Abstract

This chapter identifies three domains of philosophical questions about work. First, an ontological issue: What is work? This question is both historical and conceptual, as questions in social ontology usually are. Second, an ethical issue: How does work fit into the good life? The hard problem here is to substitute, in new economic conditions, for the four main things a good job currently does: first, produce the goods and services we need, while also providing people with income, sociability, and significance. These are issues on which many popular writers on the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" and on globalization have, of course, written for some time. But what's lacking, the chapter claims, is serious organized reflection on the normative issues raised by these challenges. And that leads to the third cluster of concerns: How should law and other sources of normative authority be configured to allow work to contribute to the flourishing of workers, and how should the opportunities and rewards of work be shared?

Keywords

flourishing, labor, job, meaning, sociability, social ontology, income, work

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The Philosophy of Work

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My aims in this chapter are modest: I want to suggest that there is a field that has not received sufficient attention in recent philosophical writing. I will call that field "the philosophy of work." And there are, I think, at least three main philosophical clusters of issues that deserve more study. The first cluster is a set of questions in social ontology. What is work? A job? A profession? A vocation? I think the answer to these questions requires the sort of genealogical investigation that is often required in social ontology. How, for example, did the social world and our concepts develop in a dialectical relation with one another to produce the contemporary idea of the job?

A second cluster of problems is ethical. How does work or a job fit into the good life? At the heart of the issues raised by this question, I am going to argue, is a hard problem. This problem is, in essence, that work has come to matter in a series of interdependent dimensions of social and individual life, and that it is not evident how, as technology and society develop moving forward, we can easily construct new forms of social life that will satisfy human beings in all those dimensions in the way that the best jobs did and do. The rise of the robot and of AI both eliminate and reshape jobs, as we know, in ways that bring costs as well as benefits for human flourishing. So does the globalization of production and distribution of goods and services. These are issues on which many popular writers on the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" and on globalization

have, of course, written for some time.[1] But what's lacking, I claim, is serious organized reflection on the normative issues raised by these challenges. We need solutions; but we also need to decide whose responsibility it is to find and to shape them.

And that leads to the third cluster of concerns, which is of especial importance for the readers of this book: How should law and other sources of normative authority be configured to allow work to contribute to the flourishing of workers, and how should the opportunities and rewards of work be shared?[2]

1.

Most healthy adults today spend five days of the week for much of their lives doing what we call "a job." They may be in factories or offices, or in cars or buses, trains or planes; working in or from their own home or in someone else's, or in a hotel, restaurant, bar, factory, warehouse, hospital, school, college, or military base. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics declares: "All workers are classified into one of 867 detailed occupations according to their occupational definition." I find myself, like some of you, at "25-1126 Philosophy and Religion Teachers, Postsecondary."

Because people typically spend eight hours or more of each weekday at work and another eight or so hours sleeping, it is where they spend about a third of their waking hours.

[1] A typical survey can be found in (Schwab, 2016), where the Executive Director of the World Economic Forum draws the problems to the attention of global business and political leaders.

[2] I'm grateful to a reader for this journal whose comments suggested to me I should lay out a map of the territory here at the start.

Work is also, as a result, the site of a great number of our relationships. And if we're lucky, our job is not just a source of a decent income; we will think what we do worth doing. We can also hope to be esteemed for achievements at work. So, we can take pride in what we do, and it may be a source, therefore, of self-esteem. These are possibilities for work of every kind: for the supermarket bagger with Down's Syndrome, whose cheerfulness is appreciated—and which she knows is appreciated—by many of the shoppers she sees regularly as well as for the litigator whose skills are recognized in awards from her peers; for the elementary-school teacher who watches her protégés grow into successful young men and women as well as for the Nobel laureate in economics or medicine.

Work can also be a source of identity. It may give you a profession, conferring on you the status of an auto mechanic, a beautician, a journalist, a nurse, a lawyer, or a teacher; often, along with wealth, education, and connections, your job helps fix your social class.

Having started working in our late teens or early twenties, we're likely to continue working for another half-century or more. And, in retirement, when we're no longer doing paid work—or, at any rate, doing much less of it—we may suffer the loss of the sense of purpose that an occupation once gave us and feel nostalgia for the daily rhythms of our job.

Given this centrality of work in our lives, I think it odd how little space it takes up in contemporary ethics and liberal political philosophy. This silence about work echoes our long silence about the family, which feminist philosophy has remedied. It will be important to keep track of gender and family in thinking about work as well.

We do, of course, regularly discuss some of the *proceeds* of work: income and wealth and, more recently, esteem or respect. We think about the allocation of these in political philosophy when we discuss distributive justice and equality. We recognize in ethics and moral philosophy generally that the character of our relationships matters. And this thought has come to be central to more recent thinking about political equality, too. But the focus of our interest is more likely to be on relations with our fellow citizens generally—on what it means to treat each other as equals, for example—than on how we interact with others in the workplace in particular.

Indeed, at least in the United States, we take it for granted that at work we are *not* equals. Most work is organized hierarchically: there are managers, bosses, deans, and CEOs. We have spent a great deal of time in political philosophy reflecting on how the state and its agents can derive the authority to command the citizen. Only recently, I think it is fair to say, have philosophers begun to take with full seriousness questions about democracy in the workplace.

There are exceptions to the relative silence about work as a philosophical problem. Elizabeth Anderson's *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)* (Anderson, 2017) is an eminent, exemplary, and excellent recent example here. Axel Honneth (1996) has connected work with important issues of recognition in *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* and some of his writings since. He is following in the footsteps of Marx and the Marxists, who thought a great deal about work, in ways shaped by their debt to Hegel.

In the 1950s, Hannah Arendt, writing in *The Human Condition*, distinguished *labor*—making or acquiring food and shelter, and doing all the other natural things

necessary to sustain our biological life—from *work*, which is the artificial shaping of the world to make products. (She had a final category, *action*, which involved what we do with one another.) And her book, which first appeared in 1958, already addresses the significance of automation. We are, she wrote, "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" (Arendt, 1998, p. 4).

The general consensus since then, however, has essentially been that Arendt need not have worried. Our conception of what is valuable in human life has been so profoundly formed by the place of work for people today that many just assume we will find new ways of making work, even if the biological needs that Arendt's labor was meant to meet can all be met by intelligent machines.

2.

The jobs created by the Industrial Revolution did at least four important things. First, of course, they produced goods in larger quantities with increasing efficiency. A second thing they did was to provide employees and shareholders with income. They built on the genius of capitalism for taking one person's savings and combining them with the industry and ideas of others to produce an income for them all.

A third important consequence was the creation of new forms of community. Trade unions come with union picnics, and factories may have sports teams and Christmas parties (McIntosh, 2011). At work itself, too, at least in the best of jobs, one's product is

the result of rewarding social processes, the combined effect of the coordinated interactions of human beings collaborating, working together.

The final, fourth, contribution was that, if you were lucky, your work was a source of significance. The Working Men's Associations of nineteenth-century Britain were reflections of a growing pride in manual labor. People came to appreciate that the goods they helped make were important to their country and its people and were often valued by others at home and around the world. Writing about nineteenth-century trade unions, E. P. Thompson says (in his classic book on *The Making of the English Working Class*), "Social and moral criteria—subsistence, self-respect, pride in certain standards of workmanship, customary rewards for different grades of skill— … are as prominent in early trade union disputes as strictly 'economic' arguments" (Thompson, 1966, p. 236).

William Blake may have seen in the factories of the Industrial Revolution only "dark, Satanic mills": their denizens increasingly saw the work they did as a source of pride, identity, and meaning. And the associations, unions, and clubs they formed—in which people who worked together, played together—came to perform a role not just in their political lives but in their social lives as well.

By the time the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was formulated, just after the end of the Second World War, Article 23 guaranteed "the right to work, to free employment, to just and favorable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment." But Article 24 immediately added that, "Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours and periodic holidays with pay."

The working class was following here a path set earlier by the middle classes. Through the course of the nineteenth century romanticism encouraged an ideal of self-development, which we see in Matthew Arnold's condemnation of Philistinism in *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), and in John Stuart Mill's celebration, in chapter 3 of *On Liberty* (1859), of "individuality as one of the elements of well-being." Playing and listening to music, reading literature, writing and reciting poetry, painting, sculpting, visiting art museums, learning history and social science, even following the sciences of their day: all came to be part of what was expected of an educated middle-class man or woman. This is what Mill meant when he talked about individual development.

The Germans called this form of cultivation "Bildung," and European societies had a growing class they later called the Bildungsbürgertum, the educated bourgeoisie.[3] One of the central questions that received the attention of German philosophers, beginning in the early nineteenth century, was what they called die Soziale Frage, *the* social question: at its heart was the welfare of the new working class, created by industrialization, urbanization, and an expanding population. Eventually Bildung came to be part of the story; for Bildung was now a component of a normal human life. It was not just for a leisured aristocracy or for the free time of a middle class.

And so, starting at the end of the nineteenth century, in many places in Europe and North America, new institutions were created to extend the benefits of Bildung to workers. Beginning in the 1880s, the settlement house movement in Britain and the United States moved middle-class "settlers" in alongside working-class families, in part

[3] The verb *bilden* can mean simply shaping or making; like the French word *formation*, Bildung connects the idea of shaping a person with the idea of a preparation for her life.

so that the former could share their "culture" with the latter. In 1899, Ruskin College was founded in Oxford to offer a tertiary education to workingmen who did not have access to Oxford University. This democratization of learning became one of the founding aims of the British Broadcasting Corporation in 1922, under the leadership of John Reith. Less than half a century later, Lord Reith's ideals were reflected in the founding of the American Corporation for Public Broadcasting, whose stated purpose "is to provide programs and services that inform, educate, enlighten, and enrich the public and help inform civil discourse essential to American society."[4]

A modern democracy gave the responsibility of choosing who would govern to the people, but the people needed an education if they were to perform this great responsibility well. The vast expansion of higher education after the Second World War, in the United States (and elsewhere), accelerated here by the G. I. Bill, was guided, in part, by the same thought. It was also true, however, that the more lucrative opportunities in the modern workplace were going to those with a college education. What the Bill opened up was the possibility of a huge increase in the numbers of people receiving a liberal education: an education fit for free men and, coming close behind them, women. Other societies have followed. And there were three different purposes woven together in the idea of modern education: as a source of enrichment for people in their private lives; as a preparation for civic responsibility; and, last, though, no doubt, not least, as a preparation for the world of work.

[4] https://www.cpb.org/aboutcpb/goals/goalsandobjectives.

3.

One of the basic social and economic challenges of our time, then, is to find ways of involving people in meaningful activity while, at the same time, distributing the social product fairly, giving everyone a satisfactory income, and producing the goods and services we need. With or without work, we need new ways of providing the four important things that I said good jobs did in industrial society. This is an intellectual and imaginative challenge as much as an institutional one. I am going to call it (with apologies to my friends in the philosophy of mind) the "hard problem." That we can only solve it properly today if we do so in ways that are ecologically sustainable only adds to its difficulty.

This hard problem, then, is to find ways to produce the goods and services we need, while providing people with income, sociability, and significance. And a major issue is whether we do this by changing the ways we construct and provide jobs—the route of reimagining work—or by meeting these needs for many or most people without their having jobs, as a self-styled "post-work" movement is suggesting. And the thought there is not just that work might disappear for many but that the concept of work is an obstacle to progress.

Technological change means that fewer and fewer people are needed to produce the same quantity of goods and services. The result is that there are many people whose only income comes from the state and private philanthropy or from jobs that lack the satisfactions—in income, meaning, and sociability—that once secured the status of the industrial working class. If they have left the labor pool altogether and are no longer seeking employment, it is not just because there are literally no jobs: rather, they have

given up on finding a job for which they are qualified and that can be a source of self-respect, or, if not, of an income large enough to make up for the fact that the work itself is not a source of self-respect.

Leaving the labor pool means, of course, that they no longer participate in the community of the workplace. But many of the new jobs don't have much scope for sociability either. With people now able to telecommute, even those who *do* have employment may not gain the experience of community from their work. If you work as an Uber or Lyft driver, or in many other occupations in the "gig economy," your assignments are organized without ever bringing you together with others who are doing the same job for the same company.

Worse, many modern people are doing what the anthropologist David Graeber has dubbed a "bullshit job," defined as "one so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence" (Graeber, 2018a, p. 3). He cites the result of a British YouGov poll that asked, "Does your job 'make a meaningful contribution to the world?'"

> Astonishingly, more than a third—37 percent—said they believed that it did not (whereas 50 percent said it did, and 13 percent were uncertain). (Graeber, 2018a, p. xxiv)[5]

[5] Here are the five major categories of such occupations: flunkies, whose job it is to make other people look good; goons, like telemarketers, whose job is only necessary because there are other people like them; duct tapers, who clean up the results of flaws of institutional design, exemplified, as Graeber told the *Daily Beast*, by the "poor guy at my university whose entire

Graeber claims that people often conflate “bullshit jobs” with something else … what he calls “shit jobs.”

> … but [he says] they’re not the same thing. Bad jobs are bad because they’re hard or they have terrible conditions or the pay sucks, but often these jobs are very useful. (Graeber, 2018b)

Both kinds of jobs raise ethical problems, of course. Even if you recognize your job is useful, there’s no guarantee that it will contribute to your satisfaction if the pay or working conditions are awful. Increasingly, then, one source of meaning in human lives—the job, the career, and its sociability and its achievements—is going away. And, though this problem has developed first in the industrialized democracies, it will surely eventually spread everywhere.

It is certainly good that machines can be turned to doing and making useful things that it is no fun for people to make or to do. Where possible, what Graeber calls “shit jobs” need to be eliminated (perhaps by improving pay and conditions or by making them easier with robots or AI). It may also be good when the efficiency of production grows, in the sense that it takes fewer and fewer people to make things; though we should give a

> job seemed to be apologizing for why the carpenter could not come and fix the bookshelves in my office”; box-tickers, who do what you’d expect; and, last but by no means least, taskmasters, who “typically provide unnecessary supervision” (Graeber, 2018c).

moment's thought to the possibility that there are automatable tasks that human beings might enjoy doing and receiving the results of.

But our automated economy still makes the things that were at the core of production in the old economy; indeed, we are making more and better things. That, though, can leave income, sociability, and significance unattended to. You could solve the problem of the disappearance of the wage by establishing a basic income guaranteed to all citizens. But that, too, wouldn't help you with the loss of community and the loss of meaning. Conversely, in a society like ours where no one can provide for their basic needs without money or expensive land, a life of sociability and meaning without access to an income is no longer possible. That is why the problem is hard.

4.

There are three recognizably philosophical tasks here, as I said at the start. The first is to explore the concepts of work and job. That project, though in a sense a matter of conceptual analysis, is not, of course, a priori. For work develops along with technologies and institutions, so the inquiry is in part historical because work and the concept of work develop together. Ian Hacking remarks, in the second chapter of *Historical Ontology*, that "Foucault's books are mostly about practices and how they affect and are affected by the talk in which we embed them. The upshot is less a fascination with words than with people and institutions, with what we do for people and to people" (Hacking, 2002, p. 47). I remember, as an undergraduate, hearing Hacking introduce Foucault's methods at the Moral Science's Club at Cambridge. It took me a while to know what to do with those ideas. But I find this basic thought is now an essential philosophical tool.

Once we have understood what work is, that question in social ontology, there is, next, that ethical inquiry I sketched in my introduction: how does work fit into making a good life, advance eudaimonia, help humans flourish? Here, too, the inquiry strikes me as necessarily historical; but it also requires us to draw on our own social experience and on reports—in history, sociology, anthropology, and imaginative literature—of the experiences of others. I don't mean that the conceptual inquiry is sharply bounded from the ethical inquiry: our understanding of the meaning and the value of work develops historically with the economy, with the institutions and technologies we engage in our work. And the conceptual inquiry is already a normative inquiry, as we have seen, because you cannot understand what a job is without understanding the idea of a good job.

Which brings us to that third set of questions in political and social philosophy: How should work be constrained or constructed by law and other social norms, and how should opportunities and rewards for work be distributed? We have models for thinking about these issues, of course. One is the Rawlsian program, in which we ask how we would respond to these questions if we didn't know what opportunities we ourselves would have. But the question only arises for Rawls because society and the state are immense and valuable cooperative enterprises whose benefits and burdens must be fairly shared. The basic structure of society—the family, the law, the economy, "the main political and social institutions and the way they fit together as one scheme of cooperation," as he put it once—must be (as he also put it) "a fair system of social cooperation over time from one generation to the next" (Rawls, 2001, pp. 4, 5). Now Rawls's program is offered as a contribution to ideal theory. It is worked out for an

"ordered society," whose members and whose institutions are known by all to meet two conditions: they have a shared commitment to an ideal of justice and their institutions more or less realize it.

Much can be learned by asking the questions Rawls's way.[6] But there is also a great deal to be learned from an approach I associate with that most philosophical of economists, Amartya Sen. We don't begin with a picture of a just society, not because that picture idealizes too much, but because it misunderstands the epistemology of our moral knowledge about politics. The general point, which Sen has rightly made central to his thinking, is that you can judge social option A better than social option B without starting with a view of the best society and asking whether having A or having B brings you closer to it … just as you can tell that a Rembrandt is better than a Ruysdael without any idea of what the best painting would look like. I think this point, though simple, is a deep and important one. You don't need to know what the heavens are like to know which way is up.

This insight fits with another. Our collective moral learning doesn't require the development of a picture of an ideal society. It starts most often with the rejection of some current actual practice or structure, which we come to see as wrong. You learn to be in favor of equality by noticing what is wrong with the unequal treatment of blacks, or women, or working-class or lower-caste or LGBTQ people. You learn to be in favor of freedom by seeing what is wrong in the life of serfs or the enslaved or of women in purdah (Patterson, 1992).

[6] There is a longer discussion of Rawlsian ideal theory in chapter 3 of (Appiah, 2017).

So, rather than invoking ideal societies, I'd like to ask whether we can move our actual norms, our laws and other institutions, toward the provision for everyone of the resources for a more dignified human life. This is a question that arises from within a society that is up and running. And the critique of current institutions and practices develops because we discover through what Mill called "experiments of living" that features of our current life damage or enhance the possibilities for human flourishing. We start, for example, with gender norms as they are and discover that they are disabling for trans people, and so need revision. No need to think abstractly about the biological significance of sexual difference and imagine without presuppositions—painting, as it were, on an empty canvas—what would be the best way of developing a set of ideas and practices around gender.

Because what makes a life of dignity can depend on local cultural understandings, the idea of a dignified life is not external to social arrangements. It is not, that is, something we bring to our question—how to remake the world to enable a dignified life for everyone—from the outside. We can only ask these questions about equality and dignity from within a society and its social understandings. Even when we ask them about another society—as we may—we do so by bringing our understandings of equality and dignity and seeing whether and, if so, how they are expressed elsewhere. And both what is dignified and how to relate as equals are matters of ongoing ethical evolution. In that historical development, there is a kind of dialectical relationship between institutional and technological change and normative understandings, of the sort that is evident in the changing conceptions of what it is for work to be rewarding and how it fits into the project of making a life.

5.

The Luddites were convinced that the mechanization of existing forms of labor would destroy jobs. And so it did, of course. But it also created them. The economist Riccardo Zago has taught me about the economic mechanism here in a variety of cases. Take, first, the mechanization of agriculture, which has certainly reduced the number of agricultural workers. It also lowered food prices and so increased demand, however, creating new jobs in the transportation, distribution, and preparation of foods. As Zago points out, "it is not a coincidence that the Meatpacking districts of New York" and other cities "hugely developed in the same periods in which mechanization occurred" (Zago, 2019). Similarly, the more recent spread of ATMs displaced bank tellers, but increased the profits of banks, allowing them to open more branches, where, as you may have noticed, they hired more workers to do managerial tasks and customer care, jobs where people still have a comparative advantage over machines (Zago, 2019, citing Bessen, 2016).

One current problem in the United States, then, is not so much a consequence of a net loss of jobs as of the human costs associated with the transition from one regime of jobs to another. The sorts of adjustments that occurred in the mechanization of agriculture and the spread of the ATM take time. The literature in labor economics suggests the recent round of job displacements—as a result of automation and of the transfer of jobs to lower-cost labor markets elsewhere—has been accompanied by very slow improvements in employment (Zago, 2019, citing Autor et al., 2013 and Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2017). And, by an improvement, I mean the replacement of lost jobs with ones that are better.

New jobs in an automating economy are usually going to require new skills. Finding or training workers with these skills can take time. A displaced worker's initial value in

the new labor market may be lower than her value in the old one; it may take her time or money to acquire the necessary human capital. One source of the growth of high-school education in the early twentieth century in the United States was the government's recognition that the children of the workers displaced from pre-mechanical agriculture needed preparation for new forms of employment (Zago, 2019, citing Goldin & Katz, 2018). And, finally, the new jobs may be in new places, and someone has to bear these costs of internal migration.

These traditional difficulties seem to be accentuated in the current economy by four things. First, progress in information technology has contributed to increasing polarization in the labor market: IT displaces many middle-class jobs, like those in the car industry, that require moderate levels of training and skill, and the new jobs are either high-skill high-wage or low-skill low-wage jobs, contributing to the hollowing out of the middle class that is so frequent a topic of discussion.

Second, in the United States, the share of GDP going to workers has been steadily declining. Third, the increasing concentration of "superstar" firms in certain sectors means that they can erect barriers to entry that reduce competition, in ways that limit the bargaining power of both workers and customers (Zago, 2019, citing Autor et al., 2017). And, fourth, one factor in the creation of the modern precariat is the fact that people within the United States are less likely than you might have expected to go to where the jobs are: and one cause here is the increasing disparity between the costs of living in rural areas and small towns, on the one hand, and the most productive metropolises, on the other … just as another is the polarization of values between the small town and the cosmopolitan city.

The policies that have been considered to meet these difficulties aim, in effect, to strengthen the position of workers, in one of four ways. First, by increasing their skills, through education and training. Second, by assisting them in identifying new opportunities. Third, through a commitment by the government to be an employer of last resort, guaranteeing people a meaningful job consistent with their developed capacities. And fourth, by guaranteeing a basic income, which allows people to refuse jobs that are not sufficiently rewarding in income, esteem, sociability, or significance.

The first three of these possibilities treat the problem as a matter of reforming the nature of work. But the last entertains the possibility of sharing the social product in ways that move beyond the idea of work as the temporal and eudemonic center of our lives. This, then, is the post-work option; and one possible such option is to guarantee everyone a basic income.

6.

The sociologist David Frayne has taught me about many problems with and at work in the North Atlantic world explored in the sociological literature. Let me add just a few to those I have already mentioned: the current labor market leaves many people without incomes adequate for a decent life; life without work is stigmatized, "overshadowing the value of noninstrumental activities like care, leisure, play, or learning for its own sake"; too many important social contributions are not recognized at all, "particularly care work and domestic labor, which are unrecognized, unremunerated and unequally distributed" (Frayne, 2019). If work is serving us so many of us so poorly, it is a natural thought that we might take the great wealth produced by our automated society and use something

other than the labor market to share it. That's one reason we have seen increasing support for the proposals for a universal basic income that I mentioned just now.

It's worth pointing out one key feature of a world in which the distribution of the social product is not done only by the labor market. Wages and the other benefits of work are differential today in large measure because they channel people into tasks whose products (whether goods or services) meet a demand that is measured by a price. As any economist will tell you, the result is that wages, like prices, integrate and reflect a great deal of information both about what people want to have and about what they want to do. A world in which everyone had an equal reliable basic income would be a world in which no one would have to work to meet their basic needs. Like current work, such employment as there was in such a world would have to be incentivized: the incentives would include, as they do for decent jobs today, the sociability and significance of the work world as well as financial rewards. We could reward the socially necessary tasks that cannot be automated and that people do not find intrinsically rewarding with large hourly wages and, especially if we combined them with shorter hours, a significant part of the population could increase their incomes with a few hours of this work, while bearing a smaller share of the costs in unpleasantness, which, in today's economy, are concentrated in the working lives of a few. But many people would be making additional income in other ways—as artists, say, but also by selling things such as wool and vegetables like Marx's part-time farmers. A universal basic income would reshape the economy, but by definition it wouldn't produce a world without money. And so it would continue to produce the unequal wealth and income that are bound to be a feature of any market economy. What the results of all this would be is hard, I think, to imagine: and

since the universal basic income would have to be funded somehow, the actual effects would depend very much on things like the progressivity of the income tax system, and whether or not there were taxes on capital and on inheritances, and so on. So, normative questions about income inequality would remain, even if one of the challenges of the present world—the fact that too many people do not have enough for a dignified human life—were solved.

7.

There may be normative reasons, as the philosopher Denise Celentano has taught me, for wondering whether people might not have a duty to work if they can.[7] This is not just a matter of adhering to the secularized version of the Protestant Ethic that pervades many modern societies. The most natural understanding of the feature of "work" that is relevant here is that—at least if the work is not a bullshit job—it entails spending time doing something that makes a social contribution. Once we think, as Rawls taught us to do, of the basic structure as a scheme of cooperation, whose obligations and rewards need to be fairly distributed, then someone who is not making a contribution to the scheme is no more entitled to its privileges than someone in a society elsewhere. It does not follow, of course, that we owe her nothing; any more than the fact that someone lives in another country means we can ignore her in our moral thinking. But there seems to be a basis here for the thought that it is only through work that we are connected to others in society in the ways that raise the question of distributiveness fairness at all.

[7] My discussion here is especially dependent on the work of Denise Celentano.

There are immediate reasons for resisting this argument for a duty to engage in paid work, though. For one thing, the basic structure includes more than the economy. The family is a site where many of the things we do, especially in the domain of child-rearing, have not, at least in the past, counted as work. And so is our political life as participants in public reasoning, as voters, and through our respect for the laws. Here, too, we contribute in ways for which we have not historically been rewarded through income; though in politics, as in the family, we can earn esteem for our contributions. It is actually quite hard to imagine a modern person whose life is totally without contributions in one or other of these domains away from work. But even if someone succeeded in escaping from contributing, there would be other reasons for wondering whether a duty to work—imposed as a condition of any social provision—would be consistent with other things that matter.

It seems evident, for example, that all of us have obligations to others—most obviously, negative duties to avoid unnecessary harm—that do not depend on the fact of our being connected in a scheme of cooperation. Furthermore, at least some ways of making social provision dependent on contributions may violate ethical notions of autonomy. Beatte Rössler writes:

> Subjects have to work, whether they want to or not. With regard to the very question of why people work their autonomy does not seem to play a role. (Rössler, 2012, p. 77)

She's asking us to consider whether imposing work as a condition of providing someone with the means for a dignified existence might violate their autonomy. But, as Joseph Raz has argued, autonomy needs only "an adequate range of options" and to "be independent from coercion and manipulation by others" (Raz, 1988, pp. 389–90). Why should having to do some kind of work or other (picked, let us suppose, from a wide range of meaningful occupations for which you are prepared) mean you don't have adequate options and freedom from manipulation? To say that someone who is "forced" in this way to work is "coerced" or "exploited" is to beg the question. For to be coerced is to be forced in morally impermissible ways to do something, and to be exploited is to have someone wrongfully take advantage of your vulnerability. A person who has the option of many decent jobs, even if she'd rather do nothing, is not vulnerable to any particular employer, nor, given a range of reasonable choices, is it evidently wrong to expect her to accept one of them. To put it simply, it's not obvious that to have an adequate range of choices you must have the option of relying on the labor of others for your basic needs. My point, here, is not to decide who is right, but to insist that there is scope for philosophical argument about this issue.

There are reasons, too, for wondering about the social and psychological challenges of a world in which many fewer people are gaining their incomes from work. The sociological literature on employment raises many doubts about the possibility of a satisfying life without it. But, on the other hand, evidence drawn from the experience of unemployment—or of retirement—in our current social system seems a bad place to start. As Daniel Sage (2018, p. 207) has argued recently, "unemployed people live in societies where paid work yields status, identity, respect and human worth." "The

damage of unemployment," he argues, "is thus not the absence of paid work but the failure to conform to a powerful social norm." In a culture, where, as the political scientist James Chamberlain argues, hard work is seen as "an expression of virtue and good character, … symbolizes independence and is the main way to fulfill civic duty and make a social contribution," it is not surprising if worklessness produces depression or anxiety (Chamberlain, 2018, p. vi).

Paul Gomberg has developed an account of what he calls "contributive justice," which is based on the thought that the proper interpretation of egalitarianism requires us to think about equality not in what we get from but in what we give to social arrangements. His basic argument is simple:

> Income and wealth are distributed either unequally or equally. If unequally, then those with less are unjustly subject to social contempt. But equal distribution is impossible because it is inconsistent with bargaining to advance our own good. Hence justice in distribution of income and wealth is impossible. (Gomberg, 2016, p. 31)

Elsewhere he writes that "philosophers have thought that justice is about what people get; I think it is about what people are able to do, particularly how they are able to develop their abilities, give back to society, and be respected for their contributions." So, we should "share labor, including the boring work most of us like to avoid if everyone is to have an opportunity to develop all of their abilities" (Gomberg, 2007, p. vi). But I confess it is simply not clear to me why reasonable financial inequalities entail contempt

for the worse-off. Indeed, I have argued to the contrary in *The Lies That Bind* (Appiah, 2018, p. 135 *et seq*.). Once more, though, my aim is to identify a philosophical question, not to settle it.

8.

In a well-known essay on "Time, Work Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," E. P. Thompson explored the way that industrialization created new patterns in the use of time, inculcating in the working classes the idea (which Weber had seen at the Protestant root of modern capitalism) that "time is money."[8] And he suggested, toward the end, that if what he called "the purposive notation of time-use" became "less compulsive, then men might have to re-learn some of the arts of living lost in the Industrial Revolution: how to fill the interstices of their days with enriched, more leisurely, personal and social relations; how to break down once more the barriers between work and life" (Thompson, 1967, p. 95).

If we are to make these changes, it seems evident that we will need an education system that readies all of us for a life that is not structured by the necessity of labor. Our

[8] Max Weber quotes a passage from Benjamin Franklin's "Advice to a Young Tradesman, Written by an Old One," early in *The Protestant Ethic*: "Remember that TIME is Money. He that can earn Ten Shillings a Day by his Labour, and goes abroad, or sits idle one half of that Day, tho' he spends but Sixpence during his Diversion or Idleness, ought not to reckon That the only Expence; he has really spent or rather thrown away Five Shillings beside" (Weber, 2001, p. 14).

current models of a liberal college education, as I mentioned earlier, give thought to preparation not just for work or even for citizenship but for the whole of life. But that form of education is focused on the part of the population that had the skills and the will to engage in the sort of learning that our colleges and universities currently offer. And, of course, since they assume that we will, in fact, be workers, they do not focus on preparing us for a life in which, for at least much of the time, we are engaged in tasks we perform for no instrumental rewards.

All these issues will arise even if a post-work society is just a less-work society, in which we do paid work for many fewer hours; *or* if we settle on providing a universal basic income and many people engage in no paid work at all; *or* if we share rewarding labor or the unpleasant socially necessary tasks that cannot yet be automated or both. Work will need to be refigured if we take seriously the idea of lives in which income is no longer dependent on a job. At the heart of these reflections is the recognition that, just as the Industrial Revolution produced new conceptions of value (like the equation of time with money), so in our modern economy, changing institutions will have to be accompanied by conceptual and institutional innovations that it will take imagination to shape and to share.[9]

Bibliography

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