1260b1.
[52] How "heavy" the cost is depends on, among other things, the ease of securing alternate employment. Furthermore, one's relative poverty, in the Greek sense, makes a difference here. If one possesses enough resources such that one does not depend upon the income received from employment, one will not be nearly as unfree (perhaps not at all) as those who depend upon their work to make a living.

employment; a question of an offence of dignity or, as we would put it, "respect." In Aristotle, a certain fawning, submissive flattery is taken to be characteristic of the life of the *thês*. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the hired worker is contrasted with the person who possesses the excellence (*aretê*) of "magnanimity" (*megalopsuchia*). The magnanimous or "great-souled" person, in Aristotle's words, "cannot let anyone else, except a friend, determine his life. For that would be slavish; and this is why all flatterers are servile and *thêtikoi* are flatterers."[53] Although for Aristotle the argument is that no person who is not a slave, woman, or foreigner should stand in such a relation to another human being, the modern argument is, or ought to be, that we ought to be concerned when *any person* is related to others in this way.

This idea of freedom—"the idea," de Ste. Croix writes, "of being at another's beck and call, of having to submit to dictation and reproof, without the option of being able to walk out or to give as good as he got"—and its association with work done for wages was common in Aristotle's society.[54] Nor, de Ste. Croix argues, was it accepted only among the propertied class: "To take the sort of permanent employment which most people nowadays are only too glad to have is to demean oneself to the level of the slave: one must avoid that at all costs, even if it brings in more money."[55] Even those hired workers who themselves had some measure of power over others, such as the *epitropos* (manager or overseer) were considered unfree in the same sense.[56] This first

[53] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1125a-28.
[54] de Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 181.
[55] *Ibid*.
[56] *Ibid*.

critique does not, however, apply to farmers who own and work on their own land; who are, as we would say, "self-employed." This is why for Aristotle the life of the farmer is superior to the life of the hired labourer and the craftsman. Although Aristotle eventually criticizes the life of farming for separate reasons, the farmer is regarded as independent and therefore not slavishly unfree.

The argument seems to work, *prima facie*, for the hired labourer, but it is curious that Aristotle includes the craftsman in his list of "slavish" occupations. Why is it that the craftsman, if he owned his own tools and was "self-employed," could not be considered as independent as the farmer? Aristotle sometimes distinguishes the life of the hired labourer (*thês*) from the life of the craftsman (*technitês*) or "vulgar craftsman" (*banausos technitês*), but at other times he runs them together as if there were no distinction to be made.[57] Perhaps Aristotle was not simply being lazy with his classifications. Artisans sometimes hired out the use of their skills, and therefore occasionally worked under conditions similar to those of the *thês*.[58] However, when not in the employ of others, when the craftsman works with his own tools in his own workshop, under the direction of and dependent upon no one but himself, we should say that the craftsman led a life free of the domination and dependence inherent in the hired labourer's activity.[59]

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[57] *Politics*, 1260a36-b.
[58] de Ste. Croix, *Class Struggle*, 183.
[59] At least with respect to the craftsman's work (there may be other factors, such as political arrangements, that cause the craftsman to be dominated).

We might also want to argue that the *skill* of the craftsman made him more free than the unskilled general labourer. Aristotle does not seem to allow for this, but the notion was not entirely alien to the ancient world. Much later, Cicero actually makes something like this point in his *de Officiis*: "all those workers who are paid for their labour and not for their skill have servile and demeaning employment; for in their case the very wage is a contract to servitude."[60] Presumably, the point here is that those who possess particular skills will contract to perform specific tasks, rather than being used for whatever the hiring agent deems necessary. Partly this means less supervision, but more importantly, if the skills the craftsmen possess are rare or in high demand, this then places them in a better position to be able to stand up for themselves; better than the eminently replaceable *thês*.

As for the applicability of this critique to a modern context, we are aided by the fact that modern thinkers have explicitly taken up this particular conception of freedom in the context of modern employment or wage labour. Nineteenth-century English and American thinkers and reformers argued that wage labour, or "wage slavery," was incompatible with republican citizenship, and a contemporary writer, Philip Pettit, argues that employment offends against the republican ideal of freedom as "non-domination."[61] Even if hired labour played a more limited role in the ancient economy, in ours it is one of the dominant modes of working. The other dominant mode of work—household work—is often marked by a similar dependence on the will of

[60] Cicero, *de Officiis*, I.150.
[61] Michael Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*, 168-200; Philip Pettit, *Republicanism*.

another, either due to the persistence of violence in the domestic sphere or the inequalities and policy lacunae that make one spouse, for instance, dependent on the other for financial resources. More of these details will be hashed out in the chapters to follow, but given how widespread employment is in our societies, the Aristotelian criticism is pressing for us.

The second theme one finds in Aristotle's judgement of the working life underpins the idea that work warps our bodies and minds in ways that render us less than fully human; less able to live a good life. Aristotle holds that the working life not only fails to develop but also actively degrades one's capacity for "excellence" or "virtue" (*aretê*).[62] The excellences are capabilities without which one cannot live well. To elaborate this second critique I will not focus exclusively on Aristotle's list of the particular excellences, but rather on one of the "structural features" of *aretê*: the exercise of choice (*prohairesis*).[63]

Aristotle does imply that *some* virtues or excellences are necessary for workers; even for slaves. "A slave," says Aristotle, "is useful for providing the necessities, so he clearly needs only a small amount of virtue—just so much as will prevent him from inadequately performing his tasks through intemperance or cowardice."[64] The full range of excellences, however, is cut off from those who work for a living. In part, workers are presumably unable to develop the excellences because they lack the proper education. However, Aristotle also seems to believe that an adult, having received the

[62] *Politics*, 1278a20.
[63] Nussbaum, *The Fragility of Goodness*.
[64] *Politics*, 1260a35

proper education, will not only have no opportunity to exercise the excellences he has previously developed, but that these excellences will in fact be degraded through neglect in a life full of work.[65] Martha Nussbaum describes Aristotle's view of the matter as follows: "a well-trained adult who is suddenly thrust into this monotonous and degrading life will not only suffer an impairment of good activity (as is obvious), but will also risk, as time goes on, suffering a decisive impairment of character itself."[66] There is something about the lives of some workers that damages their very capacity for excellent or virtuous activity.

Once again, at the bottom of Aristotle's ranking of working lives are the hired labourers and vulgar craftsmen. In part, their especially terrible condition is explained by the gruelling and physiologically destructive nature of the work in which they engage. The term "*banausos*," translated as "vulgar" by C. D. C. Reeve, is at one point referred to by Aristotle as applying to any work that, in his words "renders the body or mind of free people useless for the practices and activities of virtue."[67] "The more they damage the body," Aristotle writes, in reference to the "craft-like" pursuits, "the more vulgar they are."[68] Xenophon, in his *Oeconomicus*, describes the craftsman as living a sedentary life spent indoors, hunched over in a crippling posture, close to the fire in

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[65] Just how long this process takes is not clear. *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1098a20: "the good will express the best and most complete virtue. Moreover, it will be in a complete life. For one swallow does not make a spring, nor does one day; nor, similarly, does one day or a short time make us blessed and happy."
[66] *Fragility of Goodness*, 348.
[67] *Politics*, 1337b10.
[68] *Ibid*., 1258b35.

unhealthy conditions.[69] It does not strain modern intuitions to imagine that a persistent state of poor health or injury, caused by persistent toil, would make one's life worse.

But Aristotle goes further than this point about the exhaustion of unhealthy work. He also holds that the working life fails to offer opportunities for the *exercise* of excellence, and that this failure leads to the decay of those capacities without which one cannot live well. This failure can be articulated in two ways, both of which require making connections that are not always explicitly made by Aristotle. The first reason is that work does not allow the right sort of social environment in which to engage in the type of activities that are governed by the excellences. For Aristotle, certain forms of social relation, especially those involved in political participation and friendship (*philia*), are required for the development of some of the excellences.[70] Generosity, for example, requires a particular relation to another human being, as does magnanimity. The first thing Aristotle can say then is that work does not involve the right sort of relation to other people, and that without such a relation one has no opportunity to exercise the relevant virtue or excellence.

Yet if Aristotle was willing to admit courage and temperance into the working life, why not generosity, magnanimity, and other such excellences? If this question is transposed to the modern working environment, one could argue in support of

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[69] *Oeconomicus*, IV.2. The translator notes that Xenophon describes the craftsman's body as becoming "effeminate"—a concern over health is clearly not all that is behind Xenophon's negative judgment of the craftsman.

[70] Nussbaum points out that *philia* was a much wider notion than our notion of friendship: "it takes in family relations, the relation between husband and wife, and erotic relationships, as well as what we would call 'friendship'." *Fragility*, 328.

Aristotle by pointing out that some jobs are less-than-ideal in terms of offering opportunities for the right sort of human relationships. Examples are simple enough to provide: assembly lines that move at such a pace as to make it next-to-impossible to even maintain eye contact with one's neighbour; jobs in which one is expressly forbidden to talk to fellow employees; jobs in which one is required to be manipulative and false, both with customers and with fellow workers; and finally, to refer back to what I called Aristotle's first critique, jobs that involve hierarchical relations that damage one's ability to stand on a footing of equal respect with one's peers, and that instead promote the bowing, scraping, obsequious natures of the dominated (with which Aristotle explicitly contrasted the "magnanimous" person). Moreover, when that other central site of modern work, the household, reinforces this domination, the effect is even greater; the opportunities to participate in human interactions on a footing of equal respect are even more limited.

As mentioned, there is a second reason for the failure of a working life to offer opportunities for excellence. For Aristotle, the excellences essentially involve the capability and exercise of *choice* (*prohairesis*); not just choice in the sense of "having options," but the *actual activity* of choosing, forming ends, and deciding on means. "Excellence," says Aristotle, "is a state of character concerned with choice."[71] As Martha Nussbaum writes, excellent activities must be "chosen by the agent's own practical reason."[72] The slave cannot cultivate this capacity because, as Nussbaum puts it, he

[71] *Ibid*., 298-299.
[72] *Ibid*., 348.

does not "live according to his own practical choices."[73] For Aristotle, the same can be said of some workers *with respect to their work activities*. The working life is thus criticized because it degrades one's powers of choice through lack of sufficient opportunities to exercise these powers.

To what extent, one can ask, did Aristotle's workers lack opportunities for "choice" in the relevant sense? This critique applies to occupations that involve some degree of supervision and control by another; hence to hired labourers and some employed craftsmen, but not to independent farmers or craftsmen. Even in the case of the former type of worker, presumably they were not *always* supervised, but had some limited leeway over choosing what methods to employ in order to accomplish a given task. The question, however, is whether exercising choice regarding means is sufficient for a full development of one's powers of *prohairesis*. What is missing is a choice of the *ends* for which the workers' bodies and hands are used. The ends are not their own; they are thus like a human tool, who, as Aristotle puts it, "is someone else's, not his own."[74] Nussbaum, in reference to the activity of the slave, lays out the problem as follows:

> A household slave is not given a separate command every time he dusts a piece of furniture; he may in a limited way use his discretionary powers. But what he cannot do is to decide on the *plan* and the *values* according to which the house will be run, the work performed. He is not exactly like a tool, since he moves himself, and even calculates in a limited way. But it is still appropriate to think of him as a tool of his master's reason.[75]

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[73] Nussbaum, "Shame, Separateness, and Political Unity," 418.
[74] *Politics*, 1254a15
[75] Nussbaum, "Shame, Separateness, and Political Unity: Aristotle's Criticism of Plato," 409.

Perhaps the vulgar craftsman and hired labourer were not given, as Nussbaum puts it, "a separate command" every time they performed an action in the course of their hire, but they were still working for another and not in direct pursuit of ends that they formed themselves.

Putting aside for the moment questions about whether the development and exercise of self-directed choice is truly necessary for moral excellence or one's ability to live well, Aristotle's judgment still seems too harsh on the question of the availability of options for deliberate choice in the non-slave worker's life. A lot depends not only on the extent of surveillance and control in the work process, but also on how much time the typical worker spends "on the job," so to speak, not to mention the extent to which the worker's spare time provides opportunities for exercising the capabilities in question.

Aristotle's judgment of the worker on this particular question is probably better suited or more powerful when applied to some modern occupations. Opportunities for regulating every one of the worker's discrete actions abound in the context of the modern hierarchical firm or factory, along with the development of a science of human management whose goal is control over the minute, repetitive actions of employees. Moreover, modern developments in technology and the division of labour are such that some jobs are designed in such a way as to remove any serious opportunities for choice or planning, whether of means or ends. This detailed division of labour involves dividing larger processes and activities into small bits of tasks and assigning each one to a worker—whose activities on the job can thereby be reduced to, for example, a simple

bending and straightening an arm, all day, every day. Nor is this simply a matter of control, surveillance, or working for another. A worker-owned firm that divided jobs into singular repetitive motions would still, according to this critique, be letting the worker's capacity for choice atrophy—and probably to an even worse degree than a situation of outright dependent employment in which workers are given more complex, open-ended tasks. It is in relation to just such issues as the harmful effects of the division of labour that one finds a modern version of the second Aristotelian critique. The writers I will be examining argue for creating opportunities for "meaningful" work in our economy: work that requires the use of rational and deliberative faculties that look quite similar to what Aristotle meant by *prohairesis*.[76]

The third and final theme in Aristotle's critique of the working life is the theme of leisure (*scholê*). On the one hand, leisure requires carving out a space in which one is free from the necessity to work. However, Aristotle's concept of *scholê* requires more than just freedom from necessity, or what we might think of as "free time." Leisure is the space in which one can pursue activities chosen for their own sake, rather than those that are merely "necessary" or "useful"—the categories that, for Aristotle, pervade the realms of the farmer, craftsman, trader, and hired labourer.

Discovering what Aristotle meant by "leisure" requires another foray into ancient terminology. An instructive word that is associated with the working life, and

[76] Although most of these writers are drawing explicitly on Marx, not Aristotle. Adina Schwartz, "Meaningful Work"; Jon Elster, "Self-Realisation in Work and Politics."

indeed translated as "work" by some,[77] is '*ascholia*.' This word reveals something of the normative landscape in which Aristotle's criticism of work is located. '*Ascholia*' is formed as a negation of the word '*scholê*,' the word for leisure. Much has been made of the fact that the word for work, directly translated, means "not-leisure" (*a-scholia*). Josef Pieper, for example, claims that this linguistic particularity—work was understood as a negative, the absence of leisure—reveals the ethical primacy that Aristotle and the Greeks placed on the domain of leisure.[78] Leisure is indeed central to Aristotle's ethical and political vision. Leisure, he says, is "the starting point [*archê*] for everything else."[79] The goal of the ideal *polis* is the promotion of *eudaimonia*—living well, or the good life—and *eudaimonia* is only "found in leisure."[80] Hence, Aristotle holds that the purpose (*telos*) of the *polis* is to make leisure possible.[81] Aristotle's pessimistic judgment of work is tied closely to his valorization of leisure as a central domain of human fulfillment.

In part, *scholê* means freedom from necessity. Michael Walzer suggests that this notion is hinted at in our modern phrase "*free* time": "Free time is not only 'vacant' time; it is also time at one's command. That lovely phrase 'one's own sweet time' doesn't always mean that one has nothing to do, but rather that there is nothing that one *has* to do."[82] "Necessity" (*anankê*) is one of the defining features of the working life for Aristotle. Working for a living, working under the impulse of *penia*, is acting under

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[77] C.D.C. Reeve, in his Glossary, matches "work" with "*ascholia*." *Politics*, p. 262.
[78] Pieper, *Leisure, the Basis of Culture*, 4-5.
[79] *Politics*, 1337b30ff.
[80] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1277b5.
[81] *Politics*, 1334a4-5. This may strike one as the direct opposite of one the central perceived purposes of the modern state: to make work possible.
[82] Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 185.

compulsion. A form of hypothetical necessity—"I must work because, under the circumstances, if I do not, I will starve or otherwise suffer"—holds sway over one's activity. Aristotle focused on those whose entire lives were defined by the availability of such time—by those who seized the opportunity to live a *life* of leisure. The term *plousios* or "wealthy," which as we saw denoted the person who controlled enough resources to be able to live without working, thus had serious evaluative connotations for him. According to Aristotle, James Booth writes, "true wealth is freedom from the necessity of labor."[83] A person with leisure is a person who is not mired in this form of necessity.

Freedom from *anankê*, however, is not the whole story: it is a necessary condition for leisure, but it is not sufficient. To see this one need simply imagine the possibility that one's "free time" could be given over to work. One may choose to work even though poverty does not compel one to do so. The full significance of leisure is not only that it allows for action that is not compelled, but that it involves the pursuit of activities that are performed for their own sake. Actions undertaken under economic necessity are members of a broader category of instrumental activity: work under necessity is action that is essentially directed at the end of survival or earning a living. Along with "necessity," Aristotle also contrasts leisure with what he calls "the useful."[84] Both the useful and the necessary are members of the class of merely instrumental activities—actions performed not for their own sake, but for the sake of some further

[83] Booth, *Households*, 41. My emphasis.
[84] *Politics*, 1333b1.

end. The domain of work, for Aristotle, is a domain of mere instrumental activity: "one who is working [*ascholousin*] is doing so for the sake of some end he does not possess."[85] Aristotle distinguishes between "action" (*praxis*), and "production" (*poiêsis*).[86] "Actions" in the sense of *praxis* are activities chosen for their own sake ("the noble"), whereas "productions" (the "merely useful"), are exclusively instrumental, a means to an end which is beyond the action itself. True *scholê* is the space within which one can engage in *praxis*—action that is its own end.

What kinds of activities does Aristotle regard as chosen simply for the sake of engaging in them? He pays a particular amount of attention to contemplation (*theoria*) and political participation.[87] Political participation is understood to involve action in accordance with *aretê*. The political excellences can only be developed for those who have leisure because they are expressed in activities that must be chosen *for their own sake*.[88] It is on this basis that Aristotle goes so far as to deny citizenship to the independent farmer. The farmer must spend the majority of his time working to earn his living, and thus engaged in mere *poiêsis*. Although he does not labour under the domination of an employer, the farming life is criticized because it leaves no room for

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[85] *Ibid*., 1338a4-5.
[86] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097b1-5; 1096a7.
[87] In Book X of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle seems to change his mind and labels political activity as "unleisured" (using '*ascholia*') because not chosen for its own sake. I will not engage with the vast literature concerned with solving this perceived problem or refuting its existence. The issue is not material to the present project, except perhaps for the admission that there are some activities—perhaps some modern occupations—that are both chosen for the sake of themselves, *and* for the sake of something else.
[88] *Fragility*, 349.

the performance of actions distinctive of leisure.[89] However, despite the attention paid to the political and contemplative lives, Aristotle also allowed for other, what we might be tempted to call less "high brow" leisured pursuits. Politics and philosophy do not exhaust the possibilities. Also mentioned are activities pursued in the company of friends: "some friends drink or throw dice together, others practice gymnastics and hunt or philosophize together; each sort spending their time together in the activity they love best of everything in life."[90]

When evaluating this third critique in the context of the modern working world, we will want to ask whether some occupations can or do involve the distinctive good of leisure: activity chosen for its own sake. On the one hand, some activities simply do not lend themselves to being transformed into a formal occupation. It is difficult to imagine being paid for drinking wine and talking with friends. However, one can be paid to practice philosophy, and can hunt and fish to make a living—all of which are included in the traditional list of ancient Greek leisured pursuits. Perhaps one is a philosophy professor who is only concerned with making a living, or perhaps instead reading and writing about philosophy are the sort of thing one would pursue for their own sake, even if they were not part of one's job. In the former case one seems to be exclusively in the realm of Aristotle's *poiêsis* (the end in this case is the making of money), in the latter case it is not so clear. More will have to be said about the relationship between contemporary market and household work and leisure.

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[89] *Politics*, 1328b40.
[90] *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1172a3-5.

There is much more to Aristotle's critique of the working life than mere class prejudice. Aristotle does adopt some distasteful positions with respect to his exclusion of workers from citizenship and his support for slavery—not to mention his treatment of women.[91] But his reading of the flaws of the working life may serve as a useful starting point for developing a more critical and nuanced approach to the contemporary question of the relationship between work and well-being than that which holds sway in a public culture in the grips of the "affirmation of ordinary life." Today, the vast majority of people are engaged full-time in activities that involve one or more of the three defects of the working life noted above. Instead of arguing for excluding people from full membership in civic life, we should find ways to mitigate the harms that flow from market and household work and the dominant institutions in the context of which this work is undertaken. And to the extent that there are limits to which this is possible, we ought to expand access to more time off for all. To begin making this case, we must assess the force and validity of the three critiques as applied to modern working conditions.

[91] As Martha Nussbaum writes, "On women, Aristotle in general offers arguments so ludicrous as to be unworthy of any serious person. He holds, for example, that women have fewer teeth than men and that when a menstruating woman looks into a mirror it turns the glass red. But in the context where he is talking about their exclusion form political membership, he doesn't even say something ludicrous; he says virtually nothing." "Aristotle, Politics, and Human Capabilities," 114.

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CHAPTER TWO

A DEFENCE OF LEISURE

This chapter argues for maintaining and expanding opportunities to work less by articulating a conception of the good of leisure. There are what one might call "positive" and "negative" ethical justifications for providing opportunities to reduce the amount of work in our lives. The chapters that follow this one will explore some of these mainly negative justifications: the benefits of reduced workloads can be associated with the avoidance or reduction of the cumulative harms of the working life. There is, however, a positive case for combating the dominance of work. This positive case shifts the focus from an absence of harmful effects to the value of the activities that may fill newly freed time—activities that would otherwise be pushed aside by the demands of work. What follows is an articulation of one of the central ethical possibilities of the space opened up by a contraction of work.

Leisure ought to be associated with a way of being active in the world, or more accurately a mode of engagement with one's own activity, that is vital to human flourishing. According to the conception that will be defended, leisure bears a unique (though not exclusive) relationship to activity that is performed for its own sake, or as it will be referred to hereafter, autotelic activity. In addition to articulating the type of action and practice definitive of leisure, it will also be argued that this is a capability that is not optimally sought through work. For both conceptual and empirical reasons, the vast majority of the work in modern societies cannot provide robust opportunities

for autotelic activity. Moreover, for those lucky few whose work does represent an approximation of autotelic activity, work is still an inferior and inherently unreliable vehicle for providing this good. Work can offer many benefits—but we should not expect it to substitute for the benefits of leisure.

For the vast majority of human beings, a life filled with work is a life lacking in the opportunities for autotelic activity that are central to a flourishing existence. On this basis, there is a compelling public interest in giving everyone the opportunity to pursue a life in which a sufficient amount of time and space is carved out to pursue whims or projects that are engaged in for their own sake and not geared towards the ends of market and household work. Moreover, this time and space ought to be progressively expanded so that leisure may become an increasingly central part of human life for all who desire it. In other words, in addition to securing access to the bare minimum of leisure necessary for a decent life, societies ought to adopt as a regulative ideal the goal of maximizing the amount of leisure open to all.

Neither the maintenance nor the expansion of opportunities for leisure is cost-free. If we must give up some future output of goods and services in order to increase individuals' access to leisure, or even in order to maintain current levels of access, we will want at least a rough-and-ready way of evaluating whether, and to what extent, the trade-off is defensible at various stages of economic development. Articulating a conception of the good of leisure can, by providing us with a sense of how weighty a consideration it is, help guide our deliberations about such trade-offs.

The value of progressively increasing the amount of leisure accessible to the average citizen may be outweighed at a certain point by competing considerations. Leisure is only one input in an extremely complex balancing equation. The point is to develop a clearer picture of what we stand to lose, for example, when we raise the retirement age for public pensions or increase the standard workweek, and what we stand to gain by expanding the realm of leisure for all.

Before proceeding, it ought to be acknowledged that focusing on the relationship between leisure and the good life, or the ethical status of leisure, is not the only way to approach the question of how we should (or should not) organize the balance of opportunities for work and leisure in our societies. To the extent that this question of distribution has arisen at all in contemporary philosophy, it has been dealt with most prominently in a manner that requires bracketing the idea of the value of leisure.

In *Justice as Fairness*, Rawls gestures briefly towards this question of leisure time in the context of investigating what it means for citizens to be what he calls "normal and fully cooperating members of society over a complete life."[1] Part of what being a fully cooperating member of society means, according to Rawls, is taking part in a certain minimum amount of work. All those who do less than their part, who enjoy more time off than is left over after a standard working day, must subsidize this extra leisure themselves. Rawls suggests that leisure might be added to his index of primary goods in such a way that individuals who enjoy a life of leisure and have no income would not be entitled to government support. The general idea animating this

[1] Rawls, *Justice as Fairness,* 179.

suggested tweaking of his index of primary goods is one of reciprocity: that everyone who expects to benefit from social wealth via government income support ought to do his or her part in contributing to society's "cooperative work." Those who do not contribute their fair share of labour, who "surf all day off Malibu," as Rawls puts it, are not to be considered fully cooperating members of society, and are therefore not entitled to share in a certain portion of the resources of this society. Rawls draws the idea out as follows:

> ... include in the index of primary goods a certain amount of leisure time, say sixteen hours per day if the standard working day is eight hours. Those who do no work have eight extra hours of leisure and we count those eight extra hours as equivalent to the index of the least advantaged who do work a standard day. Surfers must somehow support themselves.[2]

Rawls raises this scenario mainly as a means of responding to an objection delivered by Richard Musgrave.[3] Musgrave had argued that one implication of Rawls's earlier formulation of the "difference principle" in *Theory of Justice* was that those who refrain from work and earn no income would be identified as among the least advantaged, and would therefore be entitled to government support. According to Musgrave, the difference principle unfairly favoured "those with a high preference for leisure."[4] As Julie Rose observes, Rawls proposes adding leisure to the index of primary goods, not out of some understanding of the importance of free time or leisure, but

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[2] *Ibid*.
[3] Musgrave, "Maximin, Uncertainty, and the Leisure Trade-Off"; Rawls, "Replay to Alexander and Musgrave."
[4] Musgrave, "Maximin, Uncertainty, and the Leisure Trade-Off," 632.

solely as a means of incorporating the idea that there is an obligation to work.[5] As Rose puts it, "far from constituting an endorsement of [the] claim that the distribution of free time is a central concern of distributive justice, Rawls's willingness to recognize leisure as a primary good is in fact only instrumental to grounding a work expectation."[6]

Rawls's argument here regarding the "Malibu surfer" has been challenged by Philippe Van Parijs, who supports an "unconditional basic income" policy under which Rawls's full-time surfer would be able to count on an income distributed by the state.[7] Van Parijs's basic income would be distributed to all permanent residents regardless of employment or even intention to work.[8] If distributed at the highest sustainable level, the basic income would in effect allow individuals to drastically reduce the amount of paid work in their lives. However, Van Parijs's central argument in favour of the basic income does not depend upon an account of the value of a leisure-filled life. He does not base his arguments on any claims about the ethical significance of work or leisure in human life, as he is committed to the view that the state ought not to make decisions on the basis of such substantive conceptions of the good.[9]

Instead, Van Parijs proceeds by asking whether a given distribution of social benefits and burdens is fair to those who happen to have varying preferences for leisure and work. In the absence of a basic income, Van Parijs argues, the status quo violates a

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[5] Rose, *Free Time*, 20-21.
[6] *Ibid*., 21.
[7] Van Parijs, "Why Surfers Should Be Fed."
[8] Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All*.
[9] Some of Van Parijs' earlier work, such as a paper written with Robert van der Veen entitled "A Capitalist Road to Communism," relied on a more perfectionist defence. Van Parijs explicitly rejects his old approach in *Real Freedom for All*, 243 n.1.

principle of non-discrimination among competing conceptions of the good. The status quo is insufficiently neutral in that it unfairly favours individuals who have strong preferences for work.[10] The optimal amount of access to free time, on Van Parijs' account, is simply that which flows from a fair distribution of "real freedom": the freedom provided, for example, by external resources like income that allow us to live according to our conception of the best life, whatever that might be. According to Van Parijs, tying a basic resource like income too closely to work produces an unfair distribution of such real freedom. So while the basic income would in effect allow some individuals to live without paid work, the value of such a way of life is not at the root of his justification for the policy.[11]

By contrast, the approach I am defending is grounded in an articulation of the good of leisure—of the value to all human beings of the forms of activity opened up by a contraction of work—rather than a conception of the significance of choice *tout court*.[12] Although I speak about "the" good of leisure, this should not be taken to suggest that it is the *only* good or benefit to be derived leisure. Nor should these arguments be taken to imply that leisure is the only valuable way to fill one's free time. Later chapters will focus on the benefits of opening up spaces for political activity, and the conclusion will touch briefly on the ways in which free time enhances even the goods of work.

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[10] Van Parijs, "Why Surfers Should be Fed," 102.
[11] In addition to the issue of whether the status quo is neutral or non-neutral in the ways Van Parijs cares about, one would want to ask whether Van Parijs has articulated a defensible notion of neutrality. Although he takes himself to be following some version of Rawlsian political liberalism, it is not clear that he succeeds. See, for instance, Richard Arneson, "Is Socialism Dead?" 507-508.
[12] See, for instance, Goodin et al., *Discretionary Time*.

To the extent that a society does over-subsidize or encourage work at the expense of leisure; to the extent that there are formidable obstacles to being able to choose a life devoted to substantial amounts of leisure, the problem with these states of affairs, according to the account that follows, is not just that there are (unequal) obstacles to obtaining something or other, but that there are obstacles to obtaining something that is central to our well-being. The distributional question, in other words, is grounded in a view of the importance of leisure to human life. Greater choice ought to be provided for shaping a balance between work and leisure because what is at stake in these choices is of fundamental significance to human flourishing. Being trapped in a work-filled existence is regrettable not just because one is trapped, but because one is trapped in a condition that is lacking in an important dimension of human experience.

The challenge is to think about how best to articulate the importance of this dimension of life. Beyond the view that leisure is actively detrimental to well-being, there is a way of talking about it that treats it as though it were merely an optional luxury. Time off for rest and recuperation is essential, one might concede, but anything beyond that—time for play or hobbies, for instance—is merely a lavish perk. This view differs from Van Parijs's provisional bracketing of claims about the value of leisure. It relies on a substantive ethical position: namely, that there is no intimate connection between leisure and human flourishing.

If one holds this position, there should be no cause for public concern when the majority of people cannot afford more than a meagre amount of this good; nor should there be any *particular* reason to be concerned if, for instance, market failure leads

people who could afford increases in leisure to select less of the good than they might otherwise desire. That is to say, there should be no more reason to worry than if there were imperfections in the market for something like seaside condominiums.[13] We may support subsidizing access or correcting market failure in the case of expensive goods like education and healthcare, but only because these are resources essential to a flourishing life. Leisure, according to the deflationary view in question, does not fall into that category.

The deflationary view is actually quite radical in its policy implications, at least from the standpoint of the status quo. Most nations already indirectly subsidize leisure—in the form of public pensions, paid vacation and holidays, and overtime rules. However, these policies are not necessarily explicitly undergirded by beliefs about the importance of leisure.

The idea that leisure is a vital part of a minimally decent life, such that we should be concerned about universal provision or access in the instance of market failure, is not completely alien to our public discourse. Notably, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 24) declares the following: "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay."[14] The inclusion of leisure in a list of universal human rights suggests a rather more serious conception of its evaluative weight than the deflationary account. Nevertheless, it gives us little indication of how we ought to understand the good in question. What

[13] Levine, "Fairness to Idleness: Is There a Right Not to Work?" 323.
[14] Cited in *The Philosophy of Human Rights*, 261.

must one believe about the character of leisure to regard it as of such fundamental importance to human life?

By pairing leisure with rest, Article 24 leaves open the possibility that while leisure may be more than a replaceable luxury, it could be the sort of thing that ought to be understood as primarily instrumentally valuable. Like rest, leisure might simply be that which allows individuals to rejuvenate and renew themselves for another day of work. Rest is necessary for any minimally decent life—it is certainly not a mere optional luxury—but its main significance is that it is instrumental to allowing us to effectively engage in the myriad other activities that we deem truly important in their own right. On some understandings, certain forms of leisure perform a similar function.[15] Leisure, here generally associated with something like amusement or play, is what allows us to "blow off steam"—to compensate psychologically for the stresses of work, for instance.[16] Leisure's importance in this sense is defined primarily in relationship to work or some other activity.

There is another concept of the good of leisure that is worth considering. Leisure may be regarded as valuable in its own right, beyond or in addition to any instrumental relationship (to work, or some other activity). The conception of leisure I would like to consider places it among those central capabilities we have an interest in securing for all

[15] Telfer, "Leisure," 155.

[16] This is not to suggest that entertainment or fun ought always to be understood as only instrumentally valuable. Rather, the point is that theories that regard leisure as primarily instrumentally valuable tend to pick out amusements as paradigmatic instances. My defence of leisure as autotelic activity both admits amusements and games as legitimate cases of leisure, and also highlights the possible intrinsic value of such pursuits.

human beings. This conception also has broader implications for how we ought to think about what it means to have access to an optimal amount of leisure.

Conceiving of leisure as a strictly instrumental good suggests a particular kind of delimitation of the ideal provision of that good. Once a worker has reached whatever stage of rest or psychological balance that allegedly forms the purpose of leisure, there is no more reason to continue. "The optimum amount of leisure, on the instrumental view," Elizabeth Telfer observes, "is that amount which enables a person to do his best work; if he has more than that, he has too much."[17] By contrast, the conception of leisure I am going to explore marks out a domain of living that we have an interest in maintaining for its own sake; not due to limitations in human stamina we would ideally be free from, but because the actions undertaken in this realm can form part of the point and purpose of human life.

Although the conception of leisure I will be defending draws on themes that have often been described as Aristotelian, particularly the theme of autotelic activity, the aim here is not to try to reproduce as faithfully as possible Aristotle's case for the meaning and value of leisure.[18] The goal is to defend a particular conception of leisure on its own terms. This will involve divergences from Aristotle's view, or to be more specific, divergences from prominent interpretations of that view. To the extent that these differences are elaborated upon, it will not simply be for the sake of engaging with the tradition, but because such elaboration bears on the overarching normative

[17] *Ibid*.
[18] On associating Aristotle with the idea of autotelic activity see also Elizabeth Telfer, "Leisure," 157-160; Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 185-186.

question at hand: namely, the extent to which the value of leisure constitutes a reason to shrink the amount of work most individuals are compelled to perform.

"Relaxed," "amusing," "pleasurable," "unserious," "fun," "effortless"—these descriptions, commonly ascribed to leisured pursuits, are neither necessary nor sufficient, either singly or in combination, for the concept of leisure I am employing here. Instances of work may fit many of these descriptions, while instances of leisure may fit none. The concept of leisure I am defending is marked at its core by two ideas: activity that is (a) performed for its own sake, and (b) undertaken outside the economic realm, which is to say, outside the realm in which one's activity is geared towards the ends of market and household work. One can regard this two-part formulation of leisure as corresponding to two stages of the argument for allowing individuals to reduce the amount of work in their lives. The first involves a claim about the good of activity performed for its own sake; the second, a claim about leisure's special relationship to this good. If the second stage is valid, then ensuring reasonable access to autotelic activity requires securing reasonable access to leisure.

It is the second facet of leisure, its non-orientation to the ends of market and household work, that explains the special relationship between leisure and action that is its own end. One ought to say "unique" and "special," instead of exclusive. It is possible for market and household work to be performed for its own sake. In other words, there is such a thing as autotelic work. Nevertheless, work should not be regarded as a reliable means of providing the good in question.

Turning for the moment to the first part of the formulation, leisure is marked by a form of being active in the world. A great variety of specific activities can fall under the formal structure; which is to say, a great many activities can be performed simply for the sake of their performance. Leisure may involve structured games, free play, light-hearted or serious endeavours, mainly physical or mainly cerebral activity, social or solitary action, and so on. Conversing with friends, lying on a riverbank deep in contemplation, dancing, fishing, encountering a work of art, playing chess—all of these activities can be instances of the form. One must say "can be" instances of the form, because for some of these examples one can imagine a context such that the activity would not count as leisure. Take chess, for example. One might be engaged in it for its own sake, or purely for the sake of an end external to the performance—for money. Autotelism describes a relationship in which one stands to one's own actions. When at leisure, one is doing something for the sake of doing it. The performance of the activity itself is savoured and valued.

The idea of free time is sometimes conflated with autotelic leisure, but there are good reasons to keep the two concepts separate. There are two distinct goods here. Free time is primarily a negative concept, an absence of the compulsion to work, whereas leisure requires a specific form or mode of activity. Free time is the space within which activity is chosen as opposed to compelled, whereas leisure involves activity that is not just chosen, but chosen for its own sake. The former good—of voluntary, chosen activity—is entirely compatible with a work-filled life, whereas the latter—the good of autotelic activity—is not.

The opposite of free time, as Michael Walzer points out, is not work *per se*, but work that is compelled.[19] After all, we can choose to fill our free time with work. Distinguishing between work that is freely chosen in this way and that which is compelled might be an important distinction for other purposes, but it is distinct from the evaluative issues tied to autotelic leisure. The contrast with leisure is not just work that we are compelled to do, but work in general—activity geared towards the provision of goods and services in the context of market and household work. Leisure involves stepping outside of this realm of work in which one's activity is governed by external productive purposes (whether this be profit or the meeting of wants and needs).

In his *Spheres of Justice*, Walzer distinguishes free time from a conception of autotelic leisure, and insists that while the former is an important public good, the latter amounts to little more than class prejudice.[20] There are two problems with Walzer's approach. First, the concept of free time on its own provides us with an incomplete case for allowing individuals to limit the amount of work in their lives. Second, Walzer's interpretation of autotelic leisure is unnecessarily narrow.

The evaluative content of the concept of free time is comparatively weak. Free time is time in which one is free from the compulsion to engage in market or household work.[21] Without further argumentation, it is not clear why one ought to care about this

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[19] Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 185.
[20] *Ibid*., 185-186.
[21] Walzer's idea of free time runs together concepts or ideals that ought to be distinguished from one another. It includes not only the notion of being free to not

particular freedom. Without some further story about the significance of the options made possible in free time, or an explanation of why, for example, economic compulsion in particular might be harmful, one is left with the bare proposition that more choice is preferable to less. In addition to this being a tenuous proposition in general, it is not clear, given the economic costs involved, that expanding free time would even represent a net expansion of choice.[22]

Arguments about the value of leisure can fill in these conceptual blanks; can bolster the relatively weak claims of free time. The autotelic conception of leisure I am defending should not be regarded as a competing alternative ideal to free time. Instead, there are close practical and justificatory relationships between the two. Free time is necessary for the pursuit of leisure, and the worth of leisure provides one of the strongest arguments in favour of protecting and expanding free time. Free time is valuable in large part *because* leisure is valuable. Free time gives us the option of avoiding work, and to thereby exercise a capability that is both central to a fully flourishing life and bears a unique relationship to leisure.

Walzer dismisses autotelic leisure on the basis of an unnecessarily narrow interpretation of the concept; an interpretation he attributes to Aristotle. Walzer rejects what he takes to be the Aristotelian concept of leisure because, in his view, it relies on beliefs about the special value of "non-productive" activity. He takes this to mean that

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work, but also the idea of being free from the dictates of a supervisor. These are not the same. One may freely enter into work that has a supervisor, or be compelled by material necessity to engage in self-employment. See *Spheres of Justice*, 186.

[22] Dworkin, "Is More Choice Better than Less?"

proper Aristotelian leisure is constituted by activities that do not result in a product, or that leave no "material outcome" as he puts it.[23] Walzer insists that it is a mistake to believe that there is any special ethical significance to free time being filled with pursuits that are unproductive in this sense. This aspect of Aristotle's account of leisure amounts to mere "aristocratic disdain for productive work," as he puts it.[24] Moreover, Walzer argues, it ignores the extent to which allegedly autotelic activities like philosophy do have material products—in the form of books, for example. "It is both an unnecessary and a self-serving restriction on the meaning of leisure," Walzer writes, "to make nonproductivity its central feature."[25]

Putting aside the question of whether Walzer is reading Aristotle correctly here, the understanding of leisure I am attempting to lay out requires neither non-productivity in Walzer's sense, nor even uselessness. Autotelic leisure *could* be "unproductive"—either in the sense that it has no material outputs, or in the sense that such outputs are not useful.[26] However, it is not a necessary feature of autotelic leisure that it be unproductive in either of these senses. Certain paradigmatic examples of leisure result in no product, or do not have any output to speak of: some games, solitary contemplation, aesthetic appreciation, and conversation with friends are all potentially non-productive pursuits that can be undertaken for their own sake. But leisure *need* not have this feature. Leisure may result in a product of a sort, and this product may even

[23] Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 186.
[24] *Ibid*.
[25] *Ibid*.
[26] Telfer, "Leisure," 159.

be useful to oneself or another—but this does not render it, on the understanding of the concept I am laying out here, equivalent to work in the relevant respects.

The distinguishing feature of leisure at issue here is not that it leaves no material trace or creates no "use-value," but that it is not oriented towards or geared towards the provision of the useful goods and services that result from market and household work. The output of leisure activity may be useful, but this usefulness does not form the governing purpose of leisure. Distinguishing between productive leisure and work is a matter of the degree to which the product or service in question is embedded in a social context (paid work in a market or unpaid work in a household) in which the product or service is meant to generate income or satisfy needs and wants. When the output has this purpose, the activity providing the output is governed by that purpose. With leisure, the usefulness of the product is not essential to the meaningfulness of engaging in the activity; it is one's very engagement in the details and textures of the activity that forms the purpose of one's actions in these cases.

By contrast with work, leisure is not governed in its particulars by the purpose of delivering a product or service that is sold, or in the case of unpaid housework, that could be sold. In a passage that borrows from Michael Oakeshott, James Booth lays out a contrast between two ways of engaging in the practice of fishing—one associated with work, the other with leisure. His contrast between the two helps capture the sense of the relationship to one's own actions distinctive of autotelic activity. Booth describes the activity of the commercial or subsistence fisherman as follows:

> He cannot while away his hours at that mountain stream, because his dinner or his earnings depend upon success. Displays of skill in fishing will matter to him only insofar as they yield the desired consequences, a result external to the activity, for example, nutrition or a paycheck.[27]

The fisherman engaged in leisure, on the other hand, is not fishing out of necessity (for survival) or in the service of some other external productive purpose: say, for sale on the market.[28] "Freed from these external pressures," Booth continues, "time can merely be passed, the activity savoured for itself, not for what it may yield."[29] This type of fishing is performed for its own sake, perhaps for the exercise of skill involved, or merely to "pass the time." One lingers over the performance, relishing its details. When skill is valued here, it is valued for its own sake, regardless of whether the skill will translate into maximized output. As a fisherman at leisure, one can experiment with different techniques, opting for fly-fishing gear over nets, even if the former is far less likely to result in catching a large number of fish (or any fish at all). One can "play" with the activity, trying out new techniques; all of this without any concern for feeding oneself, profiting on a market, or providing fish to the hungry.

The fisherman at leisure certainly aims at catching fish, but it is not the use, sale, or distribution of fish that forms the point of his enterprise. Likewise, a surfer may entertain many onlookers with her display of skill, and is in that sense useful, but if she is only surfing for its own sake, and her activity is not organized around the end of earning money through entertainment, then she is engaged in leisure. If her crowd of

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[27] Booth, "Gone Fishing," 205.
[28] *Ibid*.
[29] *Ibid*., 206.

onlookers should cease to be entertained, she will neither stop surfing nor change her style to attract an audience. In this example, the output of entertainment value is a mere "by-product" and does not govern her activity of surfing.

For some leisure activities, the product is more integral to the activity than it is in the example of surfing. A fisherman at leisure is aiming at catching fish; if he were to learn that there were no fish in the stream, he would move on. Likewise, a gardener at leisure is not simply interested in digging holes, burying objects, and moistening dirt; he or she aims at producing beautiful plants. For such activities, this "by-product" terminology may not be helpful, in that it implies the product is somehow accidental or not aimed at (as it was in the example of the surfer who just happens to attract spectators).

With these sorts of cases, Bernard Suits' account of what it means to play a game can help clarify the difference between the instrumental aspects of productive leisure and the instrumentality of work. Suits defines game-playing as "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles."[30] The rules of a game are the "unnecessary obstacles" one sets for oneself; rules that often take the form of selecting less efficient means for accomplishing what Suits calls a "prelusory goal."[31] The prelusory goal of golf, for instance, is to get a small ball into a hole. The game requires that one attempt to accomplish this goal by striking the ball with a club, as opposed to taking the most efficient means: simply walking over and dropping it in.

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[30] Suits, *The Grasshopper*, 54-55.
[31] *Ibid*.

One can understand productive leisure pursuits like fishing along the lines of Suitsian game-playing (along with many other such pursuits in which what were once strictly necessary practices are now also carried out as a kind of game, independently of the demand for the accompanying product). One selects a less efficient means (fly-fishing gear) to reach a prelusory goal (getting a fish) that could very well be achieved by either walking down to the store, or by more efficient fishing methods. These rules or obstacles are put in place voluntarily *so that we may overcome them*; just as the high jumper places a bar in her way in order to meet the challenge of jumping over it. In other words, if we are comparing commercial fishing with leisured fishing, the order of means and ends is reversed, in a sense. When at leisure, we adopt the goal of catching fish under certain conditions for the purpose of engaging in the means of doing so. The exercise of technique and skill, passing the time in catching fish, is the ultimate purpose of the endeavour. One posits the prelusory goal of catching fish, not meaningful in itself, in order to be able to immerse oneself in the means.

While aiming at creating an "output" of sorts is essential to these particular forms of productive leisure, the usefulness or marketability of the product is not. As noted, if the fisherman were to learn there were no fish in the river, no fish to be aimed at, he would no longer find meaning in the activity. If on the other hand he learns that the river has been polluted, rendering the fish inedible, the fishing *may* continue to be meaningful. With work, by contrast, the perceived usefulness of the product (whether that product is a good or a service) is essential to the activity. To varying degrees, this is what renders work an inhospitable environment for the pursuit of activity for its own

sake. The external purposes of market and household work govern, or hold sway over, the activity, yoking the performance to the creation of goods and services. The embedding of work in a process of generating profit or meeting wants and needs means that workers are constrained in the extent to which they can exercise skill for its own sake—to engage in the free play of activity that marks out leisure. Whether leisure is productive or unproductive, it allows us to engage with our activity in a way that is rarely possible while we are working. In this vein, Sarah Broadie describes the unique relationship in which we stand to our own activity when we are operating in a context that is, as she puts it, "segregated from the necessary":

> ... choice under segregation is allowed to be governed by aspects that are hardly permitted to obtrude when we are doing what we must. We may now be swayed and absorbed by the immediate specificity of what we are doing; by what doing it physically, sensually, or intellectually feels like; by the intrinsic and intimate texture of the action or activity; and by these aspects of its instruments, its materials, any objects it refers to, and its modes of presenting such objects. Thus our interest is guided by elements we were meant to relegate to the cognitive margins when implementing some principle or purpose beyond the action. We are free to concentrate ourselves into just being here-and-now doers of what we are doing.[32]

Work requires us—to varying degrees—to ignore these possibilities and textures in our practices. It requires us (again, to varying degrees) to make our practices subservient to the economic goals (profit or use-value) external to our activity. This aspect of the constraint of market and household work—of an activity yoked to a purpose external to the performance of that activity—takes various forms. Choosing

[32] Broadie, *Aristotle and Beyond*, 189-190.

less efficient means for their own sake could be disastrous and potentially abhorrent when the work is serving the urgent needs of others. This is true for a great deal of care work, where we feel uniquely obligated to serve the wants and needs of those dependent upon us, but it is also the case for work in which the sense of obligation is not so intimate; for charity work that we regard as supererogatory, for example. If I dedicate my free time in support of some socially useful cause, I may well enjoy the work, but it would be perverse under such circumstances to choose anything other than the most effective means of improving the lives of those for whom I am working. I ought to "get the job done" as efficiently as possible in such cases rather than linger in its performance.

In most cases of paid employment, what it means for activity to be "geared towards" satisfying external purposes is not necessarily a matter of the intentions of the worker. The worker need not understand or even be aware of the sense in which his or her work is generating profit or how it ultimately serves the wants and needs of others. He or she may simply aim to make a living through doing the job at hand, a job that happens to be organized around a process of profit-generation or the provision some particular use-value. Arguably, most workers in a modern economy aim primarily at the exchange-value of their work, which is to say they work only for the paycheck. For complex processes in which a firm produces only some of the elements of a final product, the worker may not even be aware of the nature of the finished article. One need not have any interest in furnishing an army with weapons to be working at a plant that manufactures equipment designed to fashion the components of munitions, but

one's specific movements and actions while working there are nonetheless ultimately governed by the purpose of supplying weapons. The proximate constraint in this case is felt by the requirement of carrying out the work in the manner in which it has been designed by a manager.[33]

Even if the worker controls the methods of his or her production, however, work is still a less-than-ideal domain for autotelic pursuits. Take the example of the munitions factory again. If I am independently wealthy, do not feel compelled to work, but for whatever reason desire to run my own munitions production workshop, then my actions will not be constrained by necessity (my own subsistence) or social obligation (the product is not urgently needed, let us assume), or even the dictates of a supervisor. Yet my activity is still in some sense constrained by the purpose of supplying a useful article for sale. It is true that since I am self-employed I may design the work process however I please, but at some point if I am heedless enough of the utility of the product, my activity will simply cease to be oriented towards satisfying a use-value or earning any return whatsoever. I will be a metal-working artist or hobbyist engaged in the practice for its own sake, whose works may or may not happen to be useable by a customer.

Despite these various forms of constraint, it is not the case that work *cannot* have elements of the autotelic. It is possible for market and household work to also be performed for their own sake. When looking for examples of autotelic work, we are not

[33] A manager who is in turn aiming at the maximization of profit for the firm, or who might also be attending to the creation of use-value as a means of generating firm income (though of course not the only means).

just looking for work that someone enjoys—what the person enjoys about the work may be that the product serves an urgent need (and have nothing to do with the specificity of the activity serving that need). We are looking for work whose activity is performed for its own sake, such that the activity would be pursued even if there were no need or desire for its resulting product or service. The actions of autotelic work are performed for their own sake, but are also intertwined with a process meant to satisfy wants and needs in the market or household. There are parallel purposes that just happen to coincide: one's whims or passions happen to line up with the needs of production.

One form of such autotelic work occurs when the autotelic engagement itself becomes an inextricable part of the use-value of the activity. For instance, autotelic engagement can satisfy a market among those who desire to witness an expert practitioner immersed in the intricacies of his or her project. Artistic and athletic practices occasionally fall under this description. The athlete may have little interest in entertaining the masses. She engages in the sport for its own sake, but in so doing earns a living in the context of a professional league that is organized around selling displays of her virtuosity. The audience is drawn to the athlete's autotelic play, which has been transformed into a commodity. This is not to say that all athletes perform their jobs for the sake of playing the game, only that it is possible.

As a general matter, work that lends itself to autotelic moments will be that which produces a non-necessary, non-urgent product, and which is self-directed. These conditions allow us at least some leeway to experiment and follow our whims in the

selection of means.[34] Yet even necessary work can have moments of autotelic immersion.[35] This occurs when whatever are among the most effective means at hand are also the ones we happen to have an interest in engaging in for their own sake. Playing with one's child may have an indispensable social purpose, educational or developmental, but at certain moments this purpose may be quite distant from a parent's mind; it may, for the parent, also be play for its own sake. Much needed care for the elderly can often take the form of simply passing time together, in conversation for instance—conversation one might be lucky enough to cherish as worthwhile for its own sake.

While autotelic work is possible, it is a poor practical substitute for leisure. In other words, the conceptual possibility of autotelic work does not obviate the need for placing limits on the amount of work we must perform. The relevant question from a political standpoint is not whether autotelic work is possible, but whether such work could be a viable option for the bulk of the population. If it is a viable option, then the good of autotelic action could be open to all who desire it even without reducing the demands of work in our lives. The problem would not be the dominance of work *per se*, but the dominance of work that is not potentially autotelic. Under any reasonably foreseeable economic circumstances, however, most work will not offer significant scope for autotelic immersion, and even the rare instances of autotelic work are fundamentally unstable.

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[34] For this reason, if we are interested in making autotelic work more available, expanding access to free time would be an effective means of doing so.
[35] Cohen, "Dialectic of Labor in Marx," 208.

To perform something for its own sake one needs to have some interest in or attraction to the activity in question. For many people, however, their interests will lead them to activities that do not have an output in any straightforward sense; for them, no work will be autotelic. There are reasons to believe that the number of such persons will not be insignificant. Much of the work we do would be absurd if performed for its own sake. The activities that define a lot of the work in our world are unlikely to be those over which one lingers, savouring the details of the activity and the experience of the performance for its own sake.

To believe that work can provide sufficient autotelic opportunities to the bulk of the population is to engage in a form of wishful thinking. One finds moments of this specific fantasy in Charles Fourier's utopia; one in which "passion is harnessed to social function," as Michael Walzer puts it.[36] For example, small children in Fourier's imagined society are assigned the task of spreading manure because they love to play in the filth and muck. Their play can be harnessed to serve a necessary public function. To imagine a society in which the work that is needful or useful can provide sufficient opportunities for autotelic activity is to imagine an unlikely society of Fourier-style manure-spreaders in which most work is also play.[37] There is no guarantee that what we happen to value for its own sake will be at all amenable to the provision of needs and wants in a modern society; no reason to think our various passions could be tethered to social function.

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[36] Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 168.
[37] Brudney, *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy*, 165.

Even when it is possible, autotelic work represents an inherently unstable situation. It is unreliably autotelic. There is always the potential for conflict between the dual purposes of autotelic work. That they happen to line up on some occasions gives us no assurance that they will continue to do so, as one's interests or the wants and needs being served change. It is nearly *cliché* to point to the strains on the artist who feels the need to violate his or her personal style in order to serve the market—to "sell out." Even for those who are lucky enough to secure autotelic work, the tensions are such that work is not a reliable source of activity pursued for its own sake. Along with the unlucky many, these lucky few also need the ability to place limits on their working lives should they no longer find autotelic fulfillment within it.

From the standpoint of social organization, we are better off trying to make most work as productive (in the sense of output per labour hour) as possible so that we can do less and less of it and thereby expand the horizon of possible leisure—even if this dedication to increasing productivity results in the work being less likely to contain moments in which we can immerse ourselves in the activity for its own sake. Promoting robust access to autotelic activity is best served not by an attempt at rehabilitating or reinventing work, hoping for a society in which individual passion and social function coincide, but rather by a limitation of the amount of work most of us are expected to perform.

This autotelic mode of action, this form of relating to our own activity, should be regarded as a central human capability: to be able to find contentment and meaning primarily in what we are doing, rather than in what we are bringing about; to say, while

in the midst of our activity, "*this*, here and now, is part of what life is worth living for." Protecting and increasing free time is an important goal for public policy because of the way in which free time gives us robust options to exercise this vital capability.

Having said that, one cannot help but notice that many human beings fill their time away from work with tedious and meaningless pastimes about which it is unlikely that we—or even they—would make such lofty statements. One might argue that these meaningless distractions are engaged in because we perform so much work and so little leisure—that is, because there is not enough time to develop more fulfilling practices, or because fatigue forces us to seek a certain form of senseless escape. Nevertheless, even with access to a great deal more leisure than the average citizen of a wealthy nation now has access to, it would not be surprising if many activities were still pursued that would seem near-worthless to some of us.

Here it is important to distinguish between activity performed for its own sake, and our conceptions of activity *worthy* of being pursued for its own sake. Josef Pieper argues that only a certain form of religious worship or contemplation is ultimately worthy of our leisure.[38] For Aristotle, political activity and/or contemplation (*theoria*) may represent the best use of our leisure.

It is not my task to decide what the proper content of leisure is, nor whether such content is plural or singular. Every state ought to help its citizens to become better equipped at seeking answers to these questions and to ultimately achieve what they themselves regard as worthwhile leisure. Beyond this, however, the state should

[38] Pieper, *Leisure: The Basis of Culture*; *In Tune with the World: A Theory of Festivity*.

exercise restraint. It should not, for instance, only allow time off policies to be used for some defined list of approved practices. The goal of the state should be to provide individuals with the means of effectively pursuing activities they deem worthy of being performed for their own sake; not because worthwhile leisure is just one viable preference among many, but because it is a central part of human flourishing.

In terms of the upshot for public action, these arguments serve as both a conservative buttressing of existing time off policies as well as a call for a more radical reorganization of economic benefits and incentives. Time off is necessary beyond the purposes of rest and relaxation. The more free time to which we have access, the more this time can become available for activities we deem worthy of performing in their own right. "As the periods of disposable time become longer," Andre Gorz writes, "non-working time can become something other than the obverse of working time."[39] Leisure activities may be amenable to small moments, dispersed throughout a daily or weekly schedule, but they may also involve projects that require sustained attention and immersion. Time off policies ought to be tailored to meet both sorts of needs, including the ability to take extended sabbatical periods from market work.

There are also reasons to create options for accessing periods of *common* time off, to support the ability to pursue associational and shared experiences of leisure (or other coordinated uses of one's free time). There are different ways of enabling coordination of free time, from establishing public holidays to enhancing the ability to adjust scheduling (attention would also have to be paid to the imposition of "non-standard"

[39] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 92.

work schedules—nights and weekends—on those with limited ability to refuse). Providing common time off creates some challenges in the case of household work: namely, how do we account for those who provide the market substitutes that would enable others to reduce their household work during periods of shared time off?[40]

In addition to expanding the amount of time that can be filled with leisure, we also have an interest in thinking seriously about the way we educate our citizens and organize our public spaces. Education for leisure need not consist of prescribing particular activities, but instead, of preparing individuals to think about the question of what they believe is worthy of doing in its own right, apart from necessity or social function. We expend a proportionately large amount of our educational resources figuring out how best to prepare fellow human beings for modern work; we ought to spend more time thinking about how to prepare them for leisure. Likewise, while we expend a great deal of resources developing the infrastructure that makes increased economic activity possible, we ought to increase the portion of our resources directed to the subsidization of collective leisure spaces that would not be sustained without government action—the communal infrastructure of leisure, as it were.

Some societies may be so poor that they cannot forego the resources necessary to allow individuals to step outside of the realm of work for substantial periods of time. However, a society that can afford to expand access to leisure but fails to do so is

[40] Julie Rose suggests that this might be handled by ensuring that paid work during such periods can be refused (without termination or other punishment) and can be shared on a rotation basis. *Free Time*, 109-110.

flawed; not in the tragic sense[41] of the impoverished society, but in the sense of wilfully curbing individuals' ability to access a mode of activity central to well-being. Deciding the extent to which a society can afford to secure meaningful access to leisure—the upper limit to which access to leisure may be provided for any particular society—requires further investigation.

[41] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 37-38.

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CHAPTER THREE

THE LIMITS OF THE CIVIC WORK ETHIC

The predominant contemporary view of the relationship between work and citizenship is about as distant from Aristotle's as possible. While Aristotle alleged that all those who work for a living are rendered unfit for political life, we not only accept that work is compatible with civic engagement, we often go much further than that, even claiming, as Carole Patemen observes, "that the capacities and skills necessary for citizenship can be developed only through employment."[1] Work, market work in particular, is often regarded as a constitutive part of what it means to be a good citizen. The civic ethic, such as it is, has become assimilated into the work ethic.

Even if you grant that there is something like an obligation to work, and that fulfilling this obligation is part of what it means to be a good citizen, there are a number of ways this tight association between work and citizenship, our contemporary sense of a civic work ethic, is problematic. For instance, such associations tend famously, and unjustifiably, to leave the contributions of unpaid household work out of the equation. I will focus on another problem: not that the civic work ethic is insufficiently inclusive, but that it is *too* inclusive.

This chapter proceeds by drawing from two different republican themes. The first portrays employment and household work, and other arrangements in which one

[1] Pateman, "Freedom and Democratization," 142. For example, see Mead, *Beyond Entitlement*.

operates subject to the arbitrary will of another, as sites of what Philip Pettit calls "domination." The second argues that market and household work commonly block out opportunities to engage in civic life, or degrade capabilities that are essential to meaningful participation. These republican traditions highlight the problematic relationship between certain ideals of citizenship and the institutions in the context of which market and household work are commonly undertaken. And while work can be made more compatible with citizenship by reducing the degree to which it renders us unfree and fails to develop our civic abilities, there are limitations to such strategies. Altering the institutional contexts of work in the service of reducing its civically corrosive effects can be counterproductive. Placing limitations on the amount of work we are required to do is therefore also essential for ensuring that anyone so inclined may have access to robust opportunities for meaningful civic engagement.

Work, for the vast majority of people in our societies, involves activities that are pursued at the behest of others, with obedience secured by the possibility of losing one's livelihood. Employment, the central context in which market work occurs, is a brazenly hierarchical affair. For many, the experience of working, whether for a large or small organization, is an experience marked by having one's daily routine dictated by managers and supervisors. The scope of this control is quite broad, extending from production methods to deeply personal aspects of one's daily activities. In the worst cases, "going to work" means spending the majority of one's waking hours in an environment in which one is told when to sit and when to stand, prohibited from talking, forbidden to urinate without permission, submitted to random searches,

mandatory drug tests, and so on.[2] The resemblances to our treatment of schoolchildren have not gone unnoticed.[3]

And although any particular employment contract is formally voluntary, there is little meaningful sense in which most people have the option to exit the world of wage labour.[4] Being compelled to work for a living largely means spending one's days, to varying degrees, subject to the arbitrary will of another and to the possibility of constant interference in intimate domains of one's life, with little or no input as to how one's environment is governed. To help articulate what might be wrong with the treatment to which we require a significant number of our citizens to be subjected for a large part of their waking hours, we can turn to a republican tradition that has taken to heart the potential conflicts between ideals of citizenship and work undertaken at the mercy of others.

The modern valorization of work has proven itself remarkably adaptable. Daniel Rodgers, writing about the history of the "work ethic" in the United States—the emergence of an affirmation of work as "the core of the moral life," as he puts it—points out that when the Puritans and other early American moralizers praised the life of

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[2] "Since 1971, federal regulations promulgated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) have required most employers to provide toilets, but, according to OSHA policy-making and enforcement officials, these regulations did not require employers to permit workers to use them." Schleifer, "Book Review: Void Where Prohibited," 604. OSHA regulations requiring access to bathroom breaks only emerged in 1998.

[3] Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 24.

[4] Not to mention insidious contractual arrangements like "noncompete agreements," which prevent, for instance, someone terminated from a fast food job from working at any competing restaurant for a given period of time. Colvin and Shierholz, "Noncompete Agreements."

work, what they had in mind, and before their eyes, was the work of small independent producers.[5] The work ethic took root in the context of an economy of artisans and farmers who were "their own masters," as it was phrased.[6] However, Rodgers notes that the language and ideals of the work ethic lingered long after the prevalence of this mode of working had vanished—well after it had become obvious that the Industrial Revolution was replacing independent farmers with a new economy involving large masses of employees working for wages.[7]

As Rodgers recounts, the disappearance of this world of small independent producers did not pass without notice or protest. The protests were lodged in the name of ideals inspired by a tradition that predated the glorification of work described by Charles Taylor's "affirmation of ordinary life."[8] Ultimately, it was the much older republican tradition, reaching back to sources in ancient Greece and Rome as well as Renaissance Italy, that provided the language and inspiration for many early critiques of the way in which the life of work was being altered by industrial development. Wage work, or "wage slavery" as it was referred to by its opponents, was charged with being inconsistent with the ideals of a republican system of government.[9]

I will focus on two different ways one might explain this inconsistency, corresponding to two different strands of the republican tradition. The first of these, articulated by Philip Pettit, is a particular understanding of what it means to be free.

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[5] Rodgers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America*, xi.
[6] *Ibid*., 30. The rather dependent work of women is largely ignored.
[7] *Ibid*., xiii.
[8] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 13-16.
[9] McCoy, *The Elusive Republic*, 7.

The image of citizens working at the beck and call of another comes into conflict with what Pettit calls "freedom as non-domination," which he takes to be a distinctly republican idea. The overwhelming majority of working lives are "dominated" lives in Pettit's sense: spent, in varying degrees, at the mercy of the whim and arbitrary will of another. An explanation of what might be wrong with Pettit-style domination in the context of work, however, reveals that there are two distinct normative themes that need to be teased apart here, and each of these themes holds a different lesson for what we ought to do about domination in household and market work.

When it comes to assessing the validity of republican critiques of employment, as well as extending them to the case of household labour, a major hurdle is the exclusive character of the republican tradition. For the most part, historical incarnations of republicanism have been marked by a tolerance for slavery and acceptance of the dependent condition of women.[10] In a republican spirit, Thomas Jefferson worried that the widespread development of "manufactures" would undermine the independence necessary for citizenship—an independence he famously associated with the yeoman farmer—but he approved of domestic manufacturing work as long as it was on a scale small enough to include only women and slaves.[11] Jefferson's nail factory at Monticello, Michael Sandel points out, "was operated by slave boys, his textile manufactory by

[10] There are exceptions, depending on how one marks out the boundaries of the "republican tradition." Harriet Taylor Mill, for example, can be read as drawing on republican themes similar to those Pettit articulates when she criticizes the dependent condition of women (*Essays on Sex Equality*, 105).
[11] Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*, 124-125.

women and girls."[12] Philip Pettit argues that one of the (intellectual) reasons the republican tradition was abandoned in favour of an alternative conception of liberty—a less robust, less demanding, "liberal" conception in his view—was the perception that it would be too costly to extend the benefits of republican freedom to women and slaves.[13]

However, if this was a genuine reason to reject republicanism then, it is not now, according to Pettit. He insists that our societies are wealthy enough to be able to extend republican freedom to all.[14] Whether this is so will depend in part on what sorts of mechanisms are needed to reduce the ill effects of employment. First and foremost, we must examine more closely what republican freedom means in Philip Pettit's sense. Only through such an examination can we determine what practical means might secure the ideal in the case of work. More importantly, this examination is also required in order to begin to evaluate whether reforms of working conditions, or of the central institutional contexts of work, are worth the effort—whether and to what extent republican freedom in general, and in the household and marketplace in particular, matters.

Pettit distinguishes between what are, in his words, two "different ideals" of freedom: the republican ideal of freedom as "non-domination," and the liberal ideal of "non-interference." Distinguishing liberalism from republicanism in this manner ("I think of liberals as those who embrace freedom as non-interference")[15] is problematic,

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[12] *Ibid.*, 144.
[13] Pettit, *Theory of Freedom*, 148.
[14] Pettit, *Republicanism*, 48.
[15] *Ibid.*, 9.

but I will not deal with that issue here.[16] I will refer simply, as Pettit generally does, to a contrast between "non-domination" or "republican liberty/freedom" on the one hand, and "non-interference" on the other; leaving aside such questions as the relation between liberalism and non-domination.

Being free in the sense of non-interference requires, as the name suggests, nothing more than an absence of interference by other agents. Roughly speaking, "interference" counts as intentionally preventing an agent from pursuing some course of action. In Pettit's more precise words, interference is an "intentional attempt to worsen an agent's situation of choice."[17] Pettit identifies three general means of interfering with an agent, as well as three senses in which an agent's "situation of choice" can be regarded as deteriorated—three effects that interference can have. Interference can be achieved through tactics that range from direct physical binding (shackling and imprisonment) and coercion of the will (threats), to what Pettit calls "manipulation"—deceptive attempts to surreptitiously alter people's beliefs or desires or to "rig" the outcomes of choices.[18] Interference can negatively affect an agent's choices in three ways: (1) by narrowing the range of available options, such that some options are never even considered as possibilities by the victim; (2) by altering expected payoffs, in order that some options come to be regarded as too costly and worth

[16] Larmore, *The Autonomy of Morality*, 184-194.
[17] Pettit, "Freedom as Antipower," 578,
[18] *Republicanism*, 53.

avoiding; (3) by fixing the outcomes of choices, such that what results from an agent's choice is contrary to what that agent intends.[19]

The idea of domination, by contrast, is not primarily that of having one's choices obstructed or manipulated in the above three fashions, but rather of living "at the mercy" of another. Domination is, Pettit writes, "an idiom of freedom in which enslavement and subjection are the great ills, independence and status the supreme goods."[20] The paradigm of domination for Pettit, as with the long republican tradition he cites, is the life of the slave: "domination … is exemplified by the relationship of master to slave or master to servant."[21] In more formal terms, I am free according to the ideal of non-domination to the extent that a "power of interference on an arbitrary basis" is not being wielded over me.[22]

The significance of "power" and "arbitrary" in this definition require some elaboration. Interference is not a necessary condition of domination. Domination is understood as a "power" of, or "capacity" for, interference. One may be dominated by another without *any* actual interference occurring. In fact, Pettit insists, the dominating agent need not even be "inclined in the slightest measure toward such interference."[23] All that is required is that one person have the ability to interfere with another arbitrarily or at will.

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[19] *Ibid*.
[20] *Ibid*., 132
[21] *Ibid*., 22.
[22] *Ibid*., 52
[23] "Freedom as Antipower," 586.

Pettit cites as an example of domination without interference a slave who manages to avoid being interfered with by his master.[24] This slave is clever enough to avoid calling attention to himself, or lucky enough to be owned by a kindly master. It is difficult to imagine a slave whose master does not interfere *at all* in his or her life, but we might put it this way: some masters will interfere with their slave's lives to a lesser or greater extent, in some areas of life more than others, and in some areas not at all (for a wide variety of reasons: out of good will, because the slave is clever or skilled at the art of flattery, or is just downright lucky enough to stay out of sight and therefore somewhat out of mind). In the areas of the slave's life in which the master does not interfere, the ideal of freedom as non-interference would seem to require us to say that *in that area*, for that range of actions or choices, the slave is free. If my master has the power to control whether and what I sing, dance, and read, but nevertheless leaves me to my whims in these matters, I will be counted, in this area of activity, as free according to the ideal of non-interference.

The case of the lucky or clever slave will be assessed very differently from the standpoint of the ideal of non-domination. This slave is unfree, according to the republican ideal of non-domination, because he or she lives under the sway and at the mercy of a master. It matters not whether the slave manages in fact to avoid interference in some range of activity. *Even in that range of activity* the slave should be, according to Pettit's republican, considered unfree. This is so because the master has the capacity to interfere at will. "They live in the shadow of the other's presence," says Pettit, "even if

[24] *Republicanism*, 32-35.

no arm is raised against them."[25] Regardless of whether my master is kind or I am clever and fawning, regardless of whether I am in fact allowed to sing, dance, and read as I wish, I am still dominated in this area of my life if, by virtue of my slavery, I sing, dance, and read only by my master's leave and at my master's pleasure. Nor is this simply a question of probability. I am dominated and thus unfree even if it is highly unlikely that my master will interfere. "What constitutes domination," Pettit insists, "is the fact that in some respect the power-bearer has the capacity to interfere arbitrarily, even if they are *never* going to do so."[26]

The "arbitrarily" and "at will" qualifications in the definition of non-domination are also crucial. Interference is neither a necessary *nor* a sufficient condition of domination. Some forms of interference do not count for Pettit as serious infringements of freedom. Only "arbitrary" interference counts. "An act is perpetrated on an arbitrary basis," Pettit explains, "… if it is subject just to the *arbitrium*, the decision or judgement, of the agent; the agent was in a position to choose it or not choose it, at their pleasure."[27] *Non*-arbitrary interference, by contrast, is interference that is, in Pettit's terms, "forced to track the interests" of the *victim* of interference.[28] The paradigmatic example of non-arbitrary interference—interference without domination—is the interference caused by just laws.

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[25] *Ibid*., 5.
[26] *Ibid*., 63. My emphasis.
[27] *Ibid*., 55.
[28] *Ibid*.

"Tracking" the interests of the target of interference should be understood, says Pettit, in a "procedural" rather than a "substantive" sense.[29] Interference is procedurally non-arbitrary when it is wielded by an agent that can be held accountable by those whom the interference affects. The interference can be contested and, in some sense, flows from legitimate procedures that express the wishes and wills of affected parties. Interference that merely happens to accord with the interests of affected persons, and is thus non-arbitrary in only a substantive sense, may nonetheless be arbitrary in the procedural sense above. A benign dictator may happen to be so incredibly wise as to make decisions that accord with what the people would decide if the state were democratic, but this dictator nonetheless still interferes in an arbitrary manner. Even though he may appear to have his people's interests in mind on this or that occasion, the benign dictator is not required or "forced" in the appropriate manner to consider the interests of the ruled. Pettit holds up the coercive laws of a properly ordered liberal-democratic constitution as an example of non-arbitrary interference.[30] Although these laws may restrict choices and remove options, they do not count as serious infringements of freedom according to the ideal of non-domination. Legitimate coercive laws do not dominate because although they interfere, they do not interfere arbitrarily. There can be interference without domination.

[29] *Ibid*.
[30] *Ibid*., 135.

Domination is also a matter of degree; it differs according to "intensity" and "extent."[31] Intensity refers to the ease with which a dominating agent can interfere, or the degree of arbitrariness. Extent refers to the scope of domination; the areas of one's life or number of choices in which one is subject to domination. Pettit also admits that being dominated in some areas of life is worse than being dominated in other, as he puts it, "less central" areas.[32] Although he does not specify what these more or less central areas of choice are, this issue will later be crucial when we examine what is supposed to be wrong with the domination of employees and household members.

Slavery is an extreme example, involving the highest degree of domination (both in terms of intensity and extent), but slavery is not the sole locus of Pettit's "domination." Most notably, for present purposes, Pettit mentions the relations of husband to wife and employer to employee.[33] He maintains that shifting one's focus to freedom as non-domination encourages closer examination of "social" freedom and unfreedom, looking beyond the more common preoccupation with the state as a source of oppression and obstruction. Moving from an account of freedom as non-interference to non-domination will mean that, as Pettit puts it,

> … we are going to look less fondly on the traditional relationship of husband to wife, for example, or employer to employee. … The shift is going to make us potentially more radical in our complaints about the ways in which social relationships are organized.[34]

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[31] *Ibid*., 58
[32] *Ibid*.
[33] *Ibid*., 6.
[34] *Ibid*., 78.

Individuals engaged in market and household work, if they are subject to the arbitrary will of spouse and employer, suffer from domination and are to that extent unfree. Pettit suggests that employers dominate employees primarily through the power of firing—the power of being able to withhold some major portion of a person's livelihood.[35] If one's primary source of sustenance is income from a job, then the employer wields a considerable power in being able to withdraw such income through termination.[36] The threat of termination hanging over the heads of employees makes it possible for the employer to interfere in numerous ways—not to mention the self-limitation and self-censorship it encourages. Workers will put up with employer and manager interference to the extent that they believe they could be fired or penalized for refusing to do so, and to the extent that being fired represents a heavy burden (for instance, if termination would also be accompanied by loss of access to health insurance).

The isolation involved in household work, and the relative absence or weakness of contractual arrangements and regulatory frameworks, can make it prone to exhibit an even greater intensity and extent of domination than market work. The contractual or legal arrangements that do govern or surround the family can often reinforce the degree of domination in Pettit's sense. Social pressures, combined with the absence of

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[35] There will be multiple layers of domination in a large firm. Managers will likely have the power to fire, or at the least the ability to sway those who have such power, and will to that extent be able to dominate those placed under them. But managers will also be subject to domination from their superiors, and so on.

[36] Other less severe weapons in the employer's arsenal include fines, demotion, assigning undesirable duties, and scheduling unreasonable hours, just to name a few.

policy regimes that would enable a balance between market work and unpaid care work (an absence of flexible working hours, a scarcity of affordable daycare, or, in the case of the United States, the lack of guaranteed paid family leave) result in a crucial economic function—the raising of future workers—being organized in such a way that full-time caretakers' living standards are often dependent on the good will of a spouse. Divorce laws that allow one spouse to walk away with all of the earning power exacerbate the problem.[37] And this is a problem, as Kimberly Yuracko emphasizes, even if the income-earning spouse does not walk away:

> … even if the woman's husband never leaves her—the very knowledge that one's well-being depends entirely on another person's continued financial support and generosity undermines one's self-determination and imposes some degree of hierarchy into one's relationship with one's provider. Such dependence on another individual for one's survival breeds an insecurity and servility that is incompatible with human flourishing.[38]

In order to figure out what (if anything) ought to be done about the fact that so many working lives seem to be replete with varying degrees of domination, we need a clearer account of why domination in Pettit's sense is supposed to be bad. Upon examination, there turn out to be two different senses in which non-domination is a good, or two different senses in which domination is blameworthy. These two senses can be brought out by asking the following question: why is it that domination reduces freedom even when no actual interference occurs? In other words: what is wrong with

[37] Nussbaum, "The Future of Feminist Liberalism," in *The Subject of Care*, 198.
[38] Yuracko, *Perfectionism and Contemporary Feminist Values*, 126.

cases of domination-without-interference? There are two different answers to this question; two different facets of Pettit's ideal of freedom as non-domination. They are not different in the sense that they give us differing answers to the question of whether someone is in fact dominated, but they do differ over just what this means—over what is the significance of this fact.

One story that Pettit tells about how domination without interference reduces freedom looks similar to Quentin Skinner's defence of republican, or "neo-roman," liberty.[39] Domination reduces freedom because of self-limitation or self-censorship.[40] Those who are subject to the will of another, according to this story, will choose to limit themselves, either out of fear of reprisals or a wish to avoid future interference through flattery. We may feel impelled to do or not do something even if those who have power over us do not explicitly or even implicitly issue a threat or ultimatum. Whether we must endear ourselves to those who can harm us, or simply lay low and keep our mouths shut to avoid appearing on their "radar screen," our position as a dependent means that we are not free to do as we might otherwise wish. The main theme of this story is the obstruction of choices. What is added to the account of freedom as non-interference, which one can also regard as a choice-centred ideal, is a unique way in which one's choices may be limited: self-censorship, self-limitation.

There is a second story one finds in Pettit's writings that is not so clearly related to choice. Pettit seems to suggest that it is not choices themselves, or not choices *tout*

[39] Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism*.
[40] *Theory of Freedom*, 137-138.

court, that matter to republicans. Contrasting advocates of non-interference with advocates of non-domination, Pettit writes:

> Those who are attached to the ideal of non-interference value the fact of having choice—the fact of non-interference—whether the choice is dominated or not; those who embrace the ideal of non-domination value the fact of having undominated choice, *but not necessarily the fact of having choice as such*.[41]

In fact, says Pettit, those who embrace non-domination "may despise the sort of choice that you enjoy by grace of your own cunning or charms or ingratiation, seeing it as a demeaning and despicable bequest."[42] This does not mean that choice does not matter at all to Pettit, but it does imply that there is something else, something in addition to choice, that he wants to emphasize.

What else besides or in addition to choice, one wonders, could be at issue? In what sense is domination bad, if it is not a matter of obstruction or narrowing of plans and actions? A hint can be gleaned from Pettit's insistence that non-domination requires the presence of others. It cannot be achieved in isolation. Pettit insists that, in contrast to non-interference, non-domination can only be enjoyed in the presence of other people.[43] As he puts it, non-domination is "the condition under which you live in the presence of other people but at the mercy of none."[44] Someone stranded alone on a desert island achieves complete non-interference, but he or she does not enjoy non-domination—

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[41] *Republicanism*, 25. Emphasis mine.
[42] *Ibid*., 25.
[43] *Ibid*., 66.
[44] *Ibid*., 80.

even though he or she is *not dominated* (not being dominated is not the same as enjoying non-domination). What matters for Pettit is not strictly speaking just the absence of domination, but, in his words, "the absence of domination *in the presence of other people*."[45]

There is something about the presence of others and one's awareness of one's relation or standing to others that is at the heart of this second account of the evil of domination. Pettit argues that there are three reasons why domination-plus-interference is worse than simple interference. Of the three, the one that carries the most weight for Pettit—the one that is, in his words, "of the greatest importance"—is the loss of "status" that goes along with domination.[46] Those who are dominated do not enjoy the "psychological status" or "intersubjective status," as he puts it, of an equal.[47] They lose the "capacity to stand eye to eye" with their dominators.[48] This image of the downcast eyes of the subjugated and vulnerable is central to Pettit's description of the inferior status of the dominated. For instance:

> … the enjoyment of non-domination in relation to another agent … goes with being able to look the other in the eye …. You do not have to live either in fear of that other, then, or in deference to them. The non-interference you enjoy at the hands of others is not enjoyed by their grace and you do not live at their mercy. You are a somebody in relation to them, not a nobody.[49]

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[45] *Ibid*., 66. Emphasis mine.
[46] In two separate works, Pettit describes the status argument as being "of the greatest importance": *Repblicanism*, 71; "Freedom as Antipower," 594. In "Keeping Republican Freedom Simple," he describes it as "of the first importance." 350.
[47] *Republicanism*, 64.
[48] *Ibid*., 5.
[49] *Ibid*, 71.

The good of non-domination is the awareness of one's status as an equal, instantiated in a whole way of walking, talking, and holding one's head high; a way of being in the world marked by the confidence that one's interests matter and one *must* be heard.[50]

This notion of status or awareness of status looks suspiciously like the swagger of the powerful. In a way, this is true. Pettit does point out that this way of life, in which one does not have to bow and scrape to anyone, was reserved for the privileged powerful few in the republican tradition:

> The individuals involved were always male, they were always men of substance—men of trade, men of land, men of property—and they were always, of course, members of the mainstream culture.[51]

The possession of overwhelming power, whether in the form of wealth or arms, is probably the most direct means by which an individual can enjoy non-domination. But this is not the whole story. Even among the narrow constituency of the republican tradition, the ideal was supposed to be one of living *among equals*.[52] Granted, at the time it was taken for granted that supporting such a group of equals necessitated maintaining a large group of unequals—slaves, dependent women, and so forth. Pettit argues that one of the reasons the republican ideal of non-domination eventually came

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[50] As Charles Larmore argues, Pettit's emphasis on "status" also looks intimately related to the liberal ideal of "respect for persons," which is one of the reasons it is problematic to draw a bright line, as Pettit wants to do, between republicanism of this sort and liberalism. Larmore, "A Critique of Philip Pettit's Republicanism," 241.
[51] *Ibid*., 133.
[52] *Ibid*.

to seem untenable (around the nineteenth century, he believes) was the view that its robust benefits could not be extended past the ranks of the privileged few.[53] "Progressives," who wanted to extend the group of people about whom the state ought to be concerned to include women and servants, not just propertied males, faced a dilemma, according to Pettit:

> If they said that the state should provide for the freedom of people in general, and took freedom in the sense of non-domination, then they would have to argue in an impossibly radical vein that contemporary family and master-servant law should be overthrown; according to that law, after all, women and servants were inherently subject to their masters and incapable of enjoying non-domination. Their solution to that problem was to give up the ideal of non-domination in favour of the ideal of non-interference.[54]

Pettit seems to believe that inequality was a necessary condition of the embrace of the republican conception of freedom in the past. "The very fact," he suggests, "of maintaining such a narrow view of the citizenry led them to embrace a very rich image of the freedom that those citizens might enjoy."[55] Nonetheless, Pettit argues that non-domination and its associated notion of status can and should, despite its stingy pedigree, be extended to all persons in contemporary societies.[56] The solution is not to eliminate *all* differentials of power, but to organize societies in such a way that the

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[53] *Ibid*., 148.
[54] *Ibid*.
[55] *Theory of Freedom*, 145.
[56] *Ibid*., 138.

powerful cannot use their resources to exercise a capacity for arbitrary interference.[57] The emphasis on status need not be associated with the image of the haughty aristocrat, lording it over his inferiors with impunity. The point of non-domination is that no one need cringe in the presence of the powerful. This point is reflected in Pettit's reference to John Milton, who wrote that in a republic, "they who are greatest, walk the streets as other men, may be spoken to freely, familiarly, without adoration."[58]

So when weighing the costs and benefits of reducing the extent and intensity of domination in the world of work, there are two different senses of the normative stakes involved: one related to choice, and the other to status. Beginning with the facet of Pettit's account of domination that emphasizes choice, a problem arises. The account leaves it an open question as to whether domination is, in many areas of work, all that bad. To really make the case against employment, for instance, an additional argument is required that tells us why domination *in the employment context in particular* is bad. If the argument ultimately comes down to choice and frustration of preferences or elimination of options, then we must look at what specific sorts of choices are being curtailed to see how serious—if at all—domination is in a particular case.

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[57] Pettit suggests two general means by which this can be accomplished: first, the strategy of "reciprocal power," by which the power of the dominator and dominated are made more equal; second the strategy of "constitutional provision," in which domination is eliminated rather than reduced by placing legal and political limits on the legitimate uses of power. *Republicanism*, 67.

[58] *Ibid*., 71. Strictly speaking, Milton used the term "free commonwealth" here.

As Pettit admits, domination may be more or less serious depending on how significant or "central" is the area of choice over which one is dominated.[59] He cites an essay of Charles Taylor's in the course of making this point. In that essay, Taylor writes:

> … we make discriminations between obstacles as representing more or less serious infringements of freedom. And we do this, because we deploy the concept against a background understanding that certain goals and activities are more significant than others.[60]

The example Taylor uses is a traffic light that inhibits our movement, and he seems to be making two different claims: (1) that the kind of choices obstructed by a traffic light are so trivial that one need not worry about the obstruction of freedom represented here; (2) that the choices are so trivial that it is not even appropriate to speak of a loss of freedom at all.[61] Ultimately, the difference between the two claims need not concern us. (Everything seems to turn on whether one wants to assume that the words "loss of freedom" indicate something inherently bad. If we do assume this, then we would want to say that there is no loss of freedom in the case of traffic lights. If we assume instead that "loss of freedom" is more of a neutral description, then we would want to say of the traffic light example that it represents a loss of freedom, but an insignificant one.) Taylor contrasts our intuitions regarding the traffic light case with a case of interference involving religious liberty:

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[59] *Republicanism*, 58.
[60] Taylor, "What's Wrong with Negative Liberty," 217-218.
[61] *Ibid*., 218.

> … a law which forbids me from worshipping according to the form I believe in is a serious blow to liberty; even a law which tried to restrict this to certain times (as the traffic light restricts my crossing of the intersection to certain times) would be seen as a serious restriction.[62]

In citing Taylor on this point, Pettit allows that there should be an additional question asked of a case of domination: namely, whether or to what extent the particular options closed off to us by virtue of the arbitrary interference matter.

We must therefore ask how "central" or "serious" the workplace is to our lives, or in other words, how significant are the choices available to us in the worlds of market and household work. In attempting to come up with an answer, we should first note that the power employers possess can spill out of the workplace and into what one would consider one's "private" life. For instance, depending upon a particular job may place one in the position of putting up with a sexually predatory boss or curbing the expression of one's political convictions even outside of working hours. This sort of bleeding of the controlling relationship into one's "personal" life, one's life outside of the work function, should count against employment, and there ought to be legal or other mechanisms put in place to prevent it from occurring. Domination in household work is particularly problematic in this respect, since one's work functions are so bound up with the personal that it is difficult to tease the two realms apart. But in either case, when the extent of domination extends to sexual harassment or an attempt to control political expression, we ought to consider this a serious infringement, for reasons that are familiar enough.

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[62] *Ibid*.

But as for "on the job" interference, interference that relates more directly to one's work functions, the question of whether non-domination is a worthy goal can become more clouded. Some cases are more clear-cut than others. The set of examples cited here in the *New York Times* is straightforward: "workers decapitated on assembly lines, shredded in machinery, burned beyond recognition, electrocuted, buried alive—all of them killed, investigators concluded, because their employers wilfully violated workplace safety laws."[63] Less severe but equally serious health and safety concerns abound: being required to stand in place for long periods of time, prohibited from using the bathroom, or repetitive stress injuries associated with new technology, just to name a few. Unsafe or unhealthy working conditions are sometimes allowed to persist due to employee ignorance of legal regulations, but the presence of conditions of domination can also explain why workers accept unsafe or unhealthy jobs even when they are aware of laws that forbid such working conditions. With the threat of termination or plant closings hovering over their heads, employees can be cowed into keeping quiet.

Once we get past these more obvious cases, however, we encounter instances of interference the normative significance of which are not obvious. Employers exercise control over matters like the division of work processes into separate tasks, the assignment of such tasks to different personnel, methods of production, use and adoption of new machinery and technology, the short and long-term goals of these processes, and so on; in other words, most of what employees do when at work. There

[63] Barstow, "U.S. Rarely Seeks Charges for Deaths in Workplace," *New York Times*, Dec. 22, 2003.

are choices to be made here, different ways of accomplishing the goals of the firm and different goals to be set. Why does it matter whether workers have a choice here or are simply told what to do (or manipulated into acting in certain ways) on pain of termination? To the extent that employees lack liberty in such matters, we cannot decide whether this is the sort of thing that should concern us until we decide whether these kinds of choices have any normative significance. In what sense are the choices just cited not similar, in their insignificance, to Taylor's traffic light example? Until one answers these questions, a condemnation of employment from the standpoint of neo-republican freedom as non-domination is incomplete.

When we eventually turn to the second critique of work derived from the republican tradition—that which is related to what Pettit derides as a "populist" strand of republicanism and is bound up with ideals of self-government and the importance of active involvement in civic life (and is also sometimes associated, unnecessarily, with a conception of "positive" liberty)—there will be more to say about these hierarchies and divisions of decision-making within the sphere of work functions. (These questions will also be taken up in a different normative context in the next chapter.) But the "choice" strain of Pettit's critique does not necessarily require us to reduce workplace domination in general. Rather, it demands that we reduce the "extent" of domination; to place limits on possible interference (or self-limitation) in certain central domains of human conduct. The critique does not, on its own, require us to bite too deeply into the way that work is organized in the household and market.

The "status" aspect of Pettit's argument, however, is not so clearly limited in its demands. This second sense in which domination is harmful is not related to the specific choices I block off in the course of my work in order to stay in the good graces of an employer or spouse, but focuses more generally on the relationship to which the dominated stands to the dominator, and the habits of obsequiousness this relationship encourages. While the first sense in which domination is harmful directs us to limit the extent of domination to those areas we may deem less critical, Pettit's focus on the "status" element of domination demands that we take a more general approach, reducing the overall "intensity" of domination (the overall ease with which a dominating agent can interfere in any particular area; the degree of arbitrariness). When an employer or spouse's power of arbitrary interference has me spending my day in a pose of fawning attentiveness—over even the most trivial matters—the harm here is located in the way I must carry myself, or my "status." As Pettit emphasizes, even if I am so successful at managing the situation such that none of my choices ends up being blocked, there is still harm being done. It is, as he puts it, a "demeaning and despicable bequest" when we enjoy free reign by virtue of our success as a "cringing, toadying, fawning sycophant."[64]

The argument from status demands that we mitigate the effectiveness of the employer's power of arbitrary interference in general, and thus the intensity of domination. In his brief comments on employment, Pettit suggests that the intensity of domination can be partially reduced to the extent that jobs are widely available and it is

[64] Pettit, "Freedom in the Market," 137.

relatively easy to switch employers.[65] An employee can more easily refuse to meet unreasonable, vicious, or trivial demands, or speak his or her mind with greater ease, according to this argument, if there are alternate employers available and switching does not incur unreasonably onerous costs.[66] Pettit also points out that domination is more intense when labour law is governed (as it is in the United States) by the "at will" principle, according to which one may be fired for any reason or no reason at all (by contrast with the "for cause" labour contract).[67] In addition, if there is a strong social safety net that provides income support or direct provision of necessities (healthcare, food, etc.) to the unemployed, such that everyone has a non-employment source of income or support on which to fall back, this will reduce the heavy cost of being fired, and hence of defying one's boss. Such a safety net, to the extent that it provides a reliable alternate source of income, could also help reduce the intensity of domination in the case of full-time household workers.

However, the degree to which such social supports equalize the imbalance of power between employer and employed, or between household members, depends upon the level of support. If being fired and falling back on social insurance means

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[65] *Republicanism*, 141.

[66] Nien-he Hsieh objects that "the cost to exiting their place of work is potentially great enough that it is unreasonable to rely exclusively on the right to exit one's place of work as a means to realize a basic right to protection against arbitrary interference at work." "Rawlsian Justice and Workplace Republicanism" 127-134.

[67] *Ibid*., 142. U.S. labour law is guided by this "at will" principle—with exceptions. For example, one cannot be fired for reason of sexual or racial discrimination, nor can one be fired for refusing to break the law—at least in principle. As Fred C. Alford reveals, those who are fired for speaking out against illegal practices are rarely vindicated (*Whistleblowers*, 109).

living in destitution, social insurance payments will not go very far in reducing the intensity of domination. To be effective in reducing domination to any significant degree, the safety net must be set at a level that supports a decent standard of living (which is to say, above what would normally be provided by a minimum wage job).

The most effective way to reduce the intensity of domination in the context of work may be to reorganize the workplace so that the interests of the employed are appropriately "tracked" in Pettit's sense. This may involve something along the lines of what Nien-he Hsieh calls "workplace republicanism," in which the decisions of management can be contested. Hsieh contrasts the case for "workplace democracy," which he associates with worker ownership and a right to control the means of production, with workplace republicanism, which takes a more limited form:

> … protection against arbitrary interference requires a regime that both constrains the discretion of managerial decision-making and provides institutional guarantees for workers to be able to contest managerial directives as part of the decision-making process internal to economic enterprises.[68]

However, the further we move towards reducing the intensity of domination in work—particularly in the case of market work—the more likely it is that we will encounter some fairly significant trade-offs. At some point, reducing the degree of domination in work may entail substantial costs in the form of reduced productivity. One might argue that this diminished productivity is worth it—that this is the least we should pay for the benefit of enhancing liberty as non-domination. But if we return to

[68] Hsieh, "Rawlsian Justice and Workplace Republicanism," 116.

Juliet Schor's discussion of the productivity dividend, diminished productivity represents not just a potential reduction in material well-being, but also foregone opportunities to reduce working time—and this complicates the argument that the harms of domination are best reduced through a reorganization of work (through workplace republicanism or otherwise).

There may be some instances in which more widely shared decision-making within an economic enterprise (or the contestability of the sort Hsieh has in mind) will improve productivity or leave it more or less unaffected (though it would have to boost productivity sufficiently to make up for the extra time required to engage in the decision-making processes of a republican workplace). But in all other cases in which productivity falls when we add extra layers of contestability, this entails the need to work even longer hours to produce some given level of output. In this way, reducing the intensity of domination may also mean limiting our economic potential for spreading more free time to all.

And if this is the case, then a radical reorganization of the business enterprise could be counterproductive, based strictly on the standard of moderating the ill effects of domination. The reason is rooted in the possibility that reducing working hours could itself be considered a means of diminishing the harms of domination—at least those harms associated with one's status and the habits fostered by this tenuous status. When we limit the amount of time individuals are expected or required to immerse themselves in environments in which they must adopt habits of servility and sycophancy, we can mitigate the status-based harms of domination. The less time we

spend engaged in relationships that involve arbitrary interference, the less we solidify the habits that are necessary to navigate those circumstances. The status-based harms of domination can compound through repetition and exposure. It is one thing to have to occasionally lower my eyes and bite my tongue when I am at the mercy of, say, a border guard in some remote outpost, but when my everyday environment demands a more regular adoption of such stances towards other human beings, the harm reaches deeper, running the risk of (mis)shaping me more fundamentally.

As noted, Pettit maintains that contemporary societies, in contrast to some of their predecessors, are wealthy enough to extend republican freedom to all. But as we saw, there are degrees of such "freedom" in Pettit's sense, and there may be a certain point past which it is no longer worth it to alter the circumstances under which we work in order to lessen the intensity of domination—if this means we ultimately need to spend more time in such relationships of (even mitigated) domination. Provided that we mark out the appropriate limits to the extent of domination in accordance with the "choice" side of Pettit's critique, we might be better off tolerating some degree of domination in the world of employment in order to enhance our ability to provide more people with time outside of such work; outside of a world marked by (varying degrees of) cringing and deference.

If it is possible through workplace restructuring to reduce work-based domination to such a degree that it no longer represents a significant harm, then the aforementioned self-defeating dynamic would seem, at that point, to no longer apply. We may have to work very long hours under such domination-free circumstances (or

circumstances of negligible domination) to reproduce some particular level of output, but if the work does not involve any worrisome level of domination, then, at least from the standpoint of this particular republican concern, there should be no objection. However, there is an additional reason why workplace reforms that require longer working hours can be self-defeating from the standpoint of the ideal of non-domination, and the argument serves as a useful segue to a different strand of the republican tradition—one that places political participation front and centre.

The more time we spend at work, the less time we have available to engage in civic life. And the less time we have to engage in civic life, the less likely it is that our interests will be "tracked" in Pettit's sense by our political authorities, since, for Pettit, civic participation is a means of reducing domination by the state.[69] In other words, strategies to reduce the intensity of domination in work, to the extent that they require more engagement with the working world, can not only be self-defeating with respect to lessening work-based domination, as argued above, they may also demand life patterns that weaken the bulwarks against Pettit-style domination from the state. Note that this argument also applies to cases of market and household work that do not involve submission to the arbitrary will of another. Work in the household and market in general, when its demands on our time are too great, can crowd out participation in politics and thereby indirectly undermine our enjoyment of non-domination in Pettit's sense.

[69] Pettit, *Republicanism*, 8.

For Pettit, this is a purely instrumental argument: "Democratic participation may be essential to the republic, but that is because it is necessary for promoting the enjoyment of freedom as non-domination, not because of its independent attractions."[70] But there is another part of the republican tradition, one Pettit rejects as "populist" and "neo-Athenian," that regards political participation as not only instrumentally valuable, but also valuable in its own right. The central ideal of republicanism on this understanding is participation in self-government. Pettit also glosses this alternative republican approach as depending on a conception of "positive liberty" (to be contrasted with the negative liberty of non-domination).[71] And indeed, Michael Sandel articulates just such a "positive" ideal of liberty in his account of republicanism: "On the republican view, I am free only to the extent that I participate in self-government, which requires in turn that I possess certain habits and dispositions, certain qualities of character."[72] However, whether or not there is any sense in which political participation should be conceived of as a form of *freedom*, as Sandel insists, is irrelevant for my purposes.

The second republican critique of work runs as follows: (1) political participation is one of the capabilities central to human flourishing, such that anyone who so desires should have adequate opportunities to participate; (2) both work in general as well as employment and certain instances of household labour in particular can damage our ability to meaningfully engage in civic life. Endorsing the first element of the argument

[70] *Ibid*.
[71] Pettit, *Republicanism*, 19.
[72] Sandel, *Democracy's Discontent*, 169.

need not require any particular conception of "freedom." And for those who, like Pettit, take a purely instrumental view of the value of political participation, the second part of the argument will suffice.

According to this version of the republican critique, employment in particular degrades the capabilities, or "civic virtues," necessary for civic participation. But in a more basic sense, the argument can apply to all cases of market and household work; not just those that require us to defer to the decisions of superiors or eschew deliberation altogether. At this basic level, the amount of household and market work that typically consumes the lives of individuals clashes with the demands of citizenship. Given the complexities of the modern administrative state, an enormous amount of time is required just to arm oneself with the necessary information to fully engage as a citizen, to say nothing of the time needed to actually participate, whether through deliberation and debate or organizing and advocacy. A great deal of attention is paid to the role of money in influencing the political process, but the fact that powerful organizations can hire individuals exclusively to push for particular legislative or regulatory changes (or inaction) means that inequalities in *time spent* can also skew the outcomes of politics. Far from having enough time, after the demands of market and household work have been met, to actively engage in the political process, many citizens cannot even rely on being able to take time off to vote.[73]

[73] The United States features varying State laws governing time off for voting. And some regulations are blind to the dual responsibilities of market and household work: for instance, some indicate that employees are entitled to take time off to vote—but only as long as the polls are not open for an hour before or after that employee's regular

So simply having sufficient time outside of market and household work is crucial to being able to engage in political life. But this republican argument also identifies "civic virtues" that are malformed or left underdeveloped by devoting a large amount of time to the working world. These civic virtues are "habits and dispositions," to use Sandel's words, that are (along with time) necessary means for participating effectively in the political sphere. And these civic virtues require significant "extrapolitical support," as Paul Weithman puts it.[74] In other words, we cannot expect individuals to spend the majority of their time in environments in which they cultivate habits and dispositions that are corrosive to civic virtue and expect them to be able to act meaningfully as citizens in whatever spare time that remains. Here is T. B. Bottomore elaborating on the idea:

> Can we accept that democratic government, which requires of the individual independent judgment and active participation in deciding important social issues, will flourish when in one of the most important spheres of life—that of work and economic production—the great majority of individuals are denied the opportunity to take an effective part in reaching the decisions which vitally affect their lives?[75]

Various "deliberative" virtues that can be regarded as crucial to political participation get short shrift in the modern workplace, including the exercise of the ability to offer public-regarding justifications, understand differing points of view, and

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work day. This simply ignores household work burdens that require an employee to, say, pick up and drop off children immediately before or after his or her (paid) working hours.

[74] Weithman, "Political Republicanism and Perfectionist Republicanism," 311.

[75] Quoted in Brest, "Further Beyond the Republican Revival," 1626.

reconsider one's own deeply held beliefs.[76] The list of civic virtues might also include capabilities surrounding the activity of decision-making, including all the practical deliberative virtues involved in formulating ends, devising means to such ends, and revising the whole structure in light of experience and conflict. For most people, the workplace is divided in such a way that all of these activities are someone else's (or no one's) job.

Another set of civic virtues relates back to the status-themed elements of Pettit's account of domination and non-domination. Here, the "training" in habits of servility necessitated by domination in the workplace is not just harmful in itself but also makes us less effective as citizens. According to Michael Sandel, wage labour was criticized in the early days of the American republic because it was not considered to be "free labor," with the latter understood as "labor carried out under conditions likely to cultivate the qualities of character that suit citizens to self-government."[77] It was argued, for example, that employment would inculcate habits of obedience, obsequiousness, and servility that would carry over into the political domain. In other words, the habit of submitting oneself to the will of one's boss would develop traits of subservience that would then translate into a craven submission to political authorities.

One possible response to the civically corrosive features of work is to reorganize the workplace to make it more consistent with the development of political capacities,

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[76] Weithman compiles a list of these deliberative virtues, drawn from the work of Frank Michelman and Cass Sunstein. "Political Republicanism and Perfectionist Republicanism," 294.
[77] *Ibid*.

likely involving some version of workplace democracy. But once again, there are limitations to this strategy. To borrow a point made originally by Benjamin Constant, some of the civic virtues identified with this republican strain of argument often hearken back to a model of the small, ancient *polis* (or at least to the imagined *polis*) and focus on traits and capabilities that would be relevant to that sort of milieu—but perhaps not to the modern state.[78] Likewise, successful engagement in the "democratic workplace" would likely require skills and dispositions different from those useful for participation in modern democratic political life. Capabilities designed for the governance of a workplace will not necessarily translate well to a context in which political action involves organizing huge masses of anonymous individuals. The relevant "civic virtues" in the latter case would tend to involve less of the deliberative virtues essential for interpersonal or face-to-face debate and reasoning, and more of the capacities necessary for the activity of mass organizing and activism; of playing different interests off against one another, building coalitions, and so on. As Jeremy Waldron argues, modern politics requires a very particular set of civic virtues, related to, as he puts it, "the logic and ethics of collective action."[79] There may be other reasons we should value the sort of participation represented by workplace democracy, but it may represent, at best, incomplete preparation for political engagement outside of the workplace (a lot would seem to depend on the *size* of the firm). At worst, as Waldron suggests, the ideal of workplace-as-*polis* may even be counterproductive:

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[78] Constant, "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns."
[79] Waldron, "Virtue *en Masse*," 37.

> It may be the case that if we persevere with the sincere/heroic individualism of civic virtue as it is conceived by its most nostalgic proponents, we will be bringing up a generation of citizens quite unprepared for the messy and congested reality of political life, and for the moral possibilities it does offer.[80]

But even if all of this were not the case, even if the workplace could provide for the development of a reasonable facsimile of the civic virtues (one might argue that the capacities required for successfully carrying out a unionization campaign, for instance, are closer to the sort of modern organizational virtues Waldron has in mind), the problem of productivity and time raises its head once again. The more the workplace provides "extrapolitical" training in the civic virtues, whether those be the virtues of a small communal *polis* or a large anonymous democratic state, the more time will be required to produce a given material standard of living—and the less time there will be to engage in other theatres of political life.

Richard Dagger, concerned that the contemporary "republican revival" has added little of value to discussions of economic affairs, tries to outline a conception of what he calls the "civic economy":

> A civic economy will value the efficient production and distribution of goods and services, but it will tolerate losses in efficiency when necessary to make work more conducive to self-governing citizenship. In Sandel's terms, a 'republican political economy' is one in which satisfying consumer preferences is less important than ensuring that workers will be able to acquire or develop, *through their work*, the traits of the self-governing citizen.[81]

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[80] *Ibid*., 38.

[81] Dagger, "Neo-Republicanism and the Civic Economy," 161-162. Italics added.

The key question here surrounds Dagger's "through their work" qualification. If his civic republican is willing to pay a price in goods and services to advance republican ideals, why not take this cost in the form of reduced hours, rather than reduced productivity? This alternative, of placing limits on the amount of work we expect our citizens to perform, allows individuals who are so motivated greater opportunities to engage in political life outside of the world of market and household work. And as with the first republican critique derived from Pettit's ideal of non-domination (or at least the "status" elements of Pettit's argument), the less time we spend working, the less we need to depend on the world of work to "shape" our citizens in one way or another.

The combination of a civically stultifying environment in the home or office and insufficient time to develop and exercise one's political capabilities represents the worst of all possible worlds. Progress from that point will be achieved through a *combination* of shrinking the time demands of work and remaking it to become, if not a forum for civic education and training, at least compatible with the development of civic virtues. Nevertheless, there remains the possibility of conflict between these goals, and making work more conducive to self-governing citizenship could often mean making it more productive—though less civically edifying—but less likely to fill our days.

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CHAPTER FOUR

BEASTS AND MACHINES: DIVISION OF LABOUR AND THE DEHUMANIZATION OF WORK

> We have much studied and perfected, of late, the great civilised invention of the division of labour; only we give it a false name. It is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided; but the men:—divided into mere segments of men—broken into small fragments and crumbs of life; so that all the little piece of intelligence that is left in a man is not enough to make a pin, or a nail, but exhausts itself in making the point of a pin, or the head of a nail. … And the great cry that rises from all our manufacturing cities, louder than the furnace blast, is all in very deed for this,—that we manufacture everything there except men.
> —John Ruskin, *The Stones of Venice*[1]

> Why is it that the communists always say they're for the workingman, and as soon as they set up a country, you got guys singing to tractors? They're singing about how they love the factory. That's where I couldn't buy communism. It's the intellectuals' utopia, not mine. I cannot picture myself singing to a tractor, I just can't. (Laughs.) Or singing to the steel. (Singsongs.) Oh whoop-dee-doo, I'm at the bonderizer, oh how I love this heavy steel. No thanks. Never happen.
> —Mike Lefevre, steelworker[2]

Work in the home, office, factory, or field is often a cripplingly dull, painfully tedious affair. One might argue that this is not by itself an especially damning revelation. Perhaps there are interesting questions about how to satisfy differing preferences for boring or interesting work in a just manner, but the performance of dull work in and of

[1] As quoted in Murphy, *Moral Economy of Labor*, 10-11.
[2] As quoted in Studs Terkel, *Working*, xxxii-xxxiii.

itself may not appear to be a particularly pressing moral problem. Tedium, one might think, should not secure a very high place on a list of evils.

Pointing to the monotony of work, however, can be an indirect way of approaching a related problem that is not so easily brushed aside. I will examine a collection of views whose central contention is that a substantial amount of the work that is done in our societies is such that those who engage in it, who fill their lives with it, are harmed in a fundamental way. The work in question either fails to allow the exercise of, or actively diminishes, capabilities that are essential to living a full, human life.

The argument is often associated with a critique of the division of labour. Under division of labour, so the story goes, work is segmented in such a way that many jobs do not involve a broad or complex-enough use of human powers. There are two main versions of this argument that will be considered. The first version takes issue with specialization in general, while the second version concerns the ways in which the "narrowness" of much market and household work limits our ability to exercise a particular capability. It is this second, capability-based argument that will be taken up and elaborated upon. Here, Martha Nussbaum's idea of "practical reason" and its exercise in connection with the world of work will be used as a framework for grouping together a set of critiques of the working life. More specifically, I will explore the ways in which contemporary working conditions (1) fail to provide opportunities to exercise practical reason within the sphere of work, and/or (2) damage the ability to exercise practical reason outside of one's working time.

These critiques add some much-needed nuance to the assumptions that work is either at the core of the good life or merely a neutral means for providing the material foundations of a good life. They identify ways in which existing market and household work diminishes our ability to live well. However, challenges emerge when considering how to remediate the harms of work, particularly with respect to the idea that most of this work can be reformed in some manner and made to serve the goals of human flourishing. In the end, it may turn out to be the case that a lot of the work that needs to be performed in our societies cannot in any meaningful sense bring us closer to living flourishing, more fully human lives. In such cases, we may be better off organizing our societies in such a way that individuals can reduce the amount of such work that needs to fill their time.

The sort of arguments I will be examining are presented mainly by people who make a living writing and theorizing about those who make a living doing very little of either. We can begin, however, with the words of the latter, much larger group. In 1974, Studs Terkel published a series of interviews in a book entitled *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do*. He noted the recurrence of a theme expressed by workers in many different sectors of the economy:

> For the many, there is a hardly concealed discontent. The blue-collar blues is no more bitterly sung than the white-collar moan. "I'm a machine," says the spot-welder ... "I'm a mule," says the steelworker. "A monkey can do what I do," says the receptionist. "I'm less than a farm implement," says the migrant worker. … Blue collar and white call upon the identical phrase: "I'm a robot."[3]

[3] Studs Terkel, *Working*, xi.

Shoshana Zuboff, in her survey of the implementation of new office technology, relays expressions of discontent that echo the protestations noted by Terkel. She quotes the complaints of a "benefits analyst" and "transfer assistant" as follows: "You don't have to think that much because the system is doing the thinking for you. You don't have to be concerned with what is on that claim. People here have begun to feel like monkeys"; "You don't have to remember things, because the system does. You could get a monkey to do this job."[4]

Those who uttered these words may have meant several different things by them, but the main thrust seems to be that there is something about the work they do that makes them feel less than human. These people see their jobs as being filled with activities befitting mere machines or nonhuman animals. Implicit in the grievance is the notion that there is a way of working that makes one feel more fully human; a kind of activity that is appropriate for a human being, rather than a beast or machine. I will leave aside the question of whether we are doing justice to "mere" apes or computers. Regardless of the differences between animal and human, the idea is that there is something that it is to work in a truly human way.[5] "There are certain sorts of activities," Martha Nussbaum writes, "that are unworthy of the diverse capabilities with which most human beings are endowed."[6] Work that does not call upon these diverse capabilities leaves the worker acting in a manner that is not, as Nussbaum puts

[4] Shoshana Zuboff, "Office Technology as Exile and Integration," 136.
[5] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 72.
[6] Nussbaum, "Shame, Separateness, and Political Unity," 400.

it, "*worthy* of a human being."[7] Perhaps this would not be a serious problem if work were merely an occasional pastime—but for the vast majority it is not. According to the arguments that will be examined, when we work, day in, day out, at an activity that fails to call upon human powers we have reason to value, our lives are damaged. These essential capacities can atrophy; some part of us has not developed as it could and has wilted from misuse and neglect.

One common feature of modern work with which such critiques tends to be associated is the division of labour. In the first volume of *Capital*, Marx distinguishes between three different levels or degrees of division of labour: (1) the division of work into broad "*genera*" or families, such as industrial or agricultural; (2) the division of these broad families of work into species, creating the particular trades of farmer, blacksmith, shepherd, painter, and so on; (3) the division of a particular trade or craft, within a single workshop or firm, into detailed tasks or fragments of a productive process. The first two are grouped under the "social" division of labour; the last he calls the "detailed" division of labour.[8]

The categories of "social" and "detailed" division of labour will be used throughout the forthcoming investigation. There are two notable differences between these categories—notable in the sense of being relevant to the ethical critiques that follow. One is a difference of degree, and the other a difference in kind. To begin, generally speaking tasks assigned under the regimen of a detailed division of labour are

[7] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 73.
[8] Marx, *Capital* I, 392.

narrower—they involve a more limited range of activities calling on a more restricted array of abilities. Adam Smith's description in the *Wealth of Nations* of a pin-making workshop, an often-quoted example of division of labour in detail, provides an illustration:

> One man draws out the wire, another straights it, a third cuts it, a fourth points it, a fifth grinds it at the top for receiving the head; to make the head requires two or three distinct operations; to put it on, is a peculiar business, to whiten the pins is another; it is even a trade by itself to put them into the paper; and the important business of making a pin is, in this manner, divided into about eighteen distinct operations, which, in some manufactories, are all performed by distinct hands, though in others the same man will sometimes perform two or three of them.[9]

This example demonstrates a particularly fine-grained distribution of work. Here the process of making a pin is divided into eighteen individual steps, and each step (sometimes two or three, says Smith) is assigned to a worker as his or her full-time occupation. "Not only the whole work [of pin-making] is a peculiar trade," Smith writes, "but it is divided into a number of branches, of which the greater part are likewise peculiar trades."[10] To revert to Marx's terms again, social division of labour makes an occupation out of "metalworker" or even "pin-maker." Division of labour in detail makes it an occupation—which is to say that the majority of one's waking hours are "occupied" by this activity—to merely cut pieces of wire to a particular length, over and over again.

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[9] Adam Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 4-5.
[10] *Ibid*.

To this difference of degree, one may add Marx's assertion that the categories of "social" and "detailed" division of labour pick out a difference in kind. Among the reasons he cites, the relevant claim for the purpose of understanding variations in the ethical critiques of the division of labour is that the social division occurs, as Marx puts it, "in the interior of a society," whereas the detailed division of labour is located "within the interior of a workshop."[11] In other words, we can say that a detailed division refers to the division of work in the interior of a firm or productive enterprise (whether it is a workshop, office, hospital, household, or whatever). When we speak about the fact that some people spend their lives fashioning pins and others raising sheep, we are talking about a social division of labour. When, within a pin-making enterprise, one person makes the pinheads, another person cuts the wire, and a third is responsible for making decisions about how many and what type of pins to make, this is an example of a detailed division. If the first two tasks (pinhead-making and wire-cutting) were performed by independent producers, these would be examples of a social division, not a detailed division. Although the independent pinhead-maker's work may look identical to the work of the pinhead-maker in Smith's workshop, this is not so, and the difference is significant. The work of the independent producer would include mental functions—deciding quantity, type, production methods, solving problems, innovating, and so forth—that are lacking in the case of the production line labourer. This distinction between workers who innovate, plan, and give orders on the

[11] *Ibid*., 394-395.

one hand, and those who merely execute rote tasks on the other, is among the central concerns in the forthcoming arguments against the detailed division of labour.

It should be noted that, although modern manufacturing presents some of the more dramatic examples, it is not the only location of detailed divisions of labour. If it were, this would hardly justify claiming that "most" or even "much" work is affected in today's developed nations. As Robert Nozick points out, less than 5 percent of manual workers in the United States worked on an assembly line even in 1974.[12] With the increasing de-industrialization of the upper-echelon developed economies, this percentage is even smaller today. These assembly-line jobs, and industrial manufacturing work in general, are not disappearing outright. Rather, they have relocated to less wealthy areas of the world. As such, the critique of division of labour is at least equally if not *more* relevant in the developing economies that have taken on the world's manufacturing work and assembly-line work.

Broadly speaking, the intuition behind the critique of a detailed division of labour is that there is something wrong with spending the majority of one's life merely cutting precise lengths of wire, over and over again; while the intuition behind the critique of the social division is that it is similarly insufficient to dedicate one's life to the mere manufacture of pins (even if one performs all eighteen operations). In both cases, it is the perceived *narrowness* of these activities that makes them supposedly unsuited to the many and varied powers of a human being. What is regarded as an acceptable level of "broadening" in one's work will vary depending on whether the

[12] *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, 249.

social or detailed division is the target. In the following list of remedies, the first two mitigate the effects of a detailed division while the third addresses the social divisions: (1) those in a pin-making enterprise should perform all of the operations that go into making a pin (all or some substantial number of the operations listed by Smith); (2) members of a pin-making enterprise should not only make pins, but also be responsible for deciding how to make them, in what quantity, at what pace, and so forth; (3) humans should make pins, change diapers, and write symphonies.

The commonly cited benefit of the division of labour, both social and detailed, is an increase in productivity and the material enrichment this generally entails.[13] Among other reasons, specialization is supposed to enhance facility.[14] Instead of muddling through as a jack-of-all-trades, I can become proficient and highly productive at just one. Nevertheless, the admittedly substantial benefit of greater prosperity is accompanied by a number of costs, according to Adam Smith, who suggested the development of a detailed division of labour could potentially lead to "the almost entire corruption and degeneracy of the great body of the people."[15] Marx is no less dramatic with his pronouncement that division of labour under the capitalist mode of production turns a human being into a "crippled monstrosity."[16]

Some criticisms of division of labour are not going to be considered here. For example, division of labour can be connected with distributive injustice. Although

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[13] Some dispute whether these productivity gains persist at the level of the detailed division. For example, Murphy, *Moral Economy of Labor*; Schwartz, "Meaningful Work."
[14] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 8.
[15] *Ibid*., 839.
[16] *Capital*, 398.

specialization may contribute to increased wealth, this wealth is not evenly or fairly divided. Some occupations—generally those that demand skills comparable to some of the tasks of Adam Smith's pin factory—are paid drastically less than others; often less than is required to meet minimum needs for adequate food, shelter, health, and education. Other types of work—for example most cooking, cleaning, and caring for family members—are not paid at all, and this certainly makes it difficult for the worker to develop or maintain many of his or her central human capacities. Thus, the issue of distributive justice *can* be linked in this way to a concern for essential human powers, but the arguments I am examining focus on damage done by the work itself, rather than the effects of paltry remuneration. These remunerative injustices, or rather questions about whether or in what sense they are injustices, are not the focus of the present critique of the division of labour. The problems I would like to focus on would persist even if all remuneration were equal and substantial. The central concern is not the level of compensation (or lack of compensation, in the case of most household work), but rather the effects of the *work itself*.

There is a common thread that runs through critiques of both the social and detailed divisions of labour. "It is not, truly speaking, the labour that is divided; but the men," claims John Ruskin.[17] "In the division of labour," Engels writes, "man is also divided."[18] These writers are not referring to a division *between* humans, but to a division *within* the human being. Nor is the sense of this division one in which the

[17] Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, quoted in Murphy, *Moral Economy*, 10.
[18] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 718.

human being is at odds with him or herself, as one might take reason to be opposed to passion for example. Rather, the worker is divided in the sense that he has become, as Marx says, a "mere fragment of a man"; divided, as Ruskin puts it, "into mere segments of men—broken into small fragments and crumbs of life."[19] Division of labour is here connected with our being but a fragment of what we could be. It is a question of the squandering of our human potential in such a way that we fall below some critical threshold. Marx's image of the "crippling" of the human being reflects this concern. Divided labour, he writes, will "systematically cripple the worker" by allowing essential human capacities to "atrophy" through lack of use.[20] By virtue of focusing one's activity on some narrow task, division of labour develops some capacities at the expense of others. As Engels puts it, "all other physical and mental faculties are sacrificed to the development of one single activity."[21] The general claim is that division of labour involves a narrowing of human activity whose consequence is a tragic narrowing of the human being.

There are different ways of understanding the ethical significance of this "narrowing" of the human. I will be exploring two. On the first understanding, the problem is with specialization itself, regardless of what *particular* capacities are cultivated or neglected through such specialization. The second is not concerned with specialization *per se*, but rather with the neglect or deformation of a capacity for practical reason that is a crucial element of human flourishing. In general, arguments

[19] Marx, *Capital*, 414; *Moral Economy*, 10-11.
[20] As quoted in Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx*, 80.
[21] Engels, *Anti-Dühring*, 718.

informed by the first understanding tend to target both the detailed and social divisions labour, while those informed by the second understanding take issue more directly with certain aspects of the division of labour in detail.

In a well-known passage in the *German Ideology*, Marx appears to criticize the social division of labour as follows:

> For as soon as the distribution of labour comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticise after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.[22]

Daniel Brudney points out that there is some ambiguity in this passage, and in the *German Ideology* in general. On the one hand, Marx's complaint appears to be that workers are in some sense "forced" to specialize. If this is all there is to it, Marx should have no problem if an individual in his hypothetical communist society voluntarily chooses to specialize.[23] But this concern for choice is not all there is to the *German Ideology's* critique of the division of labour. One also finds there an ideal of what Marx

[22] Marx, *German Ideology*, 160.
[23] Daniel Brudney, *Marx's Attempt to Leave Philosophy*, 300-301. Brudney points out that Marx believes future members of communist society would not in fact choose to specialize.

calls "the all-around realization of the individual."[24] This ideal is rooted, according to Jon Elster, in the notion that "the individual can *fully* bring to actuality *all* the powers and abilities he possesses."[25] The idea is that the good life is a life of realization of a multitude of various abilities and powers, and that this multi-faceted development is hindered by limiting human beings to one narrow area of work.

Putting Marx and Marx interpretation aside, what sense can be made of this ideal of "all-around realization" through work? Do we want to say that *all* of the various skills required of the different crafts and sciences should be listed as being critically and inherently valuable, and that one is not "complete" as a human being unless one performs them all? If this is the case, the ideal appears to be hopelessly impractical. Arguably, most societies of a certain scale and level of development *must* have some social division of labour—no single person can perform every job or type of work that exists in a modern society. To the extent that the work of different occupations is identified with something like valuable human powers, no one can exercise all, or even a substantial majority of the powers open to a human being. As John Rawls puts it:

> It is tempting to suppose that everyone might fully realize his powers and that some at least can become complete exemplars of humanity. But this is impossible. It is a feature of human sociability that we are by ourselves but parts of what we might be.[26]

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[24] *Ibid*., 300.
[25] Jon Elster, "Self-realisation in work and politics," 131. Elster criticizes this notion as being "one of the more utopian elements in Marx's thought."
[26] Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 529.

Perhaps the ideal is just that—an ideal—and we want to say that the closer we approach it the better. In other words, the more various types of work one is able to perform, the better. Yet the more pressing objection is unrelated to practicality. Even if it *were* somehow possible for everyone to engage in every "type" of work, however that might be itemized, it is not clear why this would be desirable. What is missing in my life if I do not become proficient in, say, the art of currency speculation? The problem with this critique of the social division of labour is that it implies that the exercise of the specific technical skills of, say, a bond trader, geologist, and taxidermist are all of central importance to a human life. There is something too contingent, too precise, too mundane about these sorts of abilities for them to qualify as being essential to living a good life.

The next pair of critiques moves past the ideal of all-around realization and instead identifies critical intellectual or deliberative abilities that are neglected as a result of the detailed division of labour. Harkening back to Adam Smith's pin-makers, de Tocqueville asks the following question:

> What can be expected of a man who has spent twenty years of his life in making heads for pins? And to what can that mighty human intelligence which has so often stirred the world be applied in him except it be to investigate the best method of making pins' heads?[27]

The implication here is not simply that the detail worker is one-sided, but rather that the particular "side" of the human being that is being cultivated is trivial. The work

[27] Alexis deTocqueville, *Democracy in America*, as quoted in *The Oxford Book of Work*, 514.

itself may not be inconsequential—in the sense that it may serve a purpose that is regarded as noble or useful. Even something as seemingly banal as the manufacture of pins serves an important purpose: the purpose of supplying a useful good to society. Not all work can be endorsed in this manner. Presumably, manufacturers of landmines might not or should not regard their work as serving a meaningful goal. This is not, however, the sense of "trivial" that is at issue. One's product may be absolutely essential to the survival or well-being of one's society, but the part one plays in its provision may nonetheless call upon the cultivation of merely trivial abilities. If one's job at the box-making factory consists of standing in front of a conveyor belt, picking up completed, flattened boxes from the belt and placing them one-by-one into a large container on the floor, the capacities one develops through such work are trifling.[28]

One might be tempted to put the point by arguing that work that is too narrow is simply not "challenging" enough, but this argument is off the mark. It does not take much imagination to see that work made narrow and dull by even a detailed division of labour can be "challenging" in some sense. The following example should suffice:

> For approximately forty-five years, until her recent retirement, Jayamma went every day to the brick kiln and spent eight hours a day carrying bricks on her head, 500 to 700 bricks per day. … Jayamma balanced a plank on her head, stacked twenty bricks at a time on the plank, and then walked rapidly, balancing the bricks by the strength of her neck, to the kiln, where she then had to unload the bricks without twisting her neck, handing them two by two to the man who loads the kiln.[29]

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[28] This particular example is recounted by my mother, who held such a job at a factory in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada.

[29] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 18.

The work of this Indian woman is undeniably challenging. Along with the sheer physical endurance required, it would presumably take some skill to perform each motion most efficiently and with the least amount of strain—not to mention learning to deal with the boredom. But despite the challenge inherent in this work, one cannot shake the intuition that there is something wrong with committing human beings to this kind of activity every day for forty-five years.

Perhaps the problem with Jayamma's job is that it involves too much physical activity, and not enough of the mental. The real culprit here, one might say, is the division between "manual" (or rather "physical") and "mental" labour. This approach is also imprecise. For starters, there is such a thing as mental drudgery: work such as data-entry, the grading of multiple-choice exams, or routine coding for computer software, that calls upon only the most banal and repetitive intellectual functions.[30] Despite my use of examples such as brick-hauling and factory production of pins and boxes, one should not be tempted to think that dull work is the sole province of the "old," production and manufacturing economy. The "new" economy, or "information economy," provides us with enough examples of drudgery—only now one faces more of a cerebral slog. Robert Reich, former United States Secretary of Labor, observes that:

> The "information revolution" may have rendered some of us more productive, but it has also produced huge piles of raw data which must be

[30] Data-entry is not purely "mental" labour. The use of a keyboard makes it quite literally "manual" labour. Repetitive stress injuries and neck and back problems caused by strained immobility reinforce the bodily aspects of such work.

> processed in much the same monotonous way that assembly-line workers and, before them, textile workers processed piles of other raw materials.[31]

Even the high-paying, high status, mental professions have their own versions of dull, routine, toil:

> Some lawyers spend their entire working lives doing things that normal people would find unbearably monotonous—cranking out the same old wills, contracts, divorces, over and over, with only the names changed. Some accountants do routine audits without the active involvement of their cerebral cortices.[32]

This mental drudgery can in some ways be even worse than its physical cousin. With a job that requires almost no mental attention, we can at least daydream, letting our minds wander off to a more humane place.[33]

Another claim we can make, however, is that work of this sort is lacking in a particular type of mental or deliberative capacity. Practical reason is the ability to lead one's life according to reflective and self-directed choice in community with others. It is a multi-faceted capability. Practical reason involves being able to formulate goals, to decide on and pursue means for reaching those goals, and to adjust both the former and the latter in response to experience. Martha Nussbaum describes the capability in general terms as "being able to form a conception of the good and to engage in critical

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[31] Reich, *The Work of Nations*, 175.
[32] *Ibid*., 181.
[33] Musonius Rufus: "the occupations which require not too much physical exertion do not hinder the mind from reflecting on some of the higher things and by such reasoning from increasing its own wisdom—a goal toward which every philosopher earnestly strives." From Cora Lutz, "Musonius Rufus, 'The Roman Socrates'," 83.

reflection about the planning of one's life."[34] In the context of work, Nussbaum includes practical reason as a subset of "material control over one's environment": "being able to work as a human being, exercising practical reason and entering into meaningful relationships of mutual recognition with other workers."[35]

The division of labour in detail creates jobs in which one simply acts according to a pre-given plan set by others. For Adina Schwartz, the problem with work like Jayamma's is that one cannot exercise one's powers of choice or planning while performing such work—it lacks opportunities for the exercise of what she calls "autonomy."[36] Schwartz's particular terminology (autonomy) is unhelpful for my purposes, as it implies a broader conception of freedom that is not essential the arguments that will be developed. However, her concept of autonomy overlaps in important ways the idea of practical reason, and Schwartz's reflections on working conditions can help flesh out our understanding of the dangers of the world of work with respect to its role in undermining our options for exercising practical reason.

Working on the assembly line of a box factory, carrying bricks on one's head, cutting pieces of wire for pins, keypunching, or being a clerk in an automated checkout

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[34] Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities*, 34. Nussbaum features it on her list of ten "central capabilities"—governments are obliged to secure, at minimum, a decent threshold level of these capabilities for their citizens. She adds that practical reason is one of the two "architectonic" capabilities (along with "affiliation"), in the sense that it pervades, is woven into, and organizes the other capabilities. For practical reason, she explains, this underlines that a key thread running through her capabilities approach is that of freedom of choice: "the opportunity to plan one's own life is an opportunity to choose and order the functionings corresponding to the various other capabilities." (39)

[35] *Ibid*., 34.

[36] Schwartz, "Meaningful Work," 635-636.

line, involve, in Schwartz's words, "a series of set actions … with almost no opportunities for formulating aims, for deciding on means for achieving their ends, or for adjusting … goals and methods in the light of experience."[37] These workers do not design the overall goals of their factory or office; nor do they decide how to meet these goals or how to perform their particular piece of work or "job."[38] They are hired, Schwartz writes, "to perform precisely specified actions. Even the order in which they perform those operations, the pace at which they work, and the particular bodily movements they employ are largely determined by others' decisions."[39]

Adam Smith's list of the eighteen operations that go into making a pin does not include activities like formulating aims and adjusting means. His description of the pin-making workshop does not explicitly draw attention to the division between people in a productive enterprise who make decisions and solve problems, and those who merely carry out the decisions and dictates. He is, nevertheless, aware of this distinction and its import. Smith faults the emergence and spread of a detailed division of labour for the loss among a large number of workers of a healthy, fully developed capacity for something like practical reason.[40] In his words,

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[37] *Ibid*., 634.

[38] Sebastian de Grazia writes about a suggested etymology of the English word "job": "The origin of the word is still lost but 'job' appears to come from the Middle English *jobbe* meaning a piece or a lump. In any case its early usage was to signify a piece of work." *Of Time, Work, and Leisure*, 51.

[39] Schwartz, "Meaningful Work," 634.

[40] This is not the only capability that he fears is damaged by division of labour. He lists three: "intellectual, social, and martial virtues" (*Wealth of Nations*, 840). Particularly in the passages dealing with the loss of military virtue, Smith appears to object to division of labour on republican or "civic humanist" grounds (840-841).

> [t]he man whose whole life is spent performing a few simple operations, of which the effects too are, perhaps, always the same, or very nearly the same, has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention in finding out expedients for removing difficulties which never occur.[41]

By contrast, Smith observes that in "barbarous societies" lacking detailed divisions of labour, "the varied occupations of every man oblige every man to exert his capacity; and to invent expedients for removing difficulties which are continually occurring."[42] Since, as Smith asserts, "the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments," when work does not demand initiative and invention, planning and execution, these capacities become "mutilated and deformed" in the human beings who spend their adult lives immersed in such work.[43] The worker "naturally loses … the habit of such exertion [the habit of exerting one's intellectual powers of choice and "invention"], and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become," Smith writes.[44] "Stupid and ignorant" is too strong. The point should be that when our "ordinary employments" take up a major part our adult lives, and such employments involve little or no opportunity for the use of practical reason, we risk becoming deficient in our ability to exercise that capability.

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[41] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 840.
[42] *Ibid*.
[43] *Ibid*., 840; 846.
[44] *Ibid*., 840.

Smith had his own ideas about how to correct this problem—this deficiency in the capacity for practical reason caused by narrow, rote work—without returning society to a "barbarous" condition. I will return to his solution when taking up objections. Schwartz, for her part, insists that the only solution is to enforce a right to "meaningful work." Work is "meaningful" for Schwartz not by virtue of serving a purpose endorsed by the worker, but by virtue of offering opportunities for employing practical reason (her "autonomy").

Meaningful work in the latter sense can, according to Schwartz, only be secured by requiring a reorganization of workplaces. Schwartz advocates that workplaces be rearranged so that, in her words, "all persons' jobs allow them to act as autonomous individuals and thus foster instead of stunt their autonomous development."[45] To reach this goal, mere "job rotation" is insufficient, if that means, for example, that one rotates from pinhead-making to wire-cutting, and so on through all eighteen of Smith's tasks.[46] Although job rotation would mean that workers would have more experience with a number of different tasks, this does not solve the problem Schwartz highlights—namely, the paucity in opportunities for using practical reason. Performing a variety of routine, narrow tasks does nothing in and of itself to solve this problem. By contrast with the "all-around realization" critique of the social division of labour elaborated above, Schwartz does not target the detailed division of labour simply for the fact that it involves specialization:

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[45] Schwartz, "Meaningful Work," 642.
[46] *Ibid*., 640.

> The reason for rejecting the detailed division of labor is not that it involves cooperation among specialists *per se*. Rather, that division of labor is objectionable because it is a cooperative arrangement in which some persons specialize in framing plans and in deciding how they are best pursued and others specialize in unquestioningly executing those decisions.[47]

In Schwartz's view, the key division within the firm or household that must be broken down to ensure proper cultivation of practical reason is the division between those who have opportunities for "framing, pursuing, and adjusting their own plans," and those who do not.[48] This requires that the work within a given firm (or household, we should add, though Schwartz does not touch on it) be shared in a manner that, Schwartz urges, "abolishes the distinction between those who decide and those who execute others' decisions."[49] Everyone must share in the mechanical, routine labour as well as the decision-making, goal-framing, and innovation.

It should be noted that this enforcement of a right to meaningful work is separable from the notion of workplace democracy. As Richard Arneson makes clear, a highly detailed division of labour can occur even in a fully worker-managed factory.[50] It is entirely open to the members of such a factory to democratically decide to maintain the division between workers who decide overall goals and means and workers who carry out precisely specified and limited tasks. The majority may simply prefer to stay

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[47] *Ibid*.
[48] *Ibid*., 639.
[49] *Ibid*., 641.
[50] Richard Arneson, "Meaningful Work and Market Socialism," 518. Yugoslavian experiments in worker self-management seem to represent an example of this phenomenon. Schwartz, "Meaningful Work," 641.

in their place on the assembly or service line and leave the "framing, pursuing, and adjusting" of plans to other specialists. What we would want to say about such a scenario is that there is a measure of improvement from the status quo—that is, compared to the hierarchically governed firmed that imposes the same division of labour—because the process of discussing, deliberating, and choosing this way of organizing a given productive process is itself an application of practical reason (and, in a genuinely democratically organized workplace, it is an organizational decision that would be revisable).

Schwartz does not mention household work, and one might say that household production does not tend to reflect the more fine-grained distribution of tasks one finds in certain manufacturing and service firms. Nevertheless, the distinction between those who plan, deliberate, and choose, and those who merely carry out the dictates of the former is germane for household situations in which there are significant disparities (often along gender lines) of power—for all the reasons previously discussed (material resources, gender norms and ideology, discrimination, and so on). Measures like state mandates regarding the sharing of dishwashing duties are not going to be attractive or workable options.[51] We can, however, make sure that household workers are not trapped inside the home or overly financially dependent on their spouses. There are good reasons to pursue these policies, but they do not ensure the elimination of the household division of labour. Even in an ideal situation of mutual recognition and equal power, one can have a case that is parallel to Arneson's hypothetical workplace

[51] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 279-280.

democracy: partners may simply jointly decide to maintain a traditional division of labour (but, as with workplace democracy in the market, the activity of jointly deciding to maintain this traditional division is at least some improvement with respect to opportunities for the use of practical reason).

One may get the impression that Schwartz is setting up managerial work as some type of ideal. In other words, in a reorganized workplace meaningful work in her sense seems to involve the sort of decision-making tasks that are normally the responsibility of managers. If this is the case, then it would seem that division of labour in detail does not negatively affect all of the workers in a firm—it would seem that managers still have ample opportunities to cultivate their powers of practical reason. This might be the case, but it is not necessarily so. Some lower- to mid-level managerial workers, despite the power they hold over the people they supervise, can and often do spend most of their time performing routine tasks such as "repetitive checks on subordinates' work and the enforcement of standard operating procedures."[52] Often these routine supervisory functions are handed down to them and precisely specified by their own superiors. (And the fact that some of these managers can be fairly well paid demonstrates that this practical reason–based critique does not just apply to persons in lower-income strata.)

It could be argued that the monotonous nature of one's work need not matter if one has opportunities to exercise practical reason outside of one's job or household work. If we can choose to formulate, execute, and alter life plans during our free time,

[52] Reich, *Work of Nations*, 174.

then it may not matter how tedious our work is. This will be true, however, to the extent that there is a favourable balance between free time and compulsory market and household work. What we do at work—on the job and in the household—may affect what we are able to be and do outside of work. Adina Schwartz summarizes as follows:

> When persons work for considerable lengths of time at jobs that involve mainly mechanical activity, they tend to be made less capable of and less interested in rationally framing, pursuing, and adjusting their own plans during the rest of their time.[53]

Adam Smith articulates this point—that work behaviour shapes what we can be or do in general—by writing that "the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments."[54] In other words, it can be true for adults as well as for children that an absence of the use or exercise of a capability may eventually erode it.[55] The strength of this phenomenon—of mindless work generating mindlessness—will vary depending on *how much time* one spends submerged in work, or conversely, how much time one has to devote to projects that involve practical reason. The more our work constitutes the central activity of our waking lives, the greater is the potential for harm.

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[53] Schwartz, "Meaningful Work," 637.
[54] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 840.
[55] Nussbaum distinguishes between "internal capabilities" and "combined capabilities." In the case of practical reason, the former refers to fluid states of the person that render them able to deliberate, choose, and revise regarding their life plans (or their work). The "combined" capabilities include internal capabilities as well as the opportunities to actually function in accordance with those internal capabilities—opportunities that are created by the social, economic, political, and institutional environment. *Creating Capabilities*, 20-23.

This scenario also creates a hard case. The critique of work I am developing rests on the idea that the state should be concerned with securing individuals' choices to exercise practical reason. On this understanding, the state does not necessarily have a reason to be concerned if an individual chooses to fill his or her free time with work—even work that does not include opportunities for the use of practical reason. However, it is also important to be able to *revise* these choices to exercise (or not) our capabilities, and if the previously mentioned arguments are true—that refraining from exercising practical reason can eventually degrade one's ability to engage in it—then one's very ability to revise might itself be undermined by choosing a life of rote work. (Some form of workplace democracy might represent a middle ground solution here—it would, as mentioned, both permit the worker to jointly decide to refrain from daily tasks requiring significant demands on his or her ability to plan and engage in critical reflection, while also providing semi-regular opportunities to shape and revise that state of affairs.)

One might argue that these spillover effects from dull, dehumanized work can be combated through education. Adam Smith proposes such an alternative to the Schwartzian desire to do away with the detailed division of labour. While Smith hails the benefits that flow from the productivity gains accompanying the detailed division of work, as noted above he also decries the fact that such gains are made at the expense of the "degeneracy" of, among other things, capacities for initiative, planning, and invention. His solution is to provide for some form of mandatory, partially publicly-

funded education.[56] The general idea here is that education can be used for the cultivation of intellectual powers in order to substitute for a lack of such opportunities in work. Smith seems to have mainly children and adolescents in mind, but there is a legitimate question as to whether this is sufficient. The "use it or lose it" problem could apply here as well: adult work may eventually weaken the intellectual capacities we have built up as children.

The "education," however, would need to be of the right sort. Job training programs, a common form of state-supported adult education, may be useful and worthwhile for many reasons, but they are not necessarily the sort of thing we are looking for to solve the problems articulated above. To serve as a remedy to the ills that have been attributed to the division of labour, the educational experience must offer a space in which one may develop, for example, one's powers of practical reason. Many of the ways in which we educate people would not serve this goal. Oftentimes schooling can be boring, tedious, and routine in ways that mirror the world of work—sometimes purposefully so. About compulsory schooling, H. L. Mencken once wrote that,

> The aim … is simply to reduce as many individuals as possible to the same safe level, to breed and train a standardized citizenry, to put down dissent and originality. That is its aim in the United States … and that is its aim everywhere else.[57]

[56] *Ibid*., 841-843.
[57] Quoted in John Taylor Gatto, "Against School," 35.

Along similar lines, John Gatto points to the influence of Alexander Inglis' *Principles of Secondary Education* on the development of the ideological foundations of the American public education system.[58] Gatto paraphrases and interprets as follows the first item on Inglis' list of the six basic functions of modern schooling:

> The *adjustive* or *adaptive* function. Schools are to establish fixed habits of reaction to authority. This, of course, precludes critical judgment completely. It also pretty much destroys the idea that useful or interesting material should be taught, because you can't test for *reflexive* obedience until you know whether you can make kids learn, and do, foolish and boring things.[59]

Education that is largely designed to fill heads with technical knowledge or to create a mass of people who are trained to withstand the boredom and browbeating that accompany the modern workplace cannot act as a counterbalance to the deadening effects of work.

To return to the main argument, the critique of work developed in this chapter—that work tends to provide an inhospitable environment for the development or exercise of practical reason—uncovers a certain tension. In a sense, projects like Adina Schwartz's are perfectly compatible with prevailing attitudes regarding an assumed intimate connection between the world of work and human flourishing. The reason, perhaps, that we need to reshape the internal organization of productive enterprises is

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[58] *Ibid*., 36. James Bryant Conant was apparently influenced by Inglis' work. About Conant, Gatto writes: "Without Conant, we would probably not have the same style and degree of standardized testing that we enjoy today, nor would we be blessed with gargantuan high schools that warehouse 2,000 to 4,000 students at a time."
[59] *Ibid*.

that work *as it ought to be* is at the center of the good life. If this is the case, there might then be no reason to be concerned about "free time," except to the extent it better enables a reorganization of work along the lines Schwartz envisions. At least with respect to practical reason, so the argument might go, there is nothing missing from a life dominated by (properly organized) work.

Schwartz's chief example of a rehabilitated workplace is a dogfood manufacturing plant in Topeka, Kansas in which decision-making and routine labour were shared among all of the workers, more or less as she prescribes:

> All workers were given opportunities to learn to perform all the tasks assigned to their group, no group member was mainly assigned to routine operations, and all the members of the group shared in supervising its operations, democratically deciding job assignments.[60]

At one point, Schwartz describes practical reason (or autonomy, as she calls it) as the ability to "rationally form and act on some overall conception of what [one] want[s] in life."[61] In her view, formulating ends and implementing means with regard to matters like the manufacture of dogfood calls upon the same abilities of practical reason that one utilizes when making what one might think of as the weightier or more momentous-sounding decisions regarding "overall conceptions" of what one desires out of life. Nevertheless, we might want to say that, for those who do not find any

[60] "More or less" because she points out that the Topekan workers did not democratically decide *all* of the major issues for their plant. The ideal for Schwartz would probably involve some combination of the Topekan factory and Yugoslavian workplace democracy. "Meaningful Work," 642.
[61] *Ibid*., 635.

significant overlap between, on one side, the goal of kibble-making and the activities required in its production, and on the other, their overall conceptions of the good, there would be something missing from a life of such work. That is, there would be something missing even if this work employs what we might think of as the mental "instruments" of more meaningful reflection and decision-making.

While it seems clear that standing on a conveyor belt and swivelling one's torso back and forth would be unlikely to stimulate reflection about one's overall conception of the good life, it is not clear that pondering the organization of box-making techniques would tend to do so either. To give another example, Barbara Ehrenreich describes her experience cleaning houses for a private maid service. The firm she worked for had "scientifically" determined the best way to clean a floor, breaking down the process into discrete steps and relaying it through training videos to the maids, who were required to follow the standardized procedures.[62] This type of work suffers from the sort of drawbacks that are described by Schwartz and others: no planning, no control over methods, and so on. But the question is: how much more meaningful, how much more central to a good life would such work be if it were liberated from strict, mindless routinization? One need not exercise a great deal of imagination to come up with an answer. Presumably, many of these maids also clean their own floors. Although they might be able to decide when and how to perform the host of chores in their own homes, in the end they are still washing floors, scrubbing toilets, and dusting lamp

[62] Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed*, 73-74. Ehrenreich's supervisor tells her "You know, all of this was figured out with a stopwatch."

shades. Someone might take great pride in maintaining spotless linoleum, but for many, this does not mean that the activity of deliberating about how and when to clean represents the activation of a central human potential.

This concern points us to another sense (previously set aside) in which work can be "meaningful," beyond Schwartz's notion of work that incorporates autonomy/practical reason. It might matter whether one finds the *ends* of the productive process meaningful to be able to say that reorganized workplaces can provide sufficient opportunities for the (meaningful) exercise of practical reason. A life consumed with work, for a broad swath of the population, could still be missing something significant with respect this aspect of practical reason.

Even in a workplace in which the detailed division of labour is eradicated—a workplace in which everyone must engage in decision-making and communicate extensively—there would still be cases in which central human powers remain neglected. Moreover, reformed work in the Schwartzian mould could actually exacerbate this problem. There are potential costs to reforming a workplace along the lines that Schwartz prescribes. With so much more coordination, discussion, and competing viewpoints, and much less specialization, productivity may very well suffer. In other words, we may have to work much harder and longer to produce the same amount of widgets or serve the same amount of customers. In cases like the dogfood factory, where it is doubtful that framing goals and adjusting methods are going to represent significant uses of practical reason for many individuals, this means that more of our lives will be spent in a space in which we still cannot bring to bear crucial human

capacities. In many cases, we would be better off reducing the prevalence of such work in our lives rather than attempting to "reform" it. Schwartz argued that what we do at work influences what we can be and do in our free time—but the less we must work, the more we can avoid letting work shape us.

Adam Smith suggests as much when he points out that "the employments of people of some rank and fortune" are such as to provide them with a great deal of leisure, and that this allows them to avoid some of the problems encountered by the "common people," as he puts it. He also suggests that the employments of the fortunate involve more complex intellectual activity than the "common people," but the fact that he feels compelled to also mention the benefits of increased leisure suggests that he is not wholly convinced that the work of the fortunate is sufficient for the development of the requisite mental powers.[63]

To the suggestion that one's time away from work can make up for the poverty of one's work life, Schwartz actually responds with two arguments. The first, which has already been mentioned, is that non-autonomy at work limits autonomy in free time. The second argument is that there would be a problem *even if* it were possible to successfully encourage autonomous activity (practical reason) outside of work while letting it languish at work.

Her complaint is that this arrangement would foster a kind of "schizophrenia."[64] According to Schwartz, living an "autonomous" life is not a matter of exercising

[63] Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 842.
[64] Schwartz, "Meaningful Work," 638.

initiative and intelligence in discrete pockets of one's life. Rather, she says it is a process of "integrating one's personality"; "of coming to see all one's pursuits as subject to one's activity of planning and to view all one's experiences as providing a basis for evaluating and adjusting one's beliefs, methods, and aims."[65] Society must insist that its members live, in her words, "unified lives."[66] This is a rather strenuous requirement, and one that rules out a common way of regarding the place of work in one's life.

For many of us, there are two distinct spheres or spaces in our lives: the sphere of work, in which we lower our heads, hold our noses and simply "get the job done," and the space outside of work in which we can be "truly ourselves." According to G. A. Cohen, Marx regards this phenomenon of the "schizophrenic" partitioning of one's life as intimately connected with the capitalist mode of labour. However, Cohen observes that Marx rejects the temptation to look back wistfully upon traditional or pre-industrial work, and that part of the reason for this rejection is Marx's view that there are some actual gains made in the movement to a capitalist society.[67] In the Marxian story as read by Cohen, capitalist society provides a "freedom of detachment." The absence of such freedom Cohen calls "engulfment." The medieval artisan's "engulfment" is contrasted with the proletarian's "detachment" as follows:

> He identifies with his work and his role, but his mind is subjected to his occupation, whereas the modern proletarian does not care about the job

[65] *Ibid*.
[66] *Ibid*., 639.
[67] Cohen, "The Dialectic of Labour in Marx," 189. In the final, communist stage of history the goods of pre-industrial society that were lost in the transition to capitalism will be recovered and combined in a new synthesis with the goods of capitalist society.

> he performs, or what kind of job it is. The wage-worker's indifference manifests his alienation. But it also betokens a birth of freedom.[68]

This "freedom" of detachment does not signify a freedom from constraint, but actually *depends* on the proletarian feeling constrained by his work. He feels constrained by his work because he no longer "identifies" with it; his independence is constituted by his lack of identification with the sphere of work.[69] This separation of our lives into two spheres, or rather this approach of investing our life in only the non-work sphere, might be the most appropriate reaction to a lot of the necessary market and household work in our societies. In other words, in some cases schizophrenia may be the best response we have.

Schwartz and Marx are, one might say, critics of the work ethic *from within*. In other words, they take issue with the blanket claim that work makes the worker more fully human by pointing to modes of labouring that have the opposite effect. But at the same time, they retain the faith that such work can, even *must*, be transformed so as to claim its rightful place at the centre of the good life. In Schwartz's case, her criticism is more persuasive than her faith**.** Division of labour can dwarf our most central human capabilities, but in many cases abolishing detailed divisions of labour provides only marginal opportunities to cultivate these essential powers—while at the same time potentially extending the amount of time required to get the work done.

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[68] *Ibid*., 189.
[69] *Ibid*., 187.

Nussbaum praises Aristotle for acknowledging that, in her words, "there may be certain kinds and conditions of labor that are both necessary for life and incompatible with the flourishing of the laborers."[70] In the case of these necessary but dehumanizing labours, the best possible solution might be to minimize the amount of time we and our fellow citizens must spend in such harmful drudgery.[71] One straightforward way to accomplish this is by raising productivity through detailed divisions of labour. To twist a Hobbesian phrase, in some cases we might do better to make work nastier, more brutish, but shorter.

[70] Nussbaum, "Shame, Separateness, and Political Unity," 420.
[71] In what looks like a reversal of his earlier faith in necessary work, in the third volume of *Das Kapital* Marx seems to come to this very conclusion. Cohen, "The Dialectic of Labour in Marx," 207-208.

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CONCLUSION

The three sets of critiques elaborated in the preceding chapters give us reason to be skeptical of widespread, optimistic assumptions about the relationship between work and well-being. Market and household work are beset by flaws and limitations that render them unsuitable to be considered mere all-purpose vehicles for pursuit of our various conceptions of the good. We should not be either indifferent to or supportive of the overlapping pressures that give rise to a work-dominated life.

While work provides the goods and services and career opportunities that further many of our life plans, it is also likely to diminish our ability to pursue activities and exercise or develop important capabilities that are crucial to well-being. There are some harms associated with work that can be mitigated through changes in public policy and social norms—and it would be best to do so even if taking such steps reduced productivity. The vulnerability of employees and household production workers to egregious instances of arbitrary interference on behalf of employers or other household members can and must be effectively addressed. However, with respect to opportunities to engage in autotelic activity, the development of capabilities essential to political participation, and the exercise of practical reason, we are sometimes better off leaving the defects of the working world intact and thereby expanding potential access to free time—time in which the capabilities and activities in question can be optimally developed and pursued, if we so choose.

Increasing worker independence and power, in the market and household—by promoting full employment through a public job guarantee and/or separating access to income and necessary goods and services from the performance of work (that is, through public provision)—is not the only way of alleviating the harms of work, but it is at the core of these overlapping concerns. Enhancing labour power ensures individuals have greater abilities to say "no"—to resist arbitrary interference and do so without obsequiousness. Moreover, greater independence and power places workers in a stronger position to demand more time off. In terms of securing time away from work, public provision of the material bases of a decent standard of living has a double effect. First, it means individuals can *afford* to take more time away from market work (or afford market substitutes for their household work). Second, by enhancing labour power, it also makes it more likely workers will be able to successfully negotiate for real choices to reduce working time—to secure options for choosing shorter-hours, more vacation, or more flexible schedules.

The expansion of free time can also optimize our chances of achieving some of the intrinsic goods of work. If I choose to fill some of my free time with work, I am better able to make choices about types of work and work environment—choices that do not have to be mainly driven by concerns about remuneration. I might find work that is less dangerous or that better suits my interests and abilities. Moreover, I will have a greater ability to access one of the chief goods of work: performing tasks that contribute in a meaningful way to another person's welfare while receiving recognition

from that person for meeting his or her needs or wants.[1] This conception of the intrinsic good of work is bound up with its instrumentality, or at least with that aspect of its instrumentality related to the provision of wants and needs (versus the exchange-value or income). "It is not hard," Iris Marion Young writes,

> to show that having a job and making a social contribution may or may not coincide. Does helping to produce a different-tasting toothpaste contribute usefully to the social good? Does spending day after day at an automatic dialing machine and occasionally persuading a consumer to switch long-distance companies expand the general welfare? … Many jobs are arguably socially wasteful, even directly harmful in their effects. At the same time, many unpaid or poorly paid activities contribute centrally to the social good.[2]

Free time, because one need not worry about the income attached to the work, makes it easier to pursue unpaid (or low paid) work that provides for meaningful and direct experience of the beneficial effects of one's work.

And even if the work that is preferred involves serving a critical need, and therefore may not necessarily be part of "free time" in the sense in which I have been using the term, there is still something to be said here for the value of having time free from just *one* of the forms of compulsion that mark necessary paid or unpaid labour. For some individuals, obtaining more time free from paid work alone—from the need to concern myself with the remuneration flowing from work—can represent an improvement. There is a certain perversity, for instance, in being compelled to work in

[1] This is similar to an ideal Daniel Brudney attributes to Marx. Brudney, "Justifying a Conception of the Good Life."
[2] Iris Marion Young, "Autonomy, Welfare Reform, and Meaningful Work," 47-48.

a firm producing frivolous widgets while being forced to ignore what I regard as more urgent obligations to those under my care. And the same can be said for obtaining more time free from household work: for some individuals, having this time free from household tasks may provide more opportunities to engage in paid work that, by comparison, could provide a greater sense of contributing to the social good or some meaningful cause.

While some individuals may use their expanded free time to pursue market or household work, giving people more options to work less generally entails a reduction of societal output—fewer goods and services than we might otherwise collectively produce. The main purpose of this investigation has been to give us more conceptual tools with which to make sense of actual and potential trade-offs between market and household production and time off, and in particular, to articulate the benefits to individual well-being of shrinking the amount of time we are compelled to work. I have been looking at ethical concerns that can be addressed by placing upper limits on work time, but what are the sorts of considerations we should consider when sorting out the lower bounds?

Extending Juliet Schor's productivity dividend thought experiment into the future, output per labour hour in the United States has a reasonable chance of nearly doubling over the next thirty years or so.[3] If this holds, it suggests the possibility of cutting the (market) working day in half over the next three decades while keeping real income roughly constant at current levels. More radically, one might imagine a

[3] Baker, "Stagnation Celebration."

counterfactual United States that, having already secured Schor's four-hour day in 1991, proceeded to transform the next several decades-worth of productivity dividends into, say, a standard workweek of fifteen hours, all while roughly maintaining income at its mid-twentieth century level.

Arguably, current levels of income and wealth in the most prosperous of nations are not disastrous for human well-being. To the extent there are serious deficiencies in the provision of the material foundations of a flourishing life, this is largely a matter of insufficient distribution of existing resources. These societies are not anywhere close to being so (collectively) poor that they cannot consider any further reduction in working hours. The United States in particular already features among the longest working hours in the developed world—a result that is not some unintended consequence but is driven by policy lacunae. While most Western Europeans can count on twenty paid vacation days per year (as a state-guaranteed *minimum*), residents of the United States are entitled as a matter of federal law to precisely zero; to say nothing of the scarcity of affordable childcare options and complete absence of nationally guaranteed paid family leave.[4]

The arguments tracing the ethical limitations of work apply equally to the developing world, but for poorer societies it is more likely that these evaluative considerations favouring reduced workloads may be outweighed—if the costs of such a reduction were to bite into the provision of some more fundamental capabilities, such

[4] Even when one includes paid vacation provided voluntarily by employers, the United States still comes out way behind. Ray, Sanes, and Schmitt. "No-Vacation Nation Revisited."

as those supported by access to basic healthcare and education. And although the choice of accessing the good of leisure has been framed as essential to living well, leisure should nonetheless be considered a secondary consideration for societies on the verge of mass starvation. This does not mean, however, that access to autotelic activity, and thus leisure, are not central to a good life. Rather, it means that there are some societies in which it is not possible, by virtue of cramped economic potential, for the average person to live a fully flourishing life. At the very least, tracing the ethical limitations of work can inform our vision of an ideal path for economic development, as well as the purposes of such development. We need to lay the groundwork for expanding free time as well as economic growth, since one of the chief purposes of development should be to allow more and more individuals to choose to do less and less work.

Beyond a certain level of poverty, at what point does the benefit of adding more material wealth cease to outweigh the cost of foregoing an expansion of leisure? As John Stuart Mill asked, "[h]ow many of the so-called luxuries, conveniences, refinements, and ornaments of life, are *worth* the labor which must be undergone as the condition of producing them?"[5] It is difficult to pick out a precise point at which we started producing (in aggregate) enough goods and services to ensure a decent foundation for human flourishing, but it is arguable that, in the developed nations anyway, we are past the point of "enough." When observing the sheer triviality of so much of the output of our work—from the invention, production, and marketing of

[5] Mill, "The Negro Question," 467. Emphasis in original.

new pharmaceuticals that have no additional benefits compared to generic or older variants, to the massive amount of time and human intelligence invested in a financial industry that delivers questionable real-world value (and a great deal of instability)—it is difficult to argue that the developed economies urgently need to increase their output. We may have shortages of, for instance, care services for the elderly, but this suggests a need to better allocate existing resources rather than overall poverty or scarcity of resources.

Whenever it was that the wealthiest societies reached the point of producing "enough," they are now arguably at the point where future productivity advances can be transformed (even entirely) into more access to free time without causing shortages in the material foundations of a good life.[6] And it should be noted that when we are calculating the loss in potential production from this increase in access to free time, we need to take into account the fact that some of what will fill the newly freed time will still generate goods and services. Some of this will be work that shows up in the GDP figures, when people fill their free time with remunerated work, and some will involve activities that, while not remunerated, still add valuable outputs: including, for instance, leisured pastimes in which one shares with the public, free of charge, the

[6] One needs to add "largely" here, since demographic trends leading to decreases in the proportion of the working-age population mean that more and more resources must be devoted to care for the elderly. Demographic-induced increases in the costs of social services may cut into the degree to which future productivity dividends can be transformed into leisure. However, as Dean Baker points out, given reasonable productivity projections, even with the demographic challenge included, rising productivity will still allow us to reduce working time while keeping output constant. Baker, "Stagnation Celebration."

results of study or artistic endeavour engaged in for its own sake and outside the context of a paid working environment (the sort of thing that has become more common with the advancement of information technology and social networks).

One might argue that Schor-style thought experiments about national productivity are incomplete, inasmuch as they seem to ignore the possibility that wealthier nations have responsibilities to devote a substantial portion of their resources to support the development of less wealthy nations, and that until income and wealth in the latter societies rise to at least some minimum level of decency, there should be no question of radically reducing the amount of output in wealthier nations. Even if one holds a maximalist position on the degree to which resources ought to be shared across national boundaries, the question of when it is permissible to allow individuals to reduce the amount of work in their lives does not disappear. The horizon of possibility for substantial reductions may simply be shifted farther into the future. Moreover, as noted, part of improving the lot of the less well off at a global level requires progressively improving access to free time, particularly in nations that are transitioning into industrial work patterns that feature long working days.

In varying ways, addressing income inequality within societies is also a critical part of ensuring that everyone has more options to work less. The more the gains from productivity growth flow to the top echelons of the income distribution, the less the average worker can make the choice to forego an income increase for more time off. Articulating the benefits of free time and the limitations of work can help flesh out our discussions of distributive justice—of the harm done, for instance, when the gains from

increased growth flow almost entirely to the upper echelons. When the median worker does not benefit from productivity increases, she is not just missing out on more goods and services, but also on the opportunity to decrease her working load, which, as argued, is crucial to well-being.

Robert Frank points to another manner in which income inequality worsens the prevalence of overwork: by driving what he calls "positional arms races."[7] "Positional goods," such as house size, derive part of their value through relative comparison. Frank refers to experiments in which respondents are asked to choose between two hypothetical houses: the house in the first scenario is smaller in an absolute sense than the house in the second scenario, with the difference being that in the first scenario, the (absolutely smaller) house is *bigger relative to the average house in that scenario*, while in the second scenario, the (absolutely bigger) house is *smaller than average*. Respondents overwhelmingly choose the first scenario: the house that is bigger relative to the other houses in that hypothetical society (but absolutely smaller). With "nonpositional" goods, like vacation time, this is not the case; it is the absolute level that matters to respondents.

Frank notes that there is a positive correlation between inequality and long working hours, and postulates that people in unequal societies are working longer hours in order to buy, for instance, a bigger house, anticipating an increase in relative standing. But when everyone is engaged in the same "keeping up," relative standing does not increase. As a result, one is no better off from a positional standpoint. All of

[7] Frank, *Falling Behind*.

this increased consumption, which demands longer and longer working hours, yields no actual increase in satisfaction. The point here is that individuals can experience greater satisfaction and well-being with a smaller amount of consumption and a shorter workweek. This argument provides another reason to believe that a great deal of contemporary economic production is beyond the point of providing "enough." And the more unequal a society, the more intense the self-defeating compulsion to "keep up," positionally speaking. Reducing inequality (Frank advocates a progressive consumption tax) is thereby a means of reducing the encouragement of overwork.

Addressing income inequality, however, is not sufficient for securing better access to time off. As previously discussed, even when workers are able to share in productivity gains, our economies "underproduce" leisure. Juliet Schor observes:

> … employers make it difficult to choose free time, rather than long hours and higher incomes. To use the economist's jargon, the labor market offerings are incomplete with respect to trade-offs of time and money. Employers can exact severe penalties when individuals want to work part-time or forego raises in favor of more vacations or days off. In some jobs the options are just not available; in others the sacrifices in terms of career mobility and benefits are disproportionate to any productivity costs to the employer. This is not a minor point. The standard model assumes that employees are free to vary their hours, and that whatever combination of hours and income results represents the preferences of employees. But if employees lack the opportunity to vary their working hours, or to use improvements in productivity to reduce their worktime, then we can in no way assume that the trajectory of consumption reflects people's preferences.[8]

[8] Schor, "The New Politics of Consumption."

Yet, while public policy can address these barriers to choice and enable a better match between individual preferences and consumption/leisure (whether by giving workers more bargaining power or simply implementing national regulatory solutions), the grip of the working world and its associated ideologies fundamentally shapes those preferences. I have argued that a radical expansion of free time is possible among the wealthy nations—that we can afford to substantially expand the sphere of leisure or civic activity accessible to all. Whether, or to what extent, individuals will make the choices to shrink the role of work in their lives is another matter.

Hannah Arendt framed the challenge well when, in anticipation that automation would "empty the factories and liberate mankind from … the burden of laboring," she wrote:

> It is a society of laborers which is about to be liberated from the fetters of labor, and this society does no longer know of those other higher and more meaningful activities for the sake of which this freedom would deserve to be won. … What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is, without the only activity left to them.[9]

Our conceptions of what we can do and be are themselves shaped by the domination of work in our daily schedules and its valorization in our cultural environment. The outsized presence of work in our educational systems, public spaces, and social imaginations can make it difficult to so much as contemplate any alternative ways of living in the world. We see this when those who have worked their entire lives

[9] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 4-5.

meet the prospect of retirement with a mix of confusion and horror, or, in the difficulty many have in envisioning what they might do, day in, day out, should they suddenly gain a windfall of free time. Whether time beyond the world of work is thrust upon us by technological unemployment (the replacement of most human labour by artificial intelligence–guided machines) or won by public policy, a post-work society will need to reimagine what it means to be successful, reconsider the bases of social status, and broaden its conceptions of the life paths open to human beings. Securing a world in which free time predominates is an achievable project of public policy. Ensuring that those who inhabit that world make the broadest possible use of its opportunities requires a parallel project of cultural transformation.

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