Just Work?
Redistribution, Recognition, and the Future of Employment

An Essay Presented

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Nicolas Yan
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If… the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves.

—Aristotle, *Politics*

Aristotle's dream is our reality. Our machines, with breath of fire, with limbs of unwearying steel, with fruitfulness, wonderful inexhaustible, accomplish by themselves with docility their sacred labor. And nevertheless the genius of the great philosophers of capitalism remains dominated by the prejudice of the wage system, worst of slaveries. They do not yet understand that the machine is the saviour of humanity, the god who shall redeem man from the sordidae artes and from working for hire, the god who shall give him leisure and liberty.

—Paul Lafargue, *The Right to be Lazy*

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Introduction

In 1930, John Maynard Keynes published a short essay entitled "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren."[1] In the space of just a few pages, he sketched a bold vision of the world in a century's time. Paying particular attention to the promise of technological innovation, the power of compound interest, and the magnified role of machines in the workforce, Keynes optimistically predicted that his generation's grandchildren would live in an "age of leisure and of abundance."[2] He prophesied that we would work only fifteen hours a week; that we would abandon the blind pursuit of wealth; and that we would have permanently solved our *economic problem*.[3] Keynes' was a vision of "technological unemployment"—of a society in which technological productivity not only comfortably meets material needs, but also renders human labor effectively superfluous. Free from "pressing economic cares" and the need to work, humans could instead embrace the prospect of increased leisure time.[4]

Although Keynes may have coined the phrase "technological unemployment," he was not the first thinker to approach the subject.[5] In the 19th

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[1] John Maynard Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," in *Essays in Persuasion* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010): 321-332.
[2] Keynes, "Economics Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," 328.
[3] The economic problem is the problem that societies face in trying to make the best use of scarce resources. Although human wants and desires are unlimited, the means to satisfy them have historically been limited.
[4] Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," 328-329.
[5] As early as the 4th century B.C.E., Aristotle contemplated the possibility that machines might displace human labor. He wrote, "If… the shuttle would weave and the plectrum touch the lyre without a hand to guide them, chief workmen would not want servants, nor masters slaves." See: Aristotle, *Politics*, in *The History of Economic Thought: A Reader, 2nd Edition*, ed. Steven Medema and Warren J. Samuels (London: Routledge, 2013), 7.

century, many classical political economists, including David Ricardo and John Stuart Mill, reflected on the potential effects of automation. Ricardo was "convinced that the substitution of machinery for human labour… is often very injurious to the interests of the class of labourers,"[6] while Mill characterized the belief that workers would not suffer (at least temporarily) from the introduction of machinery as "necessarily fallacious."[7] Karl Marx, meanwhile, argued that automation embodied the internal contradictions of capitalism insofar as it upheld labor time as the "sole measure and source of wealth" while simultaneously promising to "make the creation of wealth independent (relatively) of the labor time employed on it."[8] Marx therefore saw a future of technological unemployment as inevitable: labor's application to the process of industrial production would necessarily lead to its own redundancy.

Though each of these thinkers differed in the degree of their optimism about that future, they shared the belief that increased technological productivity would necessarily lead to a reduction in working hours. If a society could produce more and better with less human input, they reasoned, its need to employ workers would diminish accordingly; at a certain point, the demand for human workers would disappear.

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[6] David Ricardo exhibited a drastic reversal of opinion on the subject, after having previously declared that all classes of society would benefit from the higher productivity and reduced prices that the introduction of machinery would enable. See: David Ricardo, quoted in Samuel Hollander, "Retrospectives: Ricardo on Machinery," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 230.

[7] John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy: With Some of Their Applications to Social Philosophy (Abridged)*, ed. Stephen Nathanson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2004), 35.

[8] Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse*, in *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Edition*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1978), 285.

In some ways, Keynes and his predecessors were right. For one, we have become more productive than Keynes may ever have imagined: since Keynes published "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," the nominal gross domestic product (GDP) of the United States has increased more than twenty times, from approximately $1 trillion in 1930 to over $21 trillion in 2019.[9] However, even as we have seemingly solved our economic problem, we have not realized Keynes' vision. We may be richer than ever, but we have not stopped working. On the contrary, work has rooted itself more obstinately than ever in our social imagination. From the normalization of overwork among young professionals to the belief that hard work is a reliable vehicle of social mobility, and even the careerism that permeates college campuses, the centrality of work is taken for granted in society.

The Questions

Why are we still only halfway towards achieving Keynes' "age of leisure and of abundance"?[10] The answer lies in the social meaning of work. It may be the primary mechanism through which income is distributed throughout society, but work is not simply about its economic reward. Work is intimately connected to various aspects of the human experience: it regulates our claims for rights, recognition, status, identity, and a sense of belonging in society. We work not just to earn more, but also to uphold our end of the social contract, augment our social standing, define our identity, and enter into public life.

[9] U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, "Gross Domestic Product [GDPA]," retrieved from FRED, Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis, February 26, 2020, https://fred.stlouisfed.org/series/GDPA.
[10] Keynes, "Economics Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," 328.

As a source of social recognition and as a normative expectation of all individuals, work is appropriately conceived of as a site of justice. This thesis is not the first attempt to subject work to normative assessment. Much of the previous literature, however, has focused on justice *internal* to work—on what types of work are fitting and meaningful for humans,[11] for example, or how we might eliminate occupational inequalities that obtain between different jobs.[12]

By contrast, this thesis focuses on justice *external* to work. More specifically, the main project of this thesis is to contemplate the proper role of work in a *just society*. My goal is not to advocate for the most realistic set of small-scale reforms, but to articulate the end vision of a just society. Although I take the centrality of work as a departure point for my investigation, I do not presume *prima facie* that work would be a necessary feature of that society.

In the main, three questions have motivated and guided my investigation. First, by what historical processes has work come to assume its current economic and social importance? Second, what is the significance of the technological and structural change currently affecting the world of work, and what (if anything) should be done in response? Lastly, how might we reshape work and its social meaning in order to constitute a just society? Fittingly, these questions provide the general guidelines for the three divisions of my thesis, which I outline below.

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[11] See, for example: Russell Muirhead, *Just Work* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2004).
[12] See, for example: Samuel Arnold, "The Difference Principle at Work," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (2012): 94-118.

The Roadmap

First, in Chapter One, I give a historical overview of work—why people work, what counts as "work," and how work has evolved in its meaning and its social role. I begin with a reconstruction of Karl Polanyi's argument in *The Great Transformation*[13] to show how preindustrial societies tended to subordinate work to a variety of non-economic factors. I then demonstrate that the rise of industrialization and the ideology of market liberalism divorced work from its social context, transforming how individuals experienced work and legitimating the idea of wealth accumulation for its own sake. Finally, I show how the interaction of neoliberal politics and meritocratic ideals upholds work as a normative expectation of individuals and stigmatizes unemployment. Today, work is valued not only for its economic benefits, but also as a source of social recognition, insofar as individuals gain access to non-economic benefits including rights, status, identity, purpose, and a sense of belonging through work.

In Chapter Two, I turn to the problem of work—how "good jobs" are becoming increasingly scarce and employment increasingly insecure, why these changes matter, and how some thinkers have proposed we should respond. I first review the technological and structural changes affecting the world of work, from the increased adoption of automation and AI in the workplace to the rise of the gig economy and other nonstandard work arrangements. Next, I explore two strategies proposed in response to these changes—the "good jobs" approach and the "basic income" approach. I evaluate each strategy's respective strengths and

[13] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001).

limits. Drawing on theories of recognition, I argue that although a basic income would be a necessary component of reform, it would have problematic implications for gender justice and social recognition if pursued in isolation.

In Chapter Three, I propose that a truly just strategy to address the problem of work must involve its *redefinition*, its *revalorization*, and a *more expansive conception of the public good*. First, I argue that we must recognize the value of reproductive labor and ensure that its gender burden is more equitably borne by bringing it under our definition of "work." Second, I argue that we must revalorize work in relation to non-work activities in order to separate work from being the dominant source of social recognition. Finally, I argue that we must embrace a revised understanding of the public good that takes into account not only economic productivity, but also the full range of factors that make life worth living.

I close by briefly recapitulating my arguments, situating their importance in the current discourse, and issuing some proposals for further research.

Chapter One: A History of Work

> *The organization of labor is only another word for the forms of life of the common people.*
>
> —Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*[14]

> *Work is about a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread, for recognition as well as cash, for astonishment rather than torpor.*
>
> —Studs Terkel, *Working*[15]

In this chapter, I give a historical account of how work has asserted its primacy in the lives of individuals and society. I situate this account within a Polanyian framework, showing how the ascendancy of work was intimately connected to what Karl Polanyi diagnosed as the "disembedding" of the economy from society at large.[16] Following Polanyi, I argue that because the economy was "embedded" in the general organization of preindustrial society, a variety of non-economic factors, especially political and social relations, determined the level of economic production and the amount of work performed in society.

Next, I show that the rise of industrialization in the late 18th century, by redefining the possibilities of economic productivity, transformed work's social role. As factories displaced households as the primary site of production and as wage labor became standardized as a social norm, workers internalized the moral duty to work. At the same time, the ideology of market liberalism nurtured by the

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[14] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 79.
[15] Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1990), xiii.
[16] See: Polanyi, *The Great Transformation.*

Industrial Revolution created an institutional separation of the economic sphere in society by emancipating the market from external regulations.

Finally, I argue that the triumph of neoliberalism has inverted the relationship between work and non-economic considerations. In the postindustrial United States, work operates as the ultimate basis of social recognition by conferring upon the working individual a variety of non-economic benefits including rights, status, identity, purpose, and a sense of belonging.

1. The "Embedded" Economy

1a. The Social Meaning of Work

Work has played an essential role throughout each stage of human civilization. Historically, faced with the economic problem of trying to make the best use of scarce resources, humans have worked in order to meet the demands of economic necessity and self-sufficiency. In short, humans have always worked to secure their livelihoods. Therefore, hard work and society's veneration of the particular values that are identified with it (industriousness, efficiency, and productivity, to name a few) are not phenomena particular to our own, or any other, epoch.

Hesiod's poem *Works and Days* is one example from antiquity that colorfully illustrates the necessity of hard work in the "embedded" economy of Ancient Greece. Written around 700 B.C.E., *Works and Days* is a didactic poem of some 800 lines in which Hesiod, the narrator, instructs his brother Perses in the

arts of agriculture.[17] Hesiod praises the virtues of a life devoted to labor while warning of the evils of idleness and sloth. He exhorts his brother: "… work, high-born Perses, that Hunger may hate you, and venerable Demeter[18] richly crowned may love you and fill your barn with food; for Hunger is altogether a meet comrade for the sluggard."[19] Hesiod therefore urges Perses to work in order to ensure the self-sufficiency of his household. He notes that those who do not labor diligently must beg for charity from their neighbors, making "both gods and men […] angry with a man who lives idle, for in nature he is like the stingless drones who waste the labor of the bees, eating without working."[20] Hesiod concludes that "work is no disgrace: it is idleness which is a disgrace."[21]

Preindustrial societies thus recognized the value of hard work, yet they simultaneously tended to subordinate work to non-economic considerations. In his seminal *The Great Transformation*, the economic historian Karl Polanyi argues that prior to the Industrial Revolution, the economy was always "embedded" in society. Central to this argument is a claim about human nature: Polanyi asserts that "man's economy, as a rule, is submerged in his social relationships."[22] Beyond the food and shelter necessary for daily sustenance, human beings do not value material goods for their own sake, but only to the extent that such goods

[17] Hesiod, "Works and Days," in *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1977).
[18] Demeter is the Greek goddess of the harvest.
[19] Hesiod, "Works and Days," lines 293-319.
[20] Hesiod, "Works and Days," lines 293-319.
[21] Hesiod, "Works and Days," lines 383-404.
[22] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 48.

help to "safeguard [their] social standing, [their] social claims, [and their] social assets."[23]

To demonstrate, Polanyi offers the simple example of a tribal society in which the concept of individual economic interest is virtually non-existent. The welfare of a member of the tribe corresponds with that of the society as a whole, which keeps all of its members from starving. The member's claim to a share of the tribe's resources, meanwhile, is regulated by their *social* standing in the tribe (*i.e.*, their status *relative* to the other members of their bounded community).[24] In this context, social factors precede an individual's economic interest. What this example also illustrates is that we are, by nature, *homo reciprocans*, not *homo economicus*—socially-motivated behavior that promotes the collective welfare, rather than what we now understand as "economically rational" self-interested behavior, is innate to human beings. As Polanyi puts it, "so-called economic motives spring from the context of social life."[25]

Works and Days shows how social factors may govern economic activity and interests even outside the context of a tribal society. Hesiod tells of how men in Ancient Greece were driven to work—how even the "shiftless" were "[stirred] up… to toil"—by a desire to compete with their neighbors; he notes that "a man grows eager to work when he considers his neighbor, a rich man who hastens to plough and plant and put his house in good order."[26] These examples show that in agrarian societies, just as much as in tribal ones, individuals are motivated to

[23] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 48.
[24] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 48.
[25] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 40.
[26] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 20-25.

work not only to provide for their basic needs, but also to augment their social standing relative to their peers. Finally, although individuals in preindustrial society certainly desired increased personal wealth, they did not always desire more wealth in and of itself; they instead privileged the access that wealth gave them to social capital, insofar as more material resources enabled individuals to better care for their households and outwardly demonstrate their self-sufficiency.

1b. The Principle of Use

Because preindustrial societies subordinated work to a variety of non-economic factors, they also tended to moderate their economic production according to the *principle of use*. As Polanyi points out, although the *motive of gain* may have led some individuals (especially those who formed their society's dominant class) to accumulate an excess of material resources, and although the direct exchange of labor for remuneration did exist, neither tended to be especially prominent.[27] Instead, economic life in preindustrial society was usually characterized by some combination of *redistribution*, *reciprocity*, and *householding*.

First, the *redistribution* of resources by a central authority to the rest of the members of the society helped not only to ensure the collective welfare, but also to constitute the prevailing political regime. Whether the society was tribal, democratic, or feudal, the chief, the legislature, or the lord would organize the production and distribution of goods, "[enmeshing] the economic system proper

[27] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 49.

in social relationships."[28] The *Cura Annonae*,[29] which refers to the importation and storage of grain by the government in Ancient Rome as well as its distribution to the Roman population, provides a notable example of such redistribution; by the time of Augustus' reign, some 200,000 Romans were beneficiaries of this free grain dole.[30]

Meanwhile, the idea of *reciprocity*, which called for mutually beneficial exchange among individuals, defined the relationships among the members of a specific society. It contributed to the division of labor, the denial of individual economic interest, and the means for communal celebration at public festivities, rendering the economic system a "mere function of social organization"[31] and ensuring that within the community, giving freely would be praised, while the very idea of profit-seeking would be anathema. *Works and Days* provides multiple examples of the principle of reciprocity in practice. For instance, Hesiod repeatedly advises Perses to initiate and reciprocate generosity, especially to foster friendships with his neighbors: "Call your friend to a feast… and especially call him who lives near you: for if any mischief happens in the place, neighbors come ungirt…"[32] Similarly, Hesiod tells his brother that neighborly relations should be characterized by frequent and mutually beneficial giving, so that each may rely on the other in times of need: "Take fair measure from your neighbour

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[28] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 55.
[29] "*Cura Annonae*" translates literally to "care for the grain supply."
[30] Paul Erdkamp, "The Food Supply of the Capital," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ancient Rome*, ed. Paul Erdkamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 265-266.
[31] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 51-52.
[32] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 340-350. By the phrase "neighbors come ungirt," Hesiod means that neighbors, unlike faraway relatives, are able to immediately come to one's aid when trouble unfolds.

and pay him back fairly with the same measure, or better, if you can; so that if you are in need afterwards, you may find him sure."[33] More generally, Hesiod encourages Perses to take pleasure in the very act of giving, for "the man who gives willingly, even though he gives a great thing, rejoices in his gift and is glad in heart."[34]

Finally, the idea of *householding* delineated the limits of a self-sufficient community centered around a "breadwinning" nucleus, as well as the responsibility of that "breadwinner" to ensure that the needs of the community were met. For example, Hesiod advocates for householding in a literal sense throughout *Works and Days* in his constant exhortations for Perses to work in order to provide for his family. Although the word "household" naturally evokes the image of a house and its occupants (as in Perses' case), the idea of householding can also be extended to larger communities; its underlying idea simply concerns the production or acquisition of material resources in sufficient quantity so as to satisfy the defined community's needs. Householding can therefore significantly overlap with redistribution, since redistribution was often a means by which householding was satisfied in the context of a larger community (such as in Ancient Rome with the aforementioned *Cura Annonae*).

By and large, therefore, the *principle of use*, rather than the *motive of gain*, drove economic activity in preindustrial societies. Producing the minimum quantity of material resources required for the population's subsistence was obviously necessary for a society to sustain itself. As long as that society

[33] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 345-355.
[34] Hesiod, *Works and Days*, lines 350-360.

subscribed to the principle of use, however, any subsequent production would be motivated only by the population's desired patterns of consumption; the level of production would therefore find its fixed limit in the satisfaction of the natural wants of the "household."

Polanyi notes that Aristotle, in Book I of his *Politics*, sought to establish production according to the *principle of use*, rather than according to the *motive of gain*, as a social norm. Aristotle argued that the latter type of production, which posits endless and ever-greater accumulation as an end in and of itself, is unnatural and dishonorable, since it is disconnected from the necessities of life that humans experience.[35] In denouncing production for gain as "boundless and limitless, 'as not natural to man,'" Aristotle hints, as Polanyi argues, at the crucial point—that only through "the divorce of the economic motive from all concrete social relationships which would by their very nature set a limit to that motive" does the idea of production for gain become comprehensible.[36] Polanyi's logic has three steps: first, a focus on the natural connection between household needs and production yields a very narrow understanding of the proper place of economic activity; properly understood, work and other forms of production should be performed only in service of social relationships. Second, social relationships tend to generate a natural limit on the utility of economic activity, insofar as more material resources have diminishing returns on wellbeing past the satisfaction of a household's wants and needs. Finally, and by contrast, when production is considered in isolation—when economic activity is divorced from its social

[35] Aristotle, *Politics*, 9-10.
[36] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 57.

context—there is no longer a natural constraint on the motive of gain, leading individuals to view endless and ever-greater accumulation as an end in and of itself. In a "disembedded" economy, therefore, accumulation may be pursued for accumulation's own sake.

2. The "Disembedded" Economy

2a. Wage Labor and the Duty to Work

Although the principle of use animated economic activity in preindustrial society, its legitimacy was challenged by the advent of the Industrial Revolution. Beginning in the late 18th century, innovations in textile production, steam power, and electricity introduced elaborate and specialized machinery that redefined the possibilities of economic productivity. These technological improvements led to the formation of large factories, which, because of their demand for a ready and plentiful supply of labor, necessitated a standardization of the employment relationship. This standardization was accomplished through the rise of wage labor, which monetized time and moved the primary site of production from households to factories; the combination of these changes divorced economic activity from its social context and substituted the motive of gain for the principle of use as the purpose of production. Simultaneously, governments' infatuation with the apparent benefits of unbridled economic growth encouraged faith in the idea of self-regulating markets, which "disembedded" the economy from the general organization of society. The Industrial Revolution and the ideology of

market liberalism that it nurtured therefore transformed work, not only in terms of what it looked like, but also its social role.

First, although the arrival of the Industrial Revolution depended in large part on the adoption of new and improved machinery, engines, and manufacturing processes, these tools of production were not freely accessible. Only the emerging capitalist class had the financial means to invest in the buildings, management, labor, and other inputs that the adoption of these technologies required, the high upfront cost of which far exceeded what common individuals were able to afford or maintain on their own (to say nothing of the cost and complexity of the machines themselves). Industrial production, therefore, was a speculative endeavor that promised significant upside but also entailed considerable risk—although capitalist owners stood to disproportionately benefit from their new factories' unprecedented potential for productivity, they also became responsible for any resulting losses.[37] Naturally, the risks of investment were bearable only so long as profits could be reasonably assured, which, in turn, depended on the factory's uninterrupted production of goods in large volumes. As a result, the factory system required the ready and plentiful supply of *all* factors of production, *including labor*.[38]

However, such a state of conditions was not naturally given. Not only were workers accustomed to independence and self-employment, but they were also habituated to perform work only to the degree that it was necessary, per the principle of use. As Max Weber stated in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of*

[37] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 78.
[38] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 78.

Capitalism, by nature, humans do not "wish to earn more and more money, but simply [wish] to live as [they are] accustomed to live and to earn as much as is necessary for that purpose."[39] André Gorz, meanwhile, argues that up until the end of the 18th century, workers "would not have dreamt of intensifying and prolonging their efforts in order to earn more."[40] As such, the process of industrialization, in its attempt to force workers out of their homes and into wage labor, found stern resistance in human nature and "entailed a severe restructuring of working habits."[41]

2b. The Motive of Gain

With the rise of wage labor also came a formal demarcation of the division between "work" and "life."[42] In contrast to preindustrial societies, which saw people live and work according to the sun and the seasons, the Industrial Revolution saw capitalist owners, wishing to safeguard their investments in machinery and factories, impose rigorous "time-discipline"[43] on their workers in order to maximize their productivity. As E.P. Thompson has famously noted, the very introduction of the wage transformed time into a currency, "not passed but spent"[44]—workers, forced to distinguish between their employer's time and their "own" time by fines, bells, clocks, and the supervision of labor, formed new working habits accordingly.[45]

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[39] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 2001), 24.
[40] André Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason* (New York: Verso Books, 1989), 21.
[41] E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present*, no. 38 (December 1967): 57.
[42] Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 93.
[43] Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 90
[44] Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 61.
[45] Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 90.

The gradual consolidation of workers into factories also served to entrench the employment relationship as a social norm. The model of "standard employment" (defined as "work done on a fixed schedule—usually full-time—at the employer's place of business, under the employer's control, and with the mutual expectation of continued employment")[46] that underpins (and is often conflated with) our modern understanding of "work" gradually replaced the so-called "putting-out" system, characterized by its reliance on piecemeal forms of labor carried out in various households, that was popular in late preindustrial society.[47]

Furthermore, as the factory became the primary site of economic production, the idea of production for household use diminished. As Weber notes, the restructuring of working habits had a distinct moral element. The promise of additional income was not originally an adequate incentive to persuade the "traditionalist" to work longer hours or to perform more intense work. Therefore, Weber suggests that the *moralization* of work became the most effective way of converting traditionalists to the work ethic and legitimating the idea of accumulation for its own sake. The Calvinist[48] idea of predestination, which preached that only a certain few had been elected by God to be saved from damnation,[49] led individuals to view success in worldly activity as "the most

[46] Arne L. Kalleberg, Barbara F. Reskin, and Ken Hudson, "Bad Jobs in America: Standard and Nonstandard Employment Relations and Job Quality in the United States," *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 2 (April 2000): 258.
[47] Katrina Forrester, "What Counts as Work?" *London Review of Books* 41, no. 23 (December 2019).
[48] Calvinism is one of the main branches of Protestantism.
[49] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 65.

suitable means of counteracting feelings of religious anxiety."[50] By working hard and accumulating wealth, individuals could dispense any self-doubt and assure themselves that they were among the elect; material success became a sign of God's favor. Therefore, the demand that labor "be performed as if it were an absolute end in itself, a calling" inculcated the idea that individuals had a duty towards acquisition, which workers came to internalize.[51]

In this way, the relentless march of industrialization throughout the early 19th century slowly but surely divorced economic activity from its social context. All work became predicated on transactions—for wage laborers and capitalist owners alike, "a medium of exchange [was] introduced into every articulation of industrial life."[52] By severing the link between work and the satisfaction of felt needs, society removed the natural constraint on the motive of gain, making endless and ever-greater accumulation comprehensible as an end in and of itself. The triumph of industrial capitalism therefore displaced the category of "the sufficient" with the adage that "more is better"[53]—it saw humans become "dominated by the making of money, by acquisition as the ultimate purpose of [their lives]."[54]

Governments' attitudes towards the benefits of unbridled economic growth in the mid-19th century mirrored individuals' newfound beliefs in wealth acquisition. While economic trade and exchange have always been important to

[50] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 67.
[51] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 25.
[52] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 43-44.
[53] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 113.
[54] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 18.

society's functioning (indeed, the market has been a fairly common institution since the later Stone Age),[55] Polanyi argued that "history and ethnography… know of no economy prior to our own [*viz.*, Western industrial economies],[56] even approximately controlled and regulated by markets."[57] Preindustrial economies featured markets that were "no more than incidental to economic life," subject to stringent external oversight and regulation, and hardly recognizable in comparison to the modern libertarian ideal of self-regulating markets directed solely by the impersonal forces of supply and demand.[58] But in the 19th century, the economy became "disembedded" from the general organization of society as the ideology of market liberalism dictated that market prices, and nothing but market prices, should organize "the whole of economic life without outside help or interference."[59] This ensured that economic growth could proceed, unhindered, as governments adopted "a mystical readiness to accept the social consequences of economic improvement, whatever they might be."[60]

These changes forced workers to bear increasing responsibility for their economic welfare. Polanyi draws on the failure of the Speenhamland Law, which had been in force in rural England in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, to show that capitalist owners could ensure the profitability of the factory system only by leaving able-bodied workers with no alternative to wage labor. Speenhamland decreed that "subsidies [to workers] in aid of wages should be granted in

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[55] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 45.
[56] Polanyi was writing in the middle of the Second World War; *The Great Transformation* was first published in 1944.
[57] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 46.
[58] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 45.
[59] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 45.
[60] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 35.

accordance with a scale dependent upon the price of bread, so that a minimum income should be assured to the poor *irrespective of their earnings*."[61] It was a radical proposal. Explicitly enumerating a "right to live," the law essentially prevented the formation of a competitive labor market by guaranteeing workers a universal income floor regardless of the wages that they actually earned.[62] Polanyi notes that Speenhamland failed miserably; without any incentives for workers to satisfy their employers, and without any incentives for employers to raise wages (for, in either case, the worker would be paid the same), the productivity of labor sank to the level of "pauper labor" within a few years of the law's passage.[63]

The law's failure seemed to suggest that a system of wage labor required a competitive labor market, which ostensibly could function only if the unemployed could not easily obtain economic relief *outside the wage system*. But in the shadow of Speenhamland, efforts to form a fully-competitive labor market went too far in the opposite direction. Market liberalism dictated that individuals must be fully responsible for their economic welfare, no matter the prevailing context of employment or wages. Polanyi notes that "to separate labor from other activities of life and to subject it to the laws of the market was to annihilate all organic forms of existence and to replace them by a different type of organization, an atomistic and individualistic one."[64]

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[61] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 82.
[62] The idea of a "universal income floor" is one that I will return to in Chapter Two in my discussion of basic income.
[63] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 83.
[64] Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 171.

Therefore, through the rise of wage labor on the one hand and the ideology of market liberalism on the other, the economy became "disembedded" from the general organization of society. Industrial workers came to view work purely in economic terms, per their experience of a formal division between "work" and "life"; for these workers, the concept of wages as *compensation* achieved its fullest meaning.[65]

3. Neoliberalism and Meritocracy

In this section, I aim to show how the ascendancy of neoliberalism has renewed the central ideas associated with 19th century market liberalism. By advocating for robust market-based freedoms and appealing to the ideal of meritocracy, neoliberal policies have legitimated the inequitable allocation of rewards in society. Further, neoliberalism's avowed emphasis on promoting equal opportunities rather than equal outcomes has not only upheld paid employment as a normative expectation of individuals, but also encouraged suspicion about the moral character of welfare recipients.

Many of the ideas and policies associated with market liberalism temporarily fell out of favor after the success of the New Deal and the Keynesian Revolution.[66] To illustrate, in the wake of the massive destruction wrought by World War Two, a number of advanced capitalist countries, including the United States, advocated a "class compromise" between capital and labor as the "key

[65] Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009), 43.
[66] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 23.

guarantor of domestic peace and tranquility" and actively supported the institution of a living wage by constructing robust welfare systems.[67] During this period of "embedded liberalism," economic activity was "surrounded by a web of social and political constraints" that included active state interventions in the economy through the application of Keynesian fiscal and monetary policies and the influence of working-class institutions such as labor unions.[68]

However, by the end of the 1960s, embedded liberalism began to break down.[69] A group of ideologically-inspired economists including Friedrich Hayek, Ludwig von Mises, and Milton Friedman (collectively known as the Mont Pelerin Society) had been advocating for a number of market-based ideas and policies aimed at promoting economic freedoms that we now associate with "neoliberalism," such as the deregulation of markets, the privatization of industry, and *laissez-faire* government attitudes towards economic policy, as early as the 1940s.[70] The defining feature of neoliberalism is that economic growth and development depends on market competitiveness and labor flexibility: it preaches that market principles should be permitted to permeate all aspects of life.[71] As a result, neoliberals emphasize that the proper role of the state should be to create and preserve an institutional framework that allows

[67] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 10-11.
[68] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 11-12.
[69] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 12.
[70] See, for example: Friedrich Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom: Text and Documents—The Definitive Edition*, ed. Bruce Caldwell (1944; reprint, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2007); Ludwig von Mises, *Human Action: A Treatise on Economics* (1940; reprint, Auburn: Ludwig von Mises Institute, 2010); and Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom: Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (1962; reprint, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).
[71] Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury, 2011), 1.

economic freedoms to prosper, "rather than [to] look to the needs and well-being of the population at large."[72]

The neoliberal state's commitment to guaranteeing market-based economic freedoms uncompromisingly holds individuals responsible for their own wellbeing. By co-opting the rhetoric of meritocracy, neoliberalism has fostered an individualizing discourse surrounding work and its attendant expectations. The ideal of meritocracy holds that whatever one's position is at birth, a society should equip its members with ample opportunities to pursue upward mobility through their own merit. The logic behind the ideal, rooted in a universal understanding of fairness, is compelling enough; most would agree that it is better to distribute success and rewards on the basis of merit rather than accidents of fortune like birth. Indeed, meritocracy is at the very heart of the American Dream, the aspirational belief that all Americans are entitled to equal opportunities for success and upward mobility through hard work. But in recent years, much has been written about how the meritocratic ideal is a myth: how, far from leading to fairer outcomes, the United States' obstinate commitment to meritocracy in fact simultaneously obscures, justifies, and exacerbates the nation's existing inequalities.[73]

By defending the competitive individualism and self-interest inherent to capitalism as fair and desirable, designating competition as a necessary means of

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[72] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 2 and 48.
[73] See, for example: Jo Littler, *Against Meritocracy: Culture, Power and Myths of Mobility* (Oxford: Routledge, 2018); Daniel Markovitz, *The Meritocracy Trap: How America's Foundational Myth Feeds Inequality, Dismantles the Middle Class, and Devours the Elite* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019); and Marianne Cooper, "The False Promise of Meritocracy," *The Atlantic*, December 1, 2015, https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/12/meritocracy/418074/.

distributing rewards, and legitimizing economic inequality as an accurate reflection of individual effort and achievement, the ideal of meritocracy uses its myth of mobility to "create the idea of a level playing field that does not exist."[74] It has done so with remarkable success. A recent study showed that Americans' beliefs in the importance of meritocratic elements such as education, hard work, and ambition have remained remarkably stable since 1987,[75] even as data show that economic inequality has rapidly accelerated and upward mobility has declined over the same time period.[76]

Gorz therefore sees the neoliberal ideology of work as little more than "a cover for ultra-competitive egoism and careerism" that rewards the "winners" of the capitalist system for their "hard work," and sanctions the state's neglect of the "losers," who have only themselves to blame.[77] As Harvey notes, per the ideal of meritocracy, neoliberalism interprets individual success or failure in terms of "entrepreneurial virtues or personal failings… rather than being attributed to any systemic property."[78] Consequently, it suggests that states should not be responsible for subsidizing the unemployed poor, and that an individual's economic achievement is reflective of their character. Further, neoliberal economists insist that there is no such thing as involuntary joblessness—that unemployment can result only from a choice for the marginal

[74] Littler, *Against Meritocracy*, 50.
[75] Jeremy Reynolds and He Xian, "Perceptions of Meritocracy in the Land of Opportunity," *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* 36, no. 1 (June 2014): 129-130.
[76] Michael D. Carr and Emily E. Wieners, "The Decline in Lifetime Earnings Mobility in the U.S.: Evidence from Survey-Linked Administrative Data," Washington Center for Equitable Growth (May 2016): 23-24.
[77] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 69.
[78] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 65-66.

utility of leisure when the reserve price of labor (*i.e.*, the price below which individuals prefer not to work) is too high.[79] As a result, fewer and fewer instances of welfare dependency become "legitimate" in the eyes of the state, and "whatever dependency remains… can be interpreted as the fault of individuals."[80]

In sum, the interaction of neoliberalism and meritocracy has justified the inequitable distribution of success and rewards that obtains as a result of individuals' participation in our capitalist economy. Its effect has been not only to uphold the normative expectation of paid employment, but also to cast joblessness and welfare dependency as a moral defect of individual character.

4. Work as a Source of Social Recognition

4a. The Ideology of Work

In the context of the neoliberal politics and meritocratic beliefs of the United States today, work cannot be evaluated simply in economic terms. The relationship between work and non-economic considerations that existed in preindustrial society has been reintroduced—and inverted. Work now plays a socially-mediating role in society; participation in paid employment is largely how individuals integrate into the economic system as well as into social and political arrangements outside of work. Therefore, work is not only the primary mechanism through which income is distributed in society, but also a source of

[79] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 53-54.
[80] Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 52.

social recognition. It provides workers with access to rights, status, identity, purpose, and a sense of belonging, a bundle of non-economic benefits to which I will refer by the umbrella term of "social recognition."

First, work performs a legitimating function with regards to an individual's rights in society. According to the ideology of work, work is an unequivocal good: the more everybody works, the better off is society, and those who work few hours, or not at all, act against the common interest. In the United States, the responsibility to work is widely taken as fundamental to the social contract, the idea that there should be a proper balance between one's rights and one's corresponding duties. Rights, therefore, are not simply attached to citizenship (the mere fact of legal membership in society), but conditional upon full-time employment; participation in the labor market has become a fundamental requirement of full and equal status in society.[81] Thus it is through their commitment to the working life that citizens demonstrate their worth as socially useful individuals; by working, we prove to ourselves and to our peers that we are fulfilling our obligations to society and contributing to the common good. Indeed, it is through work that we affirm our very right to have rights.[82]

Given that work attracts nearly universal participation, it also functions as a marker of relative status. When everybody works, one's income level can be interpreted as an objective measure of one's ability; it becomes possible to conclude that those who earn more are better, and those who earn less are worse.

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[81] Joel F. Handler, *Social Citizenship and Workfare in the United States and Western Europe: The Paradox of Inclusion* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2004), 2.
[82] André Gorz, *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005), 53.

Success, then, is no longer measured internally, as a matter of personal subjectivity, but must be understood in relative terms, as an objective assessment of one's salary, wealth, and consumption. Since income levels are so closely tied to occupations, the question of, "So, what do you do?" which is an almost guaranteed feature of conversation between new acquaintances, cannot simply be benign small talk, for it, at least implicitly, also asks, "What is your status in society?" No wonder that the unemployed often feel compelled to resort to euphemisms in response: "Oh, I'm between jobs currently…"

The relationship between work and identity is closely connected to the relationship between work and status, since jobs today demand more of workers than just time and labor. Workers, particularly those who occupy high-paying professional and managerial jobs, are expected to be completely devoted to work, even at the expense of family life, personal needs, and health.[83] This expectation is personified in the image of the "ideal worker," which regards "the most desirable worker as one who is totally committed to, and always available for, his or her work."[84] Erin Reid has argued that embodying this normative stereotype can be richly rewarding; promotions, raises, and bonuses accrue to those employees who are perceived to best conform to the image of the ideal worker.[85] As a result, many are forced to assume this identity outwardly—to exhibit their devotion and commitment to their work, as well as their constant availability; their willingness to work all night to get things done, or to travel at

[83] Erin Reid, "Embracing, Passing, Revealing, and the Ideal Worker Image: How People Navigate Expected and Experienced Professional Identities," *Organization Science* 26, no. 4 (2015): 997.
[84] Reid, "Embracing, Passing, Revealing, and the Ideal Worker Image," 997.
[85] Reid, "Embracing, Passing, Revealing, and the Ideal Worker Image," 997.

the drop of a hat. Moreover, workers are also expected to identify enthusiastically with the corporate culture and to buy-in to the "mission" of the firm—all aspects of a person, not just their job performance, may be evaluated in interviews and assessments. For these workers, work is not bounded in the once-typical 9-to-5 workday, nor is it something that takes place only at the office; it has instead "come to be a bit like nitrogen: a less visible element that is eerily insinuated into everything."[86]

Work also endows individuals with a sense of purpose, a reason to get out of bed in the morning and to go on with their day as a doctor or a lawyer, as a police officer or an artist. The connection between one's job and one's identity is often forged from childhood ("What do you want to be when you grow up?"). Moreover, an individual's identification with their occupation is strengthened by the particular styles of dress associated with different jobs. The aforementioned doctor, lawyer, police officer, and artist each have distinctive uniforms (whether they are literal or cultural) that are easily recognizable. In many cases, this recognizability is no accident, for it can serve an important purpose (and not only as a practical matter for the police officer). In his 1951 study of the newly-formed American middle class, C. Wright Mills observed that "white-collar people's claims to prestige are expressed, as their label implies, by their style of appearance."[87] Mill's observation is no less true today; just think of the uproar

[86] Derek Thompson, "WeWork's Adam Neumann Is the Most Talented Grifter of Our Time," *The Atlantic*, October 25, 2019, https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2019/10/how-weworks-adam-neumann-became-billionaire/600607/.
[87] C. Wright Mills, *White Collar; the American Middle Classes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), 241.

that ensued just last year when Patagonia announced that it would restrict the sale of its custom-branded fleece vests—the accoutrement of choice for the stereotypical "finance bro"[88]—to "mission-driven companies that prioritize the planet."[89]

Finally, work provides individuals with a sense of belonging. As I have previously emphasized, one of the essential characteristics of the modern notion of work is that employment is a fundamentally social practice, carried out in the public sphere[90] and involving interactions with one's co-workers, colleagues, and customers. Especially as ritualized, cohort-based forms of association centered around institutions like the church, the village, or the school have broken down and given way to increasingly atomized and individualized ways of living, work is one of the main ways through which individuals achieve social integration. As Robert Putnam identified in his seminal book *Bowling Alone*, social capital (a term which refers to "connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them") has steadily eroded in the United States since 1965.[91] We have witnessed a decay in civic engagement, social connectedness, and community: direct engagement in politics has fallen sharply, while membership in churches, labor unions, parent-teacher associations, and civic and volunteer organizations has also declined.

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[88] See the Instagram page "Midtown Uniform" for examples. Midtown Uniform (@midtownuniform), Instagram page, https://www.instagram.com/midtownuniform/.
[89] Akane Otani, "Patagonia Triggers a Market Panic Over New Rules on Its Power Vests," *Wall Street Journal*, April 8, 2019, https://www.wsj.com/articles/patagonia-triggers-a-market-panic-over-new-rules-on-its-power-vests-11554736920.
[90] For the purposes of this thesis, I will use the term "public sphere" simply to describe the obverse of "private life" and personal relationships.
[91] Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 19.

Given the erosion of social capital in the United States, having a job represents one of the most important means through which individuals can move outside a network of purely private relations (with family and friends) and enter into public life. As David Frayne notes, "work is one of the most conventional and readily available means through which we become part of the pattern of other people's lives."[92] For the vast majority of Americans, the university (or, for some, the high school) represents the final opportunity for individuals to engage in social interactions facilitated by their institutional affiliation on a day-to-day basis. After graduation, most individuals must participate in the world of work if they hope to acquire a social existence.

4b. The Stigmatization of Unemployment

The flipside of work's monopoly over social recognition, however, is that individuals who do not work often lack access to the valuable non-economic benefits attached to employment. Additionally, the normative expectation that individuals must work in order to uphold their end of the social contract has created a harmful stigma surrounding unemployment. The force of this normative expectation has constructed a rigid binary in the public imagination separating the productive members of society from the unproductive. On the one side are "upstanding, hardworking citizens who help secure the country's future," and on the other are "morally dubious unemployed people who do nothing."[93]

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[92] David Frayne, *The Refusal of Work: Rethinking Post-Work Theory and Practice* (London: Zed Books, 2015), 14.
[93] Frayne, *The Refusal of Work*, 99-100.

Such a binary is, almost by definition, unconcerned with the *quality* of a job, but only with its presence or absence in an individual's life. As a result, the United States has employed techniques ranging from job search assistance programs to welfare policies to usher the unemployed into the world of work as quickly as possible—by taking these steps, society reassures itself that the only cause of unemployment is the unemployed themselves.[94] But the prioritization of immediate employment above all else means that individuals are often thrust into low-wage and low-skill jobs with little regard for future career prospects, as a recent ethnographic study of two nonprofit job search assistance programs in Minnesota demonstrates.

The study found that the program that was primarily oriented towards lower-income unemployed persons, Good Deeds, relied on enforcing requirements and sanctions in order to "mold clients into docile and interchangeable low-wage labor."[95] Good Deeds adopted a "one-size-fits-all" approach to pushing clients through the welfare-to-work pipeline despite the fact that many of their clients faced unique difficulties such as a lack of proficiency with English or limited computer skills.[96] The program evaluated job-seeking performance and eligibility for continued assistance under a fixed rubric that forced clients to meet a weekly quota of job applications.[97] Unsurprisingly, Good Deeds' clients were required to take virtually any offer of employment they

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[94] Gorz, *Reclaiming Work*, 81.
[95] Madison Van Oort, "Making the Neoliberal Precariat: Two Faces of Job Searching in Minneapolis," *Ethnography* 16, no. 1 (2015): 87.
[96] Van Oort, "Making the Neoliberal Precariat," 84.
[97] Van Oort, "Making the Neoliberal Precariat," 84.

received, no matter how unattractive or underpaid the job in question. Per the neoliberal ideology of work, Good Deeds insisted that *any* job should be preferable to relying on welfare.[98]

Just like job search assistance programs, welfare policies have also stigmatized so-called "welfare dependency" while upholding the working life as the model of normality to which all in society should aspire. As Joel Handler notes, "the major point of U.S. welfare is to get families off of the welfare rolls and into the paid labor market… It is simply assumed that with a job, they will be better off."[99] Welfare benefits are therefore tied to certain conditions that require the individual either to be actively searching for work or to prove that they are unable to work; Good Deeds' clients, in order to continue to receive aid, had to engage in job searches, applications, volunteering, or other sanctioned activities for at least 30 hours per week.[100]

Meanwhile, "workfare" provisions—policy clauses that require people who receive public assistance such as food stamps, housing aid, and Medicaid to work in order to continue receiving those benefits[101]—have long been a staple of American welfare programs. In 1971, Congress passed the Talmadge Work Incentive amendments, which required mothers with school-age children who received Aid to Families With Dependent Children (AFDC) funding to register for work and training programs. In 1988, Congress went a step further and

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[98] Van Oort, "Making the Neoliberal Precariat," 84.
[99] Handler, *Social Citizenship and Workfare in the United States and Western Europe*, 20.
[100] Van Oort, "Making the Neoliberal Precariat," 79.
[101] Even the Federal Work-Study Program, which assists students with the costs of postsecondary education by administering a system of part-time employment (usually through on-campus jobs in libraries and cafés), might be thought of as a form of workfare.

passed a bill that required all AFDC mothers to work. And in 1996, President Bill Clinton signed the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, which replaced AFDC with the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program.[102] In announcing the Act, Clinton stated that the old welfare system he was replacing "[undermined] the basic values of work, responsibility, and family." It created a "cycle of dependency that [had] existed for millions and millions of our fellow citizens, exiling them from the world of work." He proclaimed that he was signing the Act to break this cycle of dependency and to move Americans from welfare to work, for it is work that "gives structure, meaning, and dignity to most of our lives."[103]

But as Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon have convincingly argued in their genealogy of the word, *dependency* is a distinctively ideological term.[104] Labelling welfare recipients' need for assistance as dependency isolates and affirms their problems as individual ones, as much moral or psychological as economic, while obscuring any structural barriers to employment that they may face.[105] Fraser and Gordon note that the preindustrial usage of "dependency" was as a relational term that described a normal condition for the majority of the population: for both men and women, dependency referred to all those who made

[102] Stephen Mihm, "From Workhouses to Workfare: The American Tradition," *Bloomberg*, May 9, 2018, https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-05-09/u-s-workfare-is-more-deeply-rooted-than-liberals-think.
[103] William J. Clinton, "Text of President Clinton's Announcement on Welfare Legislation," *The New York Times*, August 1, 1996, https://www.nytimes.com/1996/08/01/us/text-of-president-clinton-s-announcement-on-welfare-legislation.html.
[104] See: Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the U.S. Welfare State," *Signs* 19, no. 2 (Winter, 1994).
[105] Fraser and Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency," 311.

their living working for someone else.[106] But with the rise of industrialization, the meaning of dependency came to describe a deviant, stigmatized, and individualized character trait.[107]

Because the rise of wage labor ostensibly created a new kind of economic independence, it was accompanied by the meritocratic notion that *all* members of society must justify their consumption of goods by working.[108] The economic independence of white working men was, of course, largely illusory. Few workers earned enough to support their families singlehandedly, and all workers relied on the contributions that their wives and children supplied, whether in or out of the household. Nevertheless, the perceived access to economic independence that wage labor provided to white working men enabled a new welfare-related use of "dependency" to develop in the United States: "… as wage labor became increasingly normative—and increasingly definitive of independence—it was precisely those *excluded* from wage labor who appeared to personify dependency."[109]

The United States has been especially amenable to interpreting dependency as an individual defect of character.[110] Our fixation on meritocracy and independence, as well as the desires of many fiscal conservatives for a "small government," has helped to engender hostility to public assistance for the poor and unemployed. Postindustrial usage of the term has cast nearly all forms

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[106] Fraser and Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency," 312.
[107] Fraser and Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency," 315.
[108] James Livingston, *No More Work: Why Full Employment is a Bad Idea* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2016), xi.
[109] Emphasis mine. Fraser and Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency," 316.
[110] Fraser and Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency," 320.

of dependency as objectionable and strengthened the identification of economic independence with employment. As Fraser and Gordon conclude, "the worker tends to become the universal social subject: everyone is expected to 'work' and to be 'self-supporting,'" and "any adult not perceived as a worker shoulders a heavier burden of self-justification."[111]

Therefore, neoliberal welfare policies not only extol the virtues of the working life, but they also contribute to the stigmatization of non-workers in society. Just as we are socialized to absorb the values of hard-work, productivity, and efficiency, we are also socialized to internalize the stigmas of personal failure and blameworthiness that are associated with unemployment. Studies show that individuals' self-perceptions are influenced by how they think others see them, and that even workers with a relatively low occupational status (such as unskilled manual laborers) feel that they receive more respect in society than those who are unemployed.[112]

Unsurprisingly, individuals who are unemployed often experience feelings of shame, alienation, and worthlessness regarding their situations. A recent study of long-term unemployed[113] welfare recipients in Australia (a peer OECD country with comparable attitudes towards work and welfare as the United States) illustrates how the social stigma of unemployment may be personally incorporated by individuals. Its findings "provide qualitative detail regarding the emotional aspects of unemployment and underline the centrality of

[111] Fraser and Gordon, "A Genealogy of Dependency," 324.
[112] Laura Pohlan, "Unemployment and Social Exclusion," *Journal of Economic Behavior and Organization* 164 (August 2019): 276.
[113] "Long-term" unemployment is defined as being out of work for 12 months or longer.

shame to the unemployment experience."[114] For example, many of the interviewees in the study accepted that "there must be 'something wrong with them' because they could not find work."[115] Interviewees also reported feelings of shame at the fact that they relied on unemployment benefits—that not only did they not contribute to society, but they were also a public burden.[116]

To mitigate these feelings of shame, individuals explicitly voiced their personal aversion to accepting welfare benefits and enthusiastically declared their desire to find employment. One interviewee, for example, emphasized, "If I get money, I want to earn it the hard way."[117] Over and over, individuals stated that only through a return to work could they regain the social standing and sense of self-worth that they once had. As one interviewee said, "If I get a good job, then that will fulfil me, I suppose… I'll go home and I can talk to my friends, yeah, I got a good job."[118] Finally, in addition to expressing their desire to find employment, interviewees communicated a *hierarchy* of unemployment. Many individuals stressed the fact that they were actively searching for work in order to distance themselves from the stereotype of the lazy welfare recipient, such as the interviewee who found comfort in the fact that he was still participating in the labor market as a job-seeker: "I've been coming in, looking for work… I'm not another one who's just bludged off the dole."[119]

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[114] Michelle Peterie, Gaby Ramia, Greg Marston, *et al.*, "Emotional Compliance and Emotion as Resistance: Shame and Anger among the Long-Term Unemployed," *Work, Employment, and Society* 33, no. 5 (2019): 800-801.
[115] Peterie, Ramia, Marston, *et al*., "Emotional Compliance and Emotion as Resistance," 803.
[116] Peterie, Ramia, Marston, *et al*., "Emotional Compliance and Emotion as Resistance," 803-804.
[117] Peterie, Ramia, Marston, *et al*., "Emotional Compliance and Emotion as Resistance," 803.
[118] Peterie, Ramia, Marston, *et al*., "Emotional Compliance and Emotion as Resistance," 803.
[119] Peterie, Ramia, Marston, *et al*., "Emotional Compliance and Emotion as Resistance," 803.

In sum, individuals who do not work must contend with the stigma of unemployment and lack access to a variety of non-economic benefits. Therefore, society's valorization of work as a source of social recognition matters not only those who engage in paid employment, but also to those who are excluded from it.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have aimed to show that work cannot be evaluated simply in economic terms. I first adopted a Polanyian framework to illustrate how preindustrial societies tended to subordinate work to a variety of non-economic factors, before showing that the rise of industrialization and the ideology of market liberalism "disembedded" the economy from the general organization of society. I argued that the effects of this "disembedding" were twofold: first, it created the normative expectation of employment in society by forcing work out of the household and into factories; and second, it legitimated the idea of wealth accumulation for its own sake. Finally, I showed how the interaction of neoliberal politics and meritocratic ideals has reinforced these effects and rendered work a source of social recognition.

Because of work's economic and social importance, its presence or absence in an individual's life matters not only for their ability to secure an income, but also for their ability to access social recognition. However, work (on our traditional definition) is becoming increasingly scarce and insecure. In Chapter Two, I examine the significance of the technological and structural

change affecting the labor market, and I evaluate two proposed policy responses in light of the demands of justice.

Chapter Two: The Problem of Work

> *Specialists without spirit, sensualists without heart; this nullity imagines that it has attained a level of civilization never before achieved.*
> —Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*[120]

> *"Don't you see, Doctor?" said Lasher. "The machines are to practically everybody what the white men were to [Native Americans]. People are finding that, because of the way the machines are changing the world, more and more of their old values don't apply any more. People have no choice but to become second-rate machines themselves, or wards of the machines."*
> —Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano*[121]

In this chapter, I examine the present problems affecting the world of work. Having demonstrated its economic and social importance, I aim to show how work (or, at least, the model of standard employment that we tend to identify with "work") has become an increasingly scarce and increasingly insecure source of income as well as social recognition. In doing so, I survey the changing nature of work, from the rapid advancement of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) to the rise of the gig economy and other nonstandard work arrangements.

I then turn to two strategies that writers have proposed in response to these changes and evaluate each strategy's respective strengths and limits. The first strategy I explore, the "good jobs" approach, calls for the expansion of opportunities for productive employment in the economy, while the second

[120] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 124.
[121] Kurt Vonnegut, *Player Piano* (New York: RosettaBooks, 2000), 268.

strategy, the "basic income" approach, calls for the government to guarantee regular and unconditional cash payments to all citizens in a society.

Finally, I lean on theories of recognition proposed by Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth, and Nancy Fraser to show that the implementation of a basic income as a standalone policy would perpetuate the ideology of work as a source of social recognition. I argue that wealth redistribution on a large scale would be a necessary component of reform. However, I simultaneously aim to show that a basic income scheme would address neither the inequitable division of unpaid reproductive labor nor the issues of misrecognition that arise from unemployment and so-called welfare dependency in a society that valorizes work.

1. Automated Insecurity

Experts agree that work is undergoing a fundamental transformation that will have wide-reaching—if uncertain—impacts in the next decade. On the one side, numerous studies and reports predict that emerging technological breakthroughs in automation and AI will enable robots to take over most of the jobs currently performed by humans, subjecting swathes of would-be workers to technological unemployment. On the other side, many writers claim that the coming wave of technological change will be little different from what we have seen in the past, and that automation and AI will continue to boost economic growth, create jobs, and improve living standards. According to this view, alarmist prophecies of widespread technological unemployment are unfounded,

and robots are but the unwitting scapegoats for the systemic problems of inequality, stagnation, and unemployment that have beset our economy.

First, many researchers have highlighted some of the more encouraging ways that automation and AI may interact with human labor. Recent research suggests that in some instances, new technologies will have the potential to *complement*, rather than *substitute for*, human labor, by making workers more productive and better informed in their decision-making. For example, one study forecasts that in the case of radiology, where the interpretation of scans and images by AI "can meet or even surpass human diagnostic accuracy in detecting some types of disease," even the full automation of this task would not eliminate the need for human radiologists to perform complementary tasks related to the initial diagnosis.[122] It is also possible to imagine that the rise of automation and AI might create entirely new lines of work for humans, both directly and indirectly. Jobs with titles like "AI Solutions Architect" or "Machine Learning Engineer" will undoubtedly proliferate, while data scientists tasked with training and refining AI algorithms will probably be in high demand.[123]

Furthermore, the debate over technological unemployment has been rehearsed countless times throughout history. During the Industrial Revolution in the early 19th century, the Luddites[124] famously destroyed textile machinery in

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[122] Ajay Agrawal, Joshua S. Gans, and Avi Goldfarb, "Artificial Intelligence: The Ambiguous Labor Market Impact of Automating Prediction," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 33, no. 2 (Spring 2019): 42.
[123] Mark Muro, Robert Maxim, and Jacob Whiton, *What Jobs Are Affected By AI? Better-Paid, Better-Educated Workers Face The Most Exposure*, Brookings Institution, November 20, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/research/what-jobs-are-affected-by-ai-better-paid-better-educated-workers-face-the-most-exposure/.
[124] The term "Luddite" is now mainly used as a pejorative towards people who resist technological progress, and their example is often cited to dismiss concerns about technological unemployment.

protest of the perceived threat that the machines posed to their livelihoods as skilled artisans.[125] In 1961, meanwhile, TIME ran a story called "The Automation Jobless," which stated some familiar fears:

> What worries many job experts more is that automation may prevent the economy from creating enough new jobs… In the past, new industries hired far more people than those they put out of business. But this is not true of many of today's new industries… Today's new industries have comparatively few jobs for the unskilled or semiskilled, just the class of workers whose jobs are being eliminated by automation.[126]

Yet we now know that these fears were unfounded. Historically, technological innovation has had unambiguously positive effects on both economic growth and employment. Whether with regards to the invention of steam and water power, the adoption of public electricity and mass production, or the introduction of information technology and computerization, we have seen Joseph Schumpeter's gale of "creative destruction"[127] bluster time and again as rapid advances in technology destroyed some jobs, paved the way for new lines of work, and enhanced productivity, lifestyles, and employment prospects for society overall. In light of this historical record, therefore, it may be tempting to view the current discourse about technological unemployment as merely "the latest chapter in a

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[125] Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Good Economics for Hard Times* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2019), 230.
[126] "The Automation Jobless," *TIME Magazine* 77, no. 9, February 24, 1961, http://content.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,828815,00.html.
[127] Schumpeter's principle of "creative destruction" refers to "a process in which new technologies, new kinds of products, new methods of production and new means of distribution make old ones obsolete, forcing existing companies to quickly adapt to a new environment or fail." See, for example, Sharon Reier, "Half a Century Later, Economist's 'Creative Destruction' Theory Is Apt for the Internet Age: Schumpeter: The Prophet of Bust and Boom," *New York Times*, June 10, 2000, https://www.nytimes.com/2000/06/10/your-money/IHT-half-a-century-later-economists-creative-destruction-theory-is.html.

long story called *The Boys Who Cried Robot*—one in which the robot, unlike the wolf, never arrives in the end."[128]

But there is a mounting body of evidence that this time around, the threat of mass joblessness due to automation and AI is different. Perhaps the key distinction between the current and preceding waves of technological change is the fact it will affect virtually every sector of the economy. Although earlier analyses forecast that low-wage and low-skill blue-collar jobs would be most vulnerable to automation,[129] more recent studies have tended towards a growing consensus that *all* types of work will be affected. A January 2019 report released by the Brookings Institution, for example, unequivocally states that "almost no occupation will be unaffected by the adoption of currently available technologies," and that more than 60 percent of employment in the United States will face high or medium exposure to automation by 2030.[130]

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[128] Derek Thompson, "A World Without Work," *The Atlantic* (July/August 2015), https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2015/07/world-without-work/395294/

[129] See, for example: Carl Benedikt Frey and Michael A. Osborne, *The Future of Employment: How Susceptible Are Jobs to Computerisation?* (working paper, Oxford Martin Programme on Technology and Employment, September 17, 2013), https://www.oxfordmartin.ox.ac.uk/publications/the-future-of-employment/.

[130] It is worth noting that estimates of the share of jobs threatened by automation and AI vary substantially. The figure of 60 percent that I cite here, though on the higher end, is similar to other findings that have accumulated: a recent study by the McKinsey Global Institute estimated that "60 percent of occupations have at least 30 percent of constituent work activities that could be automated," while a report released by the OECD last year estimated that 46 percent of jobs are either highly automatable or at risk of radical transformation. See: Mark Muro, Robert Maxim, and Jacob Whiton, *Automation and Artificial Intelligence: How Machines Are Affecting People and Places*, Brookings Institution, January 24, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/research/automation-and-artificial-intelligence-how-machines-affect-people-and-places/. See also: James Manyika, Susan Lund, Michael Chui, *et al.*, *Jobs Lost, Jobs Gained: Workforce Transitions in a Time of Automation*, McKinsey Global Institute (December 2017), https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/jobs-lost-jobs-gained-what-the-future-of-work-will-mean-for-jobs-skills-and-wages, and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *The Future of Work: OECD Employment Outlook 2019*, April 25, 2019, https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/employment/oecd-employment-outlook-2019_9ee00155-en.

In fact, high-wage and high-skill white-collar workers may be most affected by the adoption of new technologies. Research suggests that a job's hourly rate of compensation is not necessarily a strong predictor of automatability; a significant percentage of tasks and activities performed by even the economy's highest earners (financial planners, physicians, and senior executives, to name a few) are vulnerable to automation and AI.[131] Another Brookings Institution report, meanwhile, drawing on a Stanford study that quantified the overlap between the text of job descriptions (to identify key tasks associated with various jobs) and the text of AI patents (to identify the existing and potential capabilities of AI), has estimated the exposure of different occupations to automation. The report predicts that "whole new classes of well-paid, white-collar workers (who have been less touched by earlier waves of automation) will be the ones most affected by AI."[132]

Whatever the precise percentage of workers and industries ultimately affected, the increased adoption of automation and AI is, to a certain extent, inexorable. Companies' desires for improved productivity and profit maximization, combined with the relatively high cost of employing humans (the average hourly cost of a manufacturing worker in the United States is $36, while the average hourly cost of a robot is $4),[133] should ensure that machines substitute

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[131] Michael Chui, James Manyika, and Mehdi Miremadi, "Four Fundamentals of Workplace Automation," *McKinsey Quarterly* (November 2015), https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/mckinsey-digital/our-insights/four-fundamentals-of-workplace-automation#.
[132] Muro, Maxim, and Whiton, *What Jobs Are Affected By AI?*
[133] Richard Wike and Bruce Stokes, "In Advanced and Emerging Economies Alike, Worries About Job Automation," Pew Research Center, September 13, 2018, https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/09/13/in-advanced-and-emerging-economies-alike-worries-about-job-automation/.

for human labor in a wide range of occupations, industries, and geographies. One may easily imagine a future where this substitution occurs on so large a scale that the demand for human labor in the economy is exponentially reduced.

Yet regardless of what actually transpires, the extreme version of the technological unemployment thesis—made vivid by alarmist prophecies about a robot revolution ushering in a dystopian future where all jobs performed by humans are rendered obsolete—need not be borne out in order to validate the significance of the changing nature of work. In all likelihood, the actual impacts of automation and AI on the labor market will occupy some type of middle ground between the two extremes of the views that I have outlined.

But whether one leans towards technological optimism or pessimism, society must be proactive from a policymaking standpoint. Even if technology makes the proverbial pie bigger and creates new and better jobs, not all workers will stand to benefit immediately or equally. The long run may have ultimately proved the Luddites wrong, but as Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo note, "the long run was very long indeed"—the jobs of skilled artisans *did* vanish in the Industrial Revolution, and real blue-collar wages in Britain almost halved between 1755 and 1802.[134] Similarly, automation and AI may very well raise productivity and living standards overall, but its impacts will not be distributed evenly in the short-term: jobs growth may be concentrated in specific geographies, and the new jobs that are created will likely demand very different

[134] Real blue-collar wages would recover their 1755 level only 65 years later, in 1820. See: Banerjee and Duflo, *Good Economics for Hard Times*, 230.

skillsets.[135] The definition of "technological unemployment" that I will use going forward, therefore, incorporates not only the *possibility* of mass joblessness but also the *inevitability* of widespread frictional unemployment.

In sum, the mere uncertainty that the increased adoption of automation and AI in the workplace promises to generate should encourage proactivity in terms of policymaking. But technology is only one dimension of the problem: we must also consider how structural changes to the labor market have made jobs increasingly scarce and insecure.

2. The Emergence of the "Precariat"[136]

Even as postindustrial countries across the world, including the United States, enjoy historically-high rates of employment,[137] we have seen significant changes in the type of work and the quality of jobs that people perform. Official employment statistics belie the fact that many workers have been forced into the gig economy and other nonstandard work arrangements just to get by—for more and more people, the experience of pervasive insecurity has become a fact of life.

Neoliberal desires to strengthen market-based freedoms are partly responsible for the increasing share of jobs in our economy that deviate from the

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[135] Mark Muro, "Countering the Geographical Impacts of Automation: Computers, AI, and Place Disparities," Brookings Institution, February 14, 2019, https://www.brookings.edu/research/countering-the-geographical-impacts-of-automation-computers-ai-and-place-disparities/.

[136] The term "precariat" is a portmanteau of the words "precarious" and "precariat," coined by the British economist and sociologist Guy Standing. See: Standing, *The Precariat.*

[137] A May 2019 cover story in *The Economist*, citing the United States' official unemployment rate of 3.6 percent, the lowest in half a century, proclaimed that "the rich world is enjoying an unprecedented jobs boom." See: "The Great Jobs Boom," *The Economist*, May 23, 2019, https://www.economist.com/leaders/2019/05/23/the-rich-world-is-enjoying-an-unprecedented-jobs-boom.

traditional model of standard employment. As I showed in Chapter One, neoliberal policymaking is predicated on the idea that governments must preserve robust economic freedoms, such as greater labor flexibility, in order to maximize productivity and growth. "Greater labor flexibility," however, may just as well be a euphemism for "greater worker insecurity." Neoliberal economists have advocated for the ability of companies to fire workers more easily; to adjust wages (particularly downwards) in response to changes in demand; and to move employees around and change job structures with minimal friction or cost.[138]

As labor markets have become more and more flexible, the share of people in nonstandard work arrangements has multiplied accordingly. Every year, almost 45 percent of American workers leave their job, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.[139] Jobs growth is now concentrated in "jobs that move work beyond the boundary of the firm"[140]—since 2005, almost all of the net employment growth in the United States has occurred in nonstandard work arrangements.[141] Although these arrangements comprise any number of different manifestations, from high-skill freelancing to low-wage service work,[142] the most rapid jobs growth has occurred in the "gig economy," so-called for how it connects customers and workers through online intermediaries such as Uber,

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[138] Standing, *The Precariat*, 6.
[139] The annual total separations (including quits, layoffs, discharges, and other separations) rate for 2018 was 44.3 percent. See: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey News Release," March 15, 2019, https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/jolts_03152019.htm.
[140] Gretchen M. Spreitzer, Lindsey Cameron, and Lyndon Garrett, "Alternative Work Arrangements: Two Images of the New World of Work," *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior* 4, no. 1 (March 2017): 474.
[141] Spreitzer *et al.*, "Alternative Work Arrangements," 475.
[142] Spreitzer *et al.*, "Alternative Work Arrangements," 474.

DoorDash, and TaskRabbit, for the performance of specific "gigs." These gigs are invariably short-term commitments; they sometimes last just a matter of minutes.

Of course, not all workers experience nonstandard work arrangements as precarious. In theory, greater labor flexibility can be mutually beneficial to both the employer and the employee. Supporters of the gig economy claim that gig work makes workers "flexible entrepreneurs" by affording them the freedom to choose when, how, and for whom they would like to work.[143] Indeed, there is research to suggest that workers who enter nonstandard work arrangements by choice actually have positive experiences. These workers tend to be highly-educated; they boast specialized skillsets that are in high demand or in short supply, leading employers to compete for their talent; and their high human capital gives them the ability to shape the work conditions they desire, or even to work from the comfort of their homes.[144] For these workers, opting out of standard employment and into gig work simply reflects their desire to achieve better work-life balance, or to maximize control over the schedule, content, and setting of their work.

However, the vast majority of workers enter into nonstandard work arrangements out of necessity rather than choice. They do not experience the greater labor flexibility promised by the gig economy as more occupational freedom or meaningful self-employment, but as a denial of the traditional rights and benefits that workers enjoy. As Katrina Forrester has noted, gig workers

[143] Forrester, "What Counts as Work."
[144] Spreitzer *et al.*, "Alternative Work Arrangements," 485.

share little in common with the ideal of the entrepreneur, except for the fact that they must also bear significant risks. They enjoy very few of the benefits and protections attached to standard employment: in general, they have no vacation time or any other kind of paid leave, no overtime pay, and no protection from harassment; they have neither the right to belong to an union nor to organize one; and they do not receive employer contributions to pensions or social insurance.[145] Often, gig workers aren't even entitled to the minimum wage.[146] And although gig workers are free to choose their hours of work, they have no actual guarantee *of work*. Companies retain the discretion to contract out as much or as little work out as they wish (after all, most employers in the gig economy need not compete for talent), creating uncertainty for workers about the amount and the timing of their pay.[147]

The insecurity of gig work derives primarily from the fact that gig workers are classified as "independent contractors," rather than as the "employees" of any single organization. Companies exploit this classification to drive down their cost structure and avoid responsibility for social insurance.[148] And although workers are theoretically free to seek out work from as many companies as they wish, they usually depend on just one or two large companies

[145] Forrester, "What Counts as Work."
[146] Forrester, "What Counts as Work."
[147] Spreitzer *et al.*, "Alternative Work Arrangements," 485.
[148] Some argue that the classification of gig workers as "independent contractors" rather than "employees" should be interpreted as a *mis*-classification. A number of legal challenges to this definition have recently been advanced, although companies and platforms have naturally attempted to resist these changes because of the economic incentives at stake. See, for a notable example: Dynamex Operations West, Inc. v. Superior Court of Los Angeles County, 4 Cal. 5th 903 (2018), a recent decision handed down by California's Supreme Court, which made it much more difficult for companies to designate gig workers as independent contractors.

for their income. Thus, although gig workers are accorded the legal status of "independent contractor," they remain, for all intents and purposes, under the tight managerial control of an employer—the gig economy simply conceals the power differential that is inherent in the employment relationship. As Forrester summarizes, "the dystopian promise of the gig economy is that it will create an army of precarious workers for whose welfare employers take no responsibility."[149]

However, the gig economy is by no means unique in how it has fundamentally altered employment relations and introduced insecurity as a fact of life for many workers. A similar example exists in the form of "zero-hour" contracts, which have proliferated in the United Kingdom and which do not obligate employers to provide their workers with a minimum number of working hours.[150] Increasingly, even workers in standard employment must assume the risks that employers (and, to an extent, the government) used to absorb. Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics show that union membership, especially in private-sector industries, has declined steadily since 1983. Unions, with less bargaining power, have found it increasingly difficult to secure the types of benefits and protections in collective bargaining agreements that characterized standard employment during the peak of embedded liberalism.[151]

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[149] Forrester, "What Counts as Work."
[150] Colin Crouch, "A Long-Term Perspective on the Gig Economy," *American Affairs* 2, no. 2 (Summer 2018).
[151] The union membership rate declined from 20.1 percent in 1983 to 11.1 percent in 2015. See: Megan Dunn and James Walker, "Union Membership in the United States," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, September 2016, https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2016/union-membership-in-the-united-states/pdf/union-membership-in-the-united-states.pdf.

In virtually every sector of the labor market across the United States, it is possible to identify the reduction of labor rights, the erosion of job security, and a general "undertow of anxiety" affecting the middle-class.[152] Recent news articles have highlighted that even skilled workers in some of the United States' hottest labor markets have found it difficult to find work after losing their jobs.[153] Among those who are employed, one in four report having unpredictable work schedules that often cause harmful repercussions for their family lives, and one in five say that they want to work more hours.[154] And according to a 2019 report by the Federal Reserve, nearly 40 percent of adults are living so precariously that that they would find it difficult to pay for an unexpected emergency expense as small as $400.[155]

A troubling fact, however, is that jobs reports and employment statistics obscure this reality. Although the United States' official unemployment rate has hovered at around 3.5 percent since April 2019,[156] this measurement does not capture the millions of Americans who are working part-time or in temporary jobs, nor does it account for discouraged workers who have given up on an active job search—working even just one hour during the week of the Labor Department's employment survey disqualifies somebody from appearing in the

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[152] Patricia Cohen, "Lots of Job Hunting, but No Job, Despite Low Unemployment," *New York Times*, October 31, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/31/business/economy/long-term-unemployed.html.
[153] Cohen, "Lots of Job Hunting, but No Job, Despite Low Unemployment."
[154] Cohen, "Lots of Job Hunting, but No Job, Despite Low Unemployment."
[155] Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, *Report on the Economic Well-Being of U.S. Households in 2018* (May 2019), 2.
[156] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Labor Force Statistics from the Current Population Survey," February 1, 2020, https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/LNS14000000.

jobless category.[157] Furthermore, the Bureau of Labor Statistics has readily admitted that "government data sources have difficulty counting how many gig workers there are,"[158] since some gig workers moonlight in order to supplement their income, while others may not be captured in official employment statistics at all.[159]

All of these factors—the pursuit of greater labor flexibility, the rise of nonstandard work arrangements, and the decline of standard employment—have contributed to the dissolution of the rigid class structure that provided the basis for industrial society (what some have termed the end of the working class).[160] In its place, the "precariat"—a new social class consisting of millions of workers or would-be workers, united only by the knowledge that their employment is insecure—has emerged.

3. More "Good" Jobs

3a. Teach a Man to Fish…

Multiple policy recommendations have been proposed in response to the changing nature of work, each with their respective strengths and limits. I begin by examining the "good jobs" approach—the idea that we should respond to the problem of increased worker insecurity by expanding opportunities for

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[157] Cohen, "Lots of Job Hunting, but No Job, Despite Low Unemployment."
[158] Elka Torpey and Andrew Hogan, "Working in a Gig Economy," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, May 2016, https://www.bls.gov/careeroutlook/2016/article/what-is-the-gig-economy.htm.
[159] Part of this difficulty arises from the fact that there is still no official definition of the "gig economy," or even of what counts as a "gig."
[160] See, for example, Brink Lindsey, "The End of the Working Class," *The American Interest* 13, no. 3, August 30, 2017.

productive employment and promoting the creation of more good jobs in the economy. I then turn to calls for the implementation of a basic income.

First, there are many different definitions of a "good job" in common circulation. Gretchen Spreitzer *et al.*, for example, identify three key categories—economic security, purposefulness, and supportive work arrangements—that must be fulfilled in order for humans to experience work as productive, satisfying, and sustained over time.[161] Dani Rodrik and Charles Sabel, meanwhile, concede that the definition of a "good job" is "necessarily slippery"[162]—constantly evolving, heavily context-dependent, and often regulated by individual preferences—due to the pace of technological change as well as the high level of differentiation between regional labor markets. Nevertheless, they highlight some guiding preconditions: they propose that a good job entails "stable, formal-sector employment that comes with core labor protections"; that it "enables at least a middle-class existence, by a region's standards"; and that, more broadly, it provides workers "with clear career paths, possibilities of self-development, flexibility, responsibility, and fulfillment."[163]

Rodrik and Sabel argue that governments must take an active role in promoting the creation of good jobs. Their view arises out of the recognition that a failure to generate enough good jobs in any particular community can have significant economic, social, and political costs. Research has demonstrated that people in communities where middle-class jobs are scarce may experience not

[161] Spreitzer *et al.*, "Alternative Work Arrangements," 490-492.
[162] Dani Rodrik and Charles Sabel, "Building a Good Jobs Economy," (working paper, HKS no. RWP20-001, November 2019): 2.
[163] Rodrik and Sabel, "Building a Good Jobs Economy," 2-3.

only the pain of economic inequality and exclusion, but also poor social outcomes (in areas like health, education, and crime) and political discord (which nurtures nativist and populist movements, as well as a general disenchantment with democratic institutions).[164] Conversely, good jobs tend to reverse these consequences and boast enormous positive externalities—but private employers fail to take these external costs and benefits into account, unless impelled to do so by the government.[165] As a result, Rodrik and Sabel argue that creating more good jobs in society should seem "almost self-evidently an urgent political task."[166]

Though Rodrik and Sabel focus primarily on the social benefits that accrue from an abundance of good jobs, other writers have emphasized the individual benefits that workers obtain. Russell Muirhead, for example, argues that performing meaningful, rewarding, and gratifying work enables individuals to flourish—to develop their basic human capacities, to fulfill their potential, and to contribute to society. He upholds an ideal of "fitting work" that seeks to reconcile the tension between social fit (defined as "the alignment of our aptitudes with the tasks society brings into being") and personal fit (defined as "what individuals need to develop their capacity and potential").[167]

Muirhead describes work as a "practice," a complex, socially-established activity with internal standards of quality that are taught and enforced by a

[164] Rodrik and Sabel, "Building a Good Jobs Economy," 7.
[165] Rodrik and Sabel, "Building a Good Jobs Economy," 7.
[166] Rodrik and Sabel, "Building a Good Jobs Economy," 8.
[167] Muirhead, *Just Work*, 170.

community of practitioners,[168] to show how it may be experienced as intrinsically worthwhile or fulfilling. Viewed in this way, work confers "internal goods" that cultivate the skills and habits of mind associated with mastery of certain tasks, and which enable greater appreciation of the practice overall.[169] Not all jobs have the same potential to deliver these internal goods—some forms of work, such as domestic service, are so misaligned with Muirhead's description of work as a practice that they "[violate] what democratic citizens take themselves to be fitted to."[170] For Muirhead, therefore, the appropriate subject of concern is the *quality* of work that people perform; a just distribution of jobs should not only serve the demands of society at large, but also respect how individual workers fit with their particular jobs.

Samuel Arnold offers another way to define a "good job" besides how it "fits" the worker. In his article "The Difference Principle at Work,"[171] he argues that John Rawls' difference principle[172] governs the division of labor and forbids steep occupational inequalities in the "powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of responsibility and authority" (PPO) that different jobs confer upon workers.[173] In other words, Arnold argues that only certain offices and positions involve work that is sufficiently complex to enable people to exercise responsibility and authority on the job. Workers who occupy these positions of

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[168] Muirhead, *Just Work*, 155.
[169] Muirhead, *Just Work*, 156.
[170] Muirhead, *Just Work*, 72.
[171] Arnold, "The Difference Principle at Work."
[172] The difference principle holds that "social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest expected benefit of the least advantaged and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity." See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), 72.
[173] Arnold, "The Difference Principle at Work," 95.

responsibility and authority are able to develop their capacities for self-governance and social fluency through their work, unlike workers who toil in menial, unfulfilling jobs. As such, Arnold argues that the inegalitarian distribution of these positions is unjust according to widely accepted Rawlsian premises.

For Arnold, the value of a job can be objectively quantified based upon its potential to enable the worker to develop their capacities, rather than how "meaningful" or "interesting" it is (concepts which he argues are, by definition, ineliminably subjective and vary widely in their interpretation).[174] And although occupational inequalities may obtain between two jobs "insofar as they convey unequal packages of the primary goods of authority, responsibility, and complexity,"[175] there is not necessarily a simple correlation between a job's value (in the narrow Rawlsian sense) and a job's income level or status—"whether a worker wears a blue collar, a white collar, or a pink collar, her job might be deeply complex and richly larded with responsibility and authority."[176] As a result, Arnold concludes that eliminating occupational inequalities may simply involve flattening workplace hierarchies and democratizing workplace governance so that all workers have their fair share of authority, responsibility, and job complexity.[177]

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[174] Arnold, "The Difference Principle at Work," 115.
[175] Arnold, "The Difference Principle at Work," 106.
[176] Arnold, "The Difference Principle at Work," 107.
[177] One way in which this idea has been promoted is through the concept of "workplace democracy," which calls for more employee participation and involvement in organizational decision-making. See, for example: Hélène Landemore and Isabelle Ferreras, "In Defense of Workplace Democracy: Towards a Justification of the Firm–State Analogy," *Political Theory* 44, no. 1 (2016): 53-81, or Alex Gourevitch, "The Limits of a Basic Income: Means and Ends of Workplace Democracy," *Basic Income Studies* 11, no. 1 (2016): 17-28.

What Rodrik and Sabel, Muirhead, and Arnold all agree on, however, is the idea that employment has a wide range of benefits for individuals and for society. As such, they each argue that the government should increase the supply and equalize the distribution of good jobs. In what follows, I offer two related objections to this argument. The first (which I take up in the next subsection) is that humans tend to value work for its socially-constructed extrinsic benefits, rather than for its internal goods or how it develops individual capacities; the second (which I develop more fully in Chapter Three) is that the so-called intrinsic benefits of work can also be accessed through engagement in non-work activities. Taken together, the two objections show that insofar as the "good jobs" approach assumes that work is essential to human flourishing, it promotes a paternalistic and restrictive conception of the good life that permits self-realization only through engagement in paid work.

3b. Just Work?

Through its insistence that the government must make targeted interventions in the productive structure of society to boost employment, the "good jobs" approach assumes that economic production is necessary and that work is essential to human flourishing. In this subsection, however, I aim to show that humans tend to view work as an extrinsically-valuable activity insofar as they privilege the access that work provides to income and social recognition. I begin by returning to my discussion in Chapter One of how wage labor became a social norm through incentives and imperatives. I then show that individuals often experience the harms of unemployment not as a direct result of their job

loss, but because of the stigmatization of unemployment and its relationship to social exclusion. Finally, I briefly discuss how the normative force of the work ethic has been destabilized by the recent proliferation of "bullshit jobs"[178] as well as by the disappearing relationship between working time and productivity.

First, the introduction and universalization of wage labor was not an inevitable outcome but a highly-contested process. Michael Denning has observed that unemployment has always preceded employment, "both historically and conceptually," since a system of wage labor could emerge only by displacing the wageless forms of economic activity that were common before industrialization.[179] As I showed in Chapter One, humans in preindustrial society subordinated work to a variety of non-economic factors, moderated their economic production according to the principle of use, and were often driven by "economically irrational" motives. The process of industrialization, itself contingent upon the invention of new technologies that redefined the possibilities of economic productivity, found stern resistance in the fact that humans, by nature, "simply [wish] to live as [they are] accustomed to live and to earn as much as is necessary for that purpose."[180] The consolidation of workers into factories was therefore achieved only through the "severe restructuring of working habits"—the imposition of rigorous "time-discipline"[181] and the inculcation of a moral duty to work.[182] Meanwhile, the failure of the

[178] See: David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory* (London: Penguin Books, 2018).
[179] Michael Denning, "Wageless Life," *New Left Review* 2, no. 66 (November/December 2010), 81.
[180] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 24.
[181] Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 57.
[182] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 25.

Speenhamland Law demonstrated that the universalization of wage labor depended upon able-bodied workers having no choice but to work in order to survive. As Denning puts it, "capitalism begins not with the offer of work, but with the imperative to earn a living."[183]

Furthermore, the reluctance that people have historically exhibited towards work is at odds with the mechanisms through which neoliberalism upholds paid employment as a normative expectation of individuals. Gorz points out that although neoliberalism presents work as an unequivocal good that all adults in society must engage in, its policies nevertheless rely on incentivizing work in order to ensure full employment.[184] If work was indeed an unequivocal good, and if humans internalized this fact, such incentives would seem to be unnecessary; for example, there would be no need to tie welfare benefits to a willingness to work. Therefore, the fixation of neoliberal policies on not "weakening the incentive to work" reveals an internal contradiction in its ideology: "So 'work' isn't actually so attractive, gratifying, satisfying, or integrating that you don't need to give people 'incentives' by setting benefit rates for the unemployed at a level below subsistence income."[185]

Of course, many people do genuinely enjoy their work (the lucky ones among us who "do what they love"). Many teachers, athletes, and entrepreneurs, for example, fall into this category. And there are some people who work even when they aren't compelled to by financial necessity—think of the super-rich

[183] Denning, "Wageless Life," 80.
[184] Gorz, *Reclaiming Work*, 98.
[185] Gorz, *Reclaiming Work*, 98.

who work long hours and take few holidays, often well past retirement age.[186] But these people form the exception to the rule; the reality is that most people do not work unless they must.[187]

Recent research on how individuals experience the nominal shift from unemployment to retirement also helps to shed light on how humans value work for its socially-constructed extrinsic benefits. As I discussed in Chapter One, the dominant sociological model of unemployment tends to reinforce the idea that employment is synonymous with a normal, healthy state of being, since those who are unemployed often experience the deprivation of essential psychological needs.[188] But a recent study found that unemployed people report a substantial increase in their life satisfaction when they formally retire, even if they experience no significant changes to their lifestyle (and only a nominal change in their employment status).[189] These findings demonstrate the extent to which unemployed persons profit when they are liberated from having to meet the social norm of having a job, suggesting that any negative harms of unemployment should not be viewed as the result of people being "deprived" of work, but instead attributed to society's stigmatization of unemployment.

Some might argue that the harms of unemployment have more to do with the loss of social connections that joblessness may entail, but this alternative

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[186] Alex Williams, "Why Don't Rich People Just Stop Working?" *New York Times*, October 17, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/17/style/rich-people-things.html.
[187] It is worth reemphasizing that I use "work" in a very narrow sense here to refer to paid work, in the form of standard employment or the nonstandard work arrangements that I have previously discussed.
[188] Frayne, *The Refusal of Work*, 106-7.
[189] Clemens Hetschko, Andreas Knabe, and Ronnie Schöb, "Changing Identity: Retiring From Unemployment," *The Economic Journal* 124, no. 575 (March 2014): 149-166.

explanation also underscores how we tend to value work for its extrinsic benefits. As I showed in Chapter One, work is one of the primary means through which individuals achieve social integration, especially given the erosion of social capital in the United States; as such, unemployment can often lead individuals to experience social exclusion. First, the reduction in disposable income associated with the loss of a job may create financial restrictions. Studies show that the unemployed participate in social and cultural activities less frequently than the employed—even with the benefit of increased free time, unemployed individuals with constrained financial resources may find it difficult to justify spending money to engage in leisure activities with their friends.[190] Additionally, unemployment may cause individuals to lose many of their daily social contacts, especially if they disassociate from former colleagues or co-workers. The stigmatization of unemployment and the loss of social connections may in fact have mutually reinforcing effects: for example, the internalization of negative affects like shame and worthlessness might lead unemployed individuals to isolate themselves from friends and family.[191] Therefore, I return to this discussion in Chapter Three to argue for a more pluralistic system of social recognition that promotes social integration through non-work activities.

Separately, our transition to a postindustrial economy and the increased adoption of automation and AI in the workplace has severed the relationship between working time and productivity. First, an increasing share of jobs in our economy now comprise (to use David Graeber's terminology) "bullshit jobs," or

[190] Pohlan, "Unemployment and Social Exclusion," 274-276.
[191] Pohlan, "Unemployment and Social Exclusion," 274.

jobs that make no meaningful contribution to society.[192] Graeber takes care to draw a distinction between "bullshit jobs" and "shit jobs": the former often comprise white collar, salaried jobs that pay well and offer excellent working conditions, while the latter tend to be blue collar menial jobs that pay by the hour and are held in low esteem.[193] In fact, many "bullshit jobs" accord with the definitions of a "good job" that I have previously discussed—Graeber emphasizes that "those who work bullshit jobs are often surrounded by honor and prestige; they are respected as professionals, well paid, and treated as high achievers—as the sort of people who can be justly proud of what they do."[194] In spite of their high remuneration, status, and security, however, "bullshit jobs" are defined by their pointlessness.

Graeber argues that swathes of workers in both the public and private sectors "spend their entire working lives performing tasks they secretly believe do not really need to be performed."[195] From the "box tickers" who exist only to process meaningless paperwork and comply with byzantine bureaucratic procedures[196] to the "taskmasters" whose roles consist entirely of assigning tasks to others and supervising work that needs no supervision,[197] more and more

[192] Graeber formally defines a "bullshit job" as "a form of paid employment that is so completely pointless, unnecessary, or pernicious that even the employee cannot justify its existence even though, as part of the conditions of employment, the employee feels obliged to pretend that this is not the case." See: Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 9-10.
[193] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 14-15.
[194] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 15.
[195] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, xv.
[196] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 45.
[197] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 51.

unnecessary jobs,[198] management hierarchies, and administrative procedures have been created just "in order for the wheels [of capitalism] to… keep on turning."[199]

Graeber argues that these "bullshit jobs" exist simply because economy policy is fixated on job creation as a top priority. As I showed in Chapter One, the neoliberal ideology of work is premised on the view that employment is an unequivocal good; it is concerned not with the *quality* of jobs, but with their *quantity*. For a paradigmatic example, Graeber cites the justification that then-President Obama gave for supporting private healthcare over a single-payer system in an interview with *The Nation*:

> Everybody who supports single-payer health care says, "Look at all this money we would be saving from insurance and paperwork." That represents one million, two million, three million jobs [filled by] people who are working at Blue Cross Blue Shield or Kaiser or other places. What are we doing with them? Where are we employing them?[200]

Obama's answer acknowledges not only that millions of jobs in medical insurance companies are redundant, but also that a single-payer healthcare system would cut costs, reduce unnecessary paperwork, and eliminate the "reduplication of effort by dozens of competing private firms."[201] However, Obama simultaneously argues that the benefit of the existing private healthcare

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[198] As Graeber quips, "It's not entirely clear how humanity would suffer were all private equity CEOs, lobbyists, PR researchers, actuaries, telemarketers, bailiffs, or legal consultants to… vanish. (Many suspect it might improve markedly.)" See: Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, xix.
[199] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 72.
[200] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 157. See: David Sirota, "Mr. Obama Goes to Washington," *The Nation*, June 26, 2006, https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/mr-obama-goes-washington/.
[201] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 157.

system is "precisely its inefficiency," insofar as that inefficiency enables the economy to retain millions of workers in (unnecessary) employment.[202]

Graeber emphasizes that although "bullshit jobs" are endemic to virtually all industries, they are especially prevalent in the knowledge and service sectors. Employment patterns have reflected our economy's increasing dependence on the provision of information and services rather than the production of material goods; in the last century, the number of professional, managerial, clerical, sales, and service workers in the United States has tripled, increasing from "one-quarter to three-quarters of total employment."[203] The proliferation of "bullshit jobs" will therefore only accelerate as we continue to automate away "productive" jobs. Of course, not all forms of knowledge and service work are useless: journalists, nurses, and teachers, for example, all serve valuable functions. But even these jobs, like virtually all jobs in the knowledge and service sectors, share the common theme of delivering an immaterial product, making it nearly impossible to measure labor productivity through working time.[204]

Finally, the magnified role of automation and AI in the workplace has confused the notion of individual output. After all, when human labor commingles with machine labor, calculating the value contributed by an individual worker to the overall product proves much more difficult. In most

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[202] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 157.
[203] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, xv.
[204] Think, for example, of the slide decks that management consultants deliver to their clients after a monthslong engagement, or the technical help that a customer service worker might offer you over the phone.

sectors of the economy, the value of a product now bears little relation to the time that workers take to produce it. The combination of these changes—the proliferation of "bullshit jobs," our transition to a postindustrial economy, and the increased adoption of automation and AI in the workplace—has therefore destabilized the normative force of the work ethic; no longer is work "the principal source of wealth, nor the number of hours worked its measure."[205]

As such, many thinkers have begun to argue that we should leave the world of work behind. If most people value work not as an intrinsic good, but for the access that it provides to income and social recognition; if full employment is no longer a prerequisite for economic growth and productivity; and if work is often experienced as precarious, physically-taxing, and emotionally-consuming, then we need not necessarily resist the encroachment of machines in the workplace. In fact, considered in the abstract, a fully automated workforce seems like a very attractive prospect. In an idealistic future, machines could emancipate humans from menial, banal, and dangerous jobs to pursue activities that were genuinely meaningful and rewarding.

But as some writers have pointed out, "there's no economic law ensuring that as technological progress makes the pie bigger, it benefits everyone equally."[206] As such, from the viewpoint of distributive justice, we must be cautious about the creep of technological unemployment in the absence of some mechanism for large-scale wealth redistribution. Additionally, society must

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[205] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 201.
[206] Amy Bernstein and Anand Raman, "The Great Decoupling: An Interview with Erik Brynjolfsson and Andrew McAfee," *Harvard Business Review* (June 2015), https://hbr.org/2015/06/the-great-decoupling.

ensure that the benefits of automation are shared equitably enough to sustain economic activity. Machines, after all, do not consume like humans do—a burger-flipping bot cannot enjoy a Big Mac, nor would a droid on the factory floor ever desire to purchase the iPhone that it assembles. In order to maintain demand and consumption, humans will have to retain the discretionary income and purchasing power to make economic choices. Many believe that simply handing consumers money (for free) might be the answer.

4. The Case for a Basic Income

4a. Give a Man a Fish…

Enthusiasm for the implementation of a basic income[207] has surged in recent years, moving it from the fringes to the mainstream of political discourse in the United States. Its support has been drawn from both the radical left and the neoliberal right—historically, thinkers as diverse as Martin Luther King, Jr.[208] and Friedrich Hayek[209] have embraced the idea of basic income. Recently, it has been conceived as a response to the changing nature of work—advocates of basic income point to the instability of the labor market, the rise of the gig economy, and the emergence of the "precariat" as reasons to welcome the implementation of basic income. Furthermore, many argue that in view of the increased adoption

[207] A note on terminology: although I use the term "basic income" in this thesis, a variety of other terms referring to the same idea, including citizen's income, citizen's basic income, universal basic income, and basic income guarantee, are in common circulation.
[208] Karl Widerquist, "Three Waves of Basic Income Support," in *The Palgrave International Handbook of Basic Income*, ed. Malcolm Torrey (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 35.
[209] Miranda Perry Fleischer and Otto Lehto, "Libertarian Perspectives on Basic Income," in *The Palgrave International Handbook of Basic Income*, ed. Malcolm Torrey (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 440.

of automation and AI in the workplace, a basic income would enable individuals to withdraw from the labor market without significantly disrupting overall levels of productivity—in this sense, robots would solve the problem of Speenhamland.[210]

Given the current groundswell of interest that it has enjoyed, I seek to evaluate a basic income in light of the demands of justice. First, I offer a brief history of basic income. Then, after assessing its potential benefits, I argue for its implementation to the extent that large-scale wealth redistribution would be a necessary component of reform. However, I also seek to show the limits of basic income from the viewpoint of gender inequality and social recognition. Leaning on the recognition theories of Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth, and Nancy Fraser, I argue that the implementation of basic income, if pursued as a standalone policy, may in fact lead to undesirable outcomes that contradict its fundamental intentions.

First, although its most recent wave of support began to gather momentum only around 2010, the idea of basic income is nothing new. Social welfare policies that share commonalities with basic income can be traced as far back as ancient Greece.[211] Thomas Paine offered the first proposal for something that fits our modern definition of basic income in 1797 in his famous pamphlet *Agrarian Justice*, which argued for a system of universal social insurance

[210] The Speenhamland Law, as I discussed in Chapter One, guaranteed workers a universal income floor regardless of the wages that they actually earned. Speenhamland failed miserably—because it removed any incentives for workers to satisfy their employers, the productivity of labor plummeted after the law's passage.
[211] Widerquist, "Three Waves of Basic Income Support," 31.

financed by taxes on land rents that included large "stakeholder" grants for young adults when they reached maturity.[212] Meanwhile, there have been at least two prior waves of support for fully-developed proposals resembling basic income, first in the early 20th century, and then again in the 1960s and 1970s,[213] although, technically speaking, much of the second wave of support for basic income took the form of support for a Negative Income Tax (NIT).[214]

Recently, the left and the right have proposed competing visions of basic income, which (unsurprisingly) differ dramatically. The appeal of basic income for many on the conservative right is that it would function as a replacement for all other forms of social insurance—the state could withdraw all the various complex programs (pensions, tax credits, Social Security, Medicare, Medicaid, unemployment support, child benefits…) that it currently provides, in effect dismantling the entire welfare state and offering a single payment, basic income, in its stead.[215] As a result, it would require no additional funding, for it could be financed in its entirety by the roughly $2.7 trillion that the United States already spends on social insurance each year.[216] However, the right's vision of a basic income has dystopian implications: it presents the "nightmarish vision of a state

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[212] Elizabeth Anderson, *Private Government: How Employers Rule Our Lives (and Why We Don't Talk about It)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 28.
[213] Widerquist, "Three Waves of Basic Income Support," 31.
[214] A NIT involves the government setting a minimum annual income figure: a household that earned under that figure would receive a payment from the state in the amount necessary for that household to reach the minimum figure; a household that earned over that figure would pay taxes according to their level of income. NIT proved popular with the public—in fact, in 1972, the United States Senate was ten votes away from passing President Richard Nixon's Family Assistance Plan, a watered-down version of NIT, which would have paid every qualifying family $1,600 (about $11,000 in today's money) per year. See: John Lanchester, "Good New Idea," *London Review of Books* 41, no. 14 (July 2019).
[215] Lanchester, "Good New Idea."
[216] Lanchester, "Good New Idea."

which has retreated from many of its core functions and… taken up the posture of a permanent shrug"—a state which, having ostensibly discharged its welfare obligations through its provision of a basic income, no longer holds itself accountable for meeting its citizens' needs.[217]

For the purposes of this thesis, I will therefore specify my study on the left's vision of a basic income, which envisions a more active government. I proceed from the following definition, as argued for by Philippe Van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght: A basic income has four distinguishing features: (1) it is paid in cash rather than in the form of goods and services; (2) it is paid to individuals, rather than to households; (3) it is paid universally, rather than being subject to an income or means test; and (4) it is not tied to an obligation that the recipient work or be willing to work.[218] Additionally, unlike the right's vision of basic income, it would exist in addition to much of the United States' existing social safety net. And although nothing in the above definition entails that it be a specific amount, I have in mind a basic income that is apportioned generously enough so as to free recipients from the constraints of the labor market; rather than being forced to accept any work on any terms out of sheer financial necessity, individuals would be more free to choose jobs that they genuinely enjoyed, or even to refuse work altogether.[219]

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[217] Lanchester, "Good New Idea."
[218] Philippe Van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght, "Basic Income: The Instrument of Freedom," *Christen-Democratische Reflecties* 4, no. 1 (March 2016): 107-108.
[219] Andrew Yang's proposed Freedom Dividend of $1,000 per month for every American citizen over the age of 18 would, for example, fit this description. See: "The Freedom Dividend, Defined," Yang 2020, accessed March 1, 2020, https://www.yang2020.com/what-is-freedom-dividend-faq/.

Many of its proponents point to a basic income as a liberatory scheme that would increase the effective freedom of individuals. Among other things, a basic income would provide freedom from psychological and practical insecurity, from the often humiliating and convoluted process of applying for means-tested benefits, and from the need to work in order to survive.[220] Additionally, because a basic income would be addressed to all individuals, its receipt would not be accompanied by the stigmas associated with welfare dependency today. In Chapter One, I discussed how neoliberal welfare policies and job search assistance programs stigmatize their beneficiaries. By contrast, Philippe Van Parijs and Yannick Vanderborght note that a basic income would preserve the dignity of those who depend on social insurance as their main source of income, since "society [would] no longer [be] visibly divided between the needy and the others, and there is nothing humiliating about receiving a basic income granted to all members of society."[221]

Supporters of a basic income also readily anticipate the many potential objections to its implementation, the most common of which is the "fairness objection."[222] The "fairness objection" holds that the government should not permit able-bodied people who simply prefer not to work, like Rawls' example of "those who surf all day off Malibu," to live off of the labor of their fellow citizens.[223] Such an objection is obviously less tenable in the light of

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[220] Lanchester, "Good New Idea."
[221] Van Parijs and Vanderborght, "Basic Income: The Instrument of Freedom," 112.
[222] Muirhead provides an example of such an objection. He states that a willingness to work is fundamental to the reciprocity that defines the social contract: "No one… has a right to a leisured life that is funded by fellow citizens." See: Muirhead, *Just Work*, 18.
[223] Rawls writes: "Those who are unwilling to work would have a standard working day of extra leisure, and this extra leisure itself would be stipulated as equivalent to the index of primary goods

technological change; today's Malibu surfers would be living off of the labor of robots more than they would be exploiting their fellow citizens if we subsidized their lifestyles. However, a number of justifications that do not depend on technological productivity—including arguments that a basic income should be awarded on the grounds of citizenship,[224] out of egalitarian concerns,[225] or based upon communitarian principles[226]—have also been invoked. For the sake of brevity, I will focus on just one, which is premised on the conception of jobs as scarce assets.[227]

Van Parijs argues that the "fairness" objection relies upon the assumption that we live in a *Walrasian* economy, *i.e.*, an economy in which the labor market, like any other market, tends to clear. In such an economy, provided that there are no institutional constraints (like union monopolies or minimum wage legislation), it is assumed that "anyone who wants a job and is qualified for it will get one at the standard rate for a given type of skill."[228] However, our economy today is inconsistent with Walrasian assumptions—as I have shown, due to the changing nature of work and the dearth of "good jobs" that conform to the model of

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of the least advantaged. So those who surf all day off Malibu must find a way to support themselves and would not be entitled to public funds." See: John Rawls, "The Priority of Right and Ideas of the Good," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 17, no. 4 (Autumn 1988): 257, footnote 7.

[224] See, for example: Claus Offe, "A Non-Productivist Design for Social Policies," in *Arguing for Basic Income: Ethical Foundations for a Radical Reform*, ed. Philippe Van Parijs (London: Verso Books, 1992).

[225] See, for example: John Baker, "An Egalitarian Case for Basic Income," in *Arguing for Basic Income: Ethical Foundations for a Radical Reform*, ed. Philippe Van Parijs (London: Verso Books, 1992).

[226] See, for example: Michael Freeden, "Liberal Communitarianism and Basic Income," in *Arguing for Basic Income: Ethical Foundations for a Radical Reform*, ed. Philippe Van Parijs (London: Verso Books, 1992).

[227] Philippe Van Parijs, "Why Surfers Should be Fed: The Liberal Case for an Unconditional Basic Income," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 20, no. 2 (Spring, 1991): 101-131.

[228] Van Parijs, "Why Surfers Should be Fed," 122.

standard employment, not all unemployment in the labor market is voluntary. Nor are all jobs created equal; even workers at the same company or in the same industry experience qualitative differences in how fulfilling, meaningful, and interesting they find their work. A "good job" therefore constitutes a scarce asset that not all in society are able to obtain.

Van Parijs consequently argues that when "good jobs" are scarce assets, the workers who occupy them appropriate *employment rents*. The concept of an employment rent refers to the difference between the value of a person's job (taking into account all the economic and non-economic benefits that one derives from it) and the value of their next-best option, *i.e.*, unemployment.[229] As such, there may still be employment rents even in the case of full employment, for such rents exist "whenever some people would like to do someone else's job at the going wage and are qualified for it"[230]—think of a gig worker who would prefer to have a full-time job but is unable to find one, for example. A basic income therefore amounts to a way of sharing among all the employment rents that would otherwise be monopolized by those in employment. As Van Parijs notes, in a non-Walrasian economy, choosing to work is tantamount to having an expensive taste for a scarce asset; those "who, for whatever reason, give up their share of that asset and thereby leave more of it for others, should not therefore be deprived of a fair share of its value."[231] In light of the disappearing relationship between working time and productivity, a basic income would distribute income in a way

[229] Van Parijs, "Why Surfers Should be Fed," 124.
[230] Van Parijs, "Why Surfers Should be Fed," 127.
[231] Van Parijs, "Why Surfers Should be Fed," 109.

that corresponds "to the volume of wealth socially produced and not to the volume of work performed."[232]

4b. The Limits of Basic Income

In spite of the many benefits that I have enumerated regarding the implementation of a basic income, there are two related limits that I argue must be taken into account if basic income is pursued as a standalone policy (*i.e.*, if a basic income is not accompanied by recognition-based remedies). First, a basic income would risk reinforcing existing inequalities because it would not address the gender division of unpaid and unrecognized reproductive labor, even if it enabled both men and women to more easily exit the labor market. Additionally, a basic income would not compensate for the many non-economic benefits that are attached to employment; working individuals would still enjoy privileged access to social recognition, while the social stigmas surrounding unemployment and welfare dependency would persist.

First, the implementation of a basic income would not benefit men and women equally. As Kathi Weeks has noted, for most women, the working day does not always end when they leave the workplace, as it often does for men; it also includes time spent at home performing the care work and housework for which men usually do not share the same degree of responsibility.[233] Arlie Hochschild wrote extensively about this phenomenon in her influential book *The Second Shift*, in which she estimated that women worked an extra 15 hours per

[232] Gorz, *Reclaiming Work*, 89-90.
[233] Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 162.

week—or approximately one extra month of 24-hour days each year—compared to their husbands.[234]

This gender division of reproductive labor is rooted in the history of industrialization of many Western countries, including the United States. As Gornick and Meyers note, until the late 19th century, the vast majority of families in America lived agrarian lives; all family members, including men, women, and children, would participate in the household economy either by directly contributing to production or helping to sell goods in the market.[235] The rise of industrialization and the normalization of wage labor that I discussed in Chapter One, however, prompted the ideal of the nuclear family with a male breadwinner and a female homemaker to emerge.[236] In the last century, as women have entered the labor force in ever greater numbers, this traditional model has been replaced by a model of "highly gendered partial specialization" wherein men have maintained their responsibility as primary breadwinner while women have combined employment with reproductive labor in the home.[237] But although the model of partial specialization has seen women increase their ties to the labor market, men have not increased their contributions to work in the home at a corresponding rate.[238]

The extent to which women bear the burden of reproductive labor has decreased since Hochschild wrote *The Second Shift* in 1989. Still, according to a

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[234] Arlie Hochschild and Anne Machung, *The Second Shift*: *Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (New York: Viking Books, 1989).
[235] Janet C. Gornick and Marcia K. Meyers, *Families that Work: Policies for Reconciling Parenthood and Employment* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005), 25.
[236] Gornick and Meyers, *Families that Work*, 6.
[237] Gornick and Meyers, *Families that Work*, 5.
[238] Gornick and Meyers, *Families that Work*, 7.

recent American Time Use Survey released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in June 2019, although employed men and women spend similar amounts of time engaging in full- and part-time paid work (7.88 hours per day for men versus 7.31 hours per day for women),[239] women invest significantly more time in reproductive labor. On an average day, 49 percent of women do housework, such as cleaning or laundry, compared with only 20 percent of men.[240] Furthermore, women spend significantly more time performing these chores: on average, they spend 2.38 hours per day on household activities, while men spend only 1.32 hours.[241] Finally, while the average woman spends 1.84 hours per day caring for and helping household members as a primary activity, the average man spends less than 55 minutes per day doing the same.[242]

Furthermore, essentialized notions about gendered labor still persist. Overall, women now participate in the labor market at a rate roughly equal to men.[243] But women still experience pressure to sacrifice their careers to become homemakers. A number of studies have revealed that the pull of family-related factors leads many high-achieving women to quit their jobs in order to raise

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[239] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 4. Employed persons working and time spent working on days worked by full- and part-time status and sex, jobholding status, educational attainment, and day of week, 2018 annual averages," *American Time Use Survey*, June 19, 2019, https://www.bls.gov/news.release/atus.t04.htm.
[240] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "American Time Use Survey Summary," *American Time Use Survey*, June 19, 2019, https://www.bls.gov/news.release/atus.nr0.htm.
[241] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 1. Time spent in primary activities and percent of the civilian population engaging in each activity, averages per day by sex, 2018 annual averages," *American Time Use Survey*, June 19, 2019, https://www.bls.gov/news.release/atus.t01.htm.
[242] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 1."
[243] A recent jobs report released by the Labor Department revealed that women make up exactly half of the labor force. See: Jeffrey Sparshott, "Newsletter Special Edition: Now That's a Jobs Report," *Wall Street Journal*, December 6, 2019, https://blogs.wsj.com/economics/2019/12/06/newsletter-special-edition-now-thats-a-jobs-report/.

children while their husbands continue working.[244] For example, Pamela Stone and Meg Lovejoy have found that professional women are out of the labor force at a rate roughly three times that of their male counterparts and overwhelmingly cite "family responsibilities" as the reason.[245] Although the vast majority of the women that they interviewed expressed strong ambivalence about their decision to quit their jobs, their choices were ultimately influenced by workplace inflexibility, the demands that their children imposed, and the preferences of their husbands (who often were unwilling or unable to help with reproductive labor in the household).[246] Assuming these essentialized norms about gender persist, a basic income would only magnify the problem of the "second shift."

In addition to its problematic implications for the gender division of reproductive labor, the implementation of a basic income would also perpetuate the ideology of work as a source of social recognition. As a purely redistributive measure, it would ameliorate income and wealth inequality, but only through surface-level reallocations of money within the existing architecture of society; it would not transform the fundamental organization of our "disembedded" capitalist economy, nor its productive structures that generate joblessness and social inequality. Indeed, Alex Gourevitch and Lucas Stanczyk have noted that a large part of the appeal of basic income—and a crucial defense of its feasibility—rests in the fact that it "is compatible with leaving in place most of

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[244] See, for example: Pamela Stone and Meg Lovejoy, "Fast-Track Women and the "Choice" to Stay Home," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 596, no. 1 (November 2004): 62-83, and Youngjoo Cha, "Reinforcing Separate Spheres: The Effect of Spousal Overwork on Men's and Women's Employment in Dual-Earner Households," *American Sociological Review* 75, no. 2 (2010): 303–329.
[245] Stone and Lovejoy, "Fast-Track Women and the "Choice" to Stay Home," 63.
[246] Stone and Lovejoy, "Fast-Track Women and the "Choice" to Stay Home," 75-76.

the rest of the structure of contemporary capitalism."[247] But that is precisely the point, for the structure of contemporary capitalism valorizes work as a source of social recognition. Therefore, no matter the size of a basic income, those who are employed will still derive rights, recognition, identity, and belonging from their work, while the unemployed will still be denied access to social recognition.

Moreover, assuming the continued moralization of work, unemployment may still be stigmatized under a basic income scheme. Though Van Parijs, Vanderborght, and Freeden argue that a basic income would preserve the dignity of those who depend upon it by not targeting a specific class, its universality would not conceal its fundamentally redistributive nature; financed by direct taxation, it would still entail the transfer of money from those who work and earn a decent living, to those who do not. It would perhaps be less overt in its redistribution than current means-tested welfare programs, but there is no doubt that with basic income, "the state [still] takes from the one group and gives to the other."[248] As such, society would be mired in an unending redistributive cycle of dependence: the state would have to "make surface reallocations again and again," *ad infinitum*.[249] The end consequences of a basic income may therefore contradict its fundamental intentions; those who are unemployed might still appear "inherently deficient and insatiable, as always needing more and more," reinforcing their marginalization and stigmatization in society.[250]

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[247] Alex Gourevitch and Lucas Stanczyk, "The Basic Income Illusion," *Catalyst* 1, no. 4 (Winter 2018): 152.
[248] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 208.
[249] Nancy Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation," in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso Books, 2003), 76.
[250] Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics," 76.

As Nancy Fraser makes clear, redistribution implicates recognition in ways that can give rise to unintended consequences. Not only do redistributive claims affect the economic position of social actors, they also affect their standing and identities "when background patterns of cultural value skew the meaning of economic reforms."[251]

5. The Redistribution-Recognition Dilemma

The concept of recognition[252] has enjoyed widespread interest in recent decades, in academic discourse as well as in the public arena. Nancy Fraser has called the struggle for recognition the "paradigmatic form of political conflict in the late twentieth century," as the rise of identity politics has seen a variety of groups mobilize "under the banners of nationality, ethnicity, 'race', gender, and sexuality" to demand society's affirmation of their unique identities.[253] In this section, I apply existing theories of recognition to the domain of work in order to understand the limits of a basic income pursued as a standalone policy.

Drawing on the work of Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth, and Fraser,[254] I argue that even with the implementation of a basic income, an individual's ability

[251] Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics," 65.
[252] A note on terminology: my usage of the term "social recognition" to refer to the bundle of non-economic benefits that work provides is related to, yet independent of, the concept of "recognition" advanced here. Insofar as "recognition" regulates an individual's status in society, their ability to form an identity and have it affirmed by others, and their feelings of belonging, "recognition" is a prerequisite of "social recognition." Put more simply, "recognition" describes a process, while "social recognition" describes some of the benefits that individuals obtain from that process.
[253] Nancy Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition? Dilemmas of Justice in a 'Post-Socialist' Age," *New Left Review* 1, no. 212 (July/August 1995): 68.
[254] It is worth noting that the arguments of the three theorists that I draw on do differ slightly. Where Taylor and Honneth focus on how recognition enables individuals to achieve self-realization, Fraser is more concerned with how recognition allows individuals to participate

to achieve self-realization would still be contingent on their engagement in paid work. First, I give a brief overview of the importance of recognition and its connection to self-realization. I then show that recognition, as an intersubjective process, is regulated by prevailing social norms that constrain the possibilities of self-realization. Although I conclude that the implementation of a basic income would not itself address the harms of misrecognition, I accept the efficacy of basic income as a tool for wealth redistribution. Therefore, I invoke Fraser's ideal of *participatory parity* to show that a basic income would still be a necessary component of any program of reform to constitute a just society.

First, Taylor and Honneth argue that the importance of recognition derives from the fact that it is a prerequisite for self-realization. Taylor characterizes self-realization as the fulfilment of one's authentic, individualized identity. He specifies that such an identity can be discovered only from within:

> There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's life. But this notion gives a new importance to being true to myself. If I am not, I miss the point of my life; I miss what being human is for *me*.[255]

Discovering one's identity authentically therefore acquires "moral importance," insofar as it involves "a kind of contact with [one's self], with [one's] own inner nature" and resistance of the pressures of outward conformity.[256] In this sense,

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equally in public life. I will show, however, that both of these approaches prove helpful for my argument.

[255] Charles Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," in *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 30.

[256] Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 30.

self-realization involves an individual's ability to pursue their original and authentic conception of the good life, whatever that may be.

However, self-realization cannot be achieved internally. Taylor and Honneth emphasize that self-realization is a fundamentally social process, for it depends on *external recognition* of the articulation of one's *internally-discovered* identity. In other words, self-realization depends on reciprocal recognition among individuals. As Hegel illustrated in his master-slave dialectic, "recognition designates an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects in which each sees the other as its equal and also as separate from it… one becomes an individual subject only in virtue of recognizing, and being recognized by, another subject."[257] Similarly, Taylor points to the *dialogical* character of human life: he argues that we can become full human agents through exchanges with other individuals, based on whether (and how) they recognize our identities.[258] According to Taylor, one's self-realization is possible only when others in society recognize the legitimacy of one's lifestyle and life choices.

As such, the scope of self-realization in any particular society is necessarily bounded by its social norms. In light of a society's prevailing views about what is and is not acceptable to be, say, or do, individuals may achieve self-realization only to the extent that their vision of the good life corresponds with that which is implicitly endorsed by the state. As Honneth notes, "a person's 'honor,' 'dignity,' or 'status' refers to the degree of social esteem

[257] Nancy Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics," 10. See: Georg Wilhelm Fredrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit (Cambridge Hegel Translations)*, trans. Terry Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 102-135.
[258] Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 32.

accorded to his or her manner of self-realization within society's inherited cultural horizon."[259] As I showed in Chapter One, our "inherited cultural horizon" is circumscribed by the neoliberal ideology of work which conceives of work as an unequivocal good while stigmatizing unemployment and so-called welfare dependency. Since individuals must engage in paid employment in order to obtain recognition, self-realization is possible only for those who view work as a component of their original and authentic conception of the good life.

Consequently, society denies self-realization to the unemployed and those who choose not to work. These individuals instead suffer the grievous harm of misrecognition, which occurs when an individual tries to articulate their internally-discovered identity, but "the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves."[260] On Honneth's view, misrecognition not only may constrain an individual's freedom for action or speech, but also constitutes an "injurious [harm] because it impairs these persons in their positive understanding of self."[261] Taylor, meanwhile, argues that misrecognition can even have the effect of "saddling its victims with a crippling self-hatred."[262] The harms of misrecognition, therefore, correspond with the harms of unemployment that I discussed in Chapter One.

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[259] Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1996), 134.
[260] Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 25.
[261] Axel Honneth, "Integrity and Disrespect: Principles of a Conception of Morality Based on the Theory of Recognition," *Political Theory* 20, no. 2 (May 1992): 188-189.
[262] Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 26.

As a purely redistributive measure, a basic income would not broaden society's "inherited cultural horizon"; it would simply perpetuate the ideology of work as a source of social recognition. But if recognition is "not just a courtesy we owe people" but "a vital human need,"[263] it follows that society has the responsibility of ensuring, as much as possible, that all of its citizens have the equal opportunity to achieve self-realization according to their individual conceptions of the good life. As Honneth argues, "the justice or wellbeing of a society is proportionate to its ability to secure conditions of mutual recognition under which… individual self-realization, can proceed adequately," and so societies can purport to exist as legitimate ordering structures only to the extent that they are successful in securing such conditions.[264] I return to this discussion in Chapter Three, which argues for the adoption of a more pluralistic system of social recognition that enables self-realization through non-work activities.

However, Fraser's account of recognition shows how a basic income, despite its limits in expanding the scope of self-realization, would be a necessary component of any program of reform. In contrast to Taylor and Honneth, who focus on how recognition enables self-realization, Fraser argues that the importance of recognition derives from how it enables full and equal participation in public life. For Fraser, viewing recognition as a matter of justice means "examining institutionalized patterns of cultural value for their effects on the

[263] Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 26.
[264] Axel Honneth, "Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser," in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso Books, 2003), 173-4.

relative standing of social actors."[265] Fraser notes that reciprocal recognition obtains "if and when such patterns [of cultural value] constitute actors as *peers*, capable of participating on a par with one another in social life," *i.e.*, when a society realizes full *participatory parity*.[266] By contrast, misrecognition occurs when these patterns "constitute some actors as inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible, hence as less than full partners in social interaction."[267]

Even though the implementation of a basic income would not by itself address the status inequalities generated by the ideology of work, it would help individuals' to meet their basic financial needs and reduce the effects of socioeconomic inequalities. Fraser emphasizes that the inequitable allocation of economic resources and wealth impedes participatory parity as much as the existence of a status hierarchy.[268] Because an individual's ability to stand as a full member of society is partly regulated by whether they have the resources to pursue their conception of the good life and exercise their political voice, a basic income would help to prevent the "gross disparities in wealth, income, and leisure [that deny] some people the means and opportunities to interact with others as peers."[269]

In Fraser's view, only redistribution *and* recognition taken together would accomplish the ideal of participatory parity that she associates with justice, and it is this view that animates the program of reform that I propose in the next chapter.

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[265] Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics," 29.
[266] Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics," 29.
[267] Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics," 29.
[268] Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics," 49.
[269] Fraser, "From Redistribution to Recognition?" 36.

Conclusion

In this Chapter I have sought to review the problems affecting work today, articulate why a program of reform is necessary, and show the limits of some proposed policy responses. I first argued that our concern about the changes affecting work should extend beyond the fears of mass joblessness that the increased adoption of automation and AI in the workplace has generated. I showed that on the one hand, we should expand our definition of technological unemployment to include widespread frictional unemployment; on the other, we must also take into account the increasing scarcity of "good jobs" and insecurity of employment due to the rise of the gig economy and other nonstandard work arrangements.

I began by evaluating the "good jobs" approach, which holds that we should expand opportunities for productive employment and promote the creation of more "good jobs" in the economy. I argued that although the "good jobs" approach assumes that economic production is necessary and that work is essential to human flourishing, humans tend to value work primarily for its socially-constructed external benefits. I extend this argument in Chapter Three when I show that many of work's so-called intrinsic benefits can be accessed through engagement in non-work activities. Ultimately, I will show that the insistence of the "good jobs" approach on ushering individuals into employment promotes a paternalistic and restrictive conception of the good life that permits self-realization only through paid work.

Next, I evaluated the "basic income" approach, which holds that we should apportion regular unconditional cash payments to every individual in a society. Although I accepted the efficacy of basic income as a mechanism for large-scale wealth redistribution, I drew out its problematic consequences for gender justice and social recognition by leaning on the recognition theories of Taylor, Honneth, and Fraser.

The inadequacy of current approaches invites contemplation of how we might reshape work and its social meaning in order to constitute a just society. In Chapter Three, therefore, I propose the rough outlines of a program for reform.

Chapter Three: A Future of Work

Work takes all the time and with it one has no leisure for the republic and his friends.

—Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*[270]

Time is a game played beautifully by children.

—Heraclitus, *Fragments*[271]

In this chapter, I aim to show that a truly just strategy to address the problem of work must involve not only its *redefinition* and its *revalorization*, but also a *more expansive conception of the public good* that does not depend simply on the economic productivity flowing from paid work.

First, in order to ensure that the implementation of a universal basic income would not simply reinforce existing gender inequalities, I argue that we must redefine our social understanding of "work" to include reproductive labor in addition to paid employment. I suggest that one strategy to accomplish this redefinition is through the provision of high-quality, publicly-funded, and universally-accessible care options that reduce the care responsibilities of the family (*i.e.*, a system of universal child care). I show that such a strategy would increase the visibility of reproductive labor, transform our perceptions of its value, and help to ensure that its gender burden is more equitably borne.

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[270] Xenophon, *Oeconomicus*. Quoted in: Paul Lafargue, *The Right to be Lazy: And Other Studies*, trans. Charles H. Kerr (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Company, 1907), 61.
[271] Heraclitus, *Fragments: The Collected Wisdom of Heraclitus*, trans. Brooks Haxton (New York: Viking Books, 2001), 51.

Second, I argue that we must revalorize work in relation to non-work activities in order to separate work from being the dominant source of social recognition. I follow the arguments of Julie Rose to show that the equitable distribution of free time is itself a distinct concern of justice. Additionally, I show that the discretion inherent in the allocation of free time makes visible the value that different people ascribe to different activities according to their individual conceptions of the good life. Furthermore, I argue that non-work activities, through their promise of "internal goods," are comparable (if not superior) to work in how they enable individuals to achieve self-realization.

Finally, I argue that we must embrace a more expansive and nuanced understanding of the public good in order to promote a pluralistic system of social recognition. First, I show how GDP is an inadequate standard of measurement for economic (and overall) wellbeing in today's economy. Next, I argue that we must redefine GDP to account for the economic productivity flowing from reproductive labor. Lastly, I argue for the adoption of a "dashboard" concept of wellbeing. By measuring a holistic set of indicators in our government statistics, the state will expand the scope of self-realization and constitute a more just society.

1. Redefining Work

In this section, I argue for a redefinition of work that recognizes the value of reproductive labor as well as paid employment. I briefly explore how the Wages for Housework movement struggled against the historical misrecognition

of reproductive labor by demanding its remuneration before proposing the implementation of a system of universal child care.

1a. Wages for Housework?

The misrecognition of reproductive labor is inextricable from its historical gender division. As I have discussed in Chapter One, the normalization of wage labor relied upon the invisible contributions of women and children to the household economy, since few workers earned enough to support their families singlehandedly. But the identification of wage labor with the perception of economic independence, as well as society's subsequent valorization of employment, has meant that all forms of reproductive labor—from child care, to housework, to the long-term care of the elderly—are treated instrumentally. Although these activities are essential to the maintenance of households and the basic biological reproduction of society, Fraser notes that reproductive labor has historically been invalidated as "what must be sloughed off to become a breadwinner."[272]

As such, rather than being understood as work *per se*, reproductive labor has become naturalized as "women's work." The emergence of the ideal of the nuclear family with a male breadwinner and a female homemaker saw reproductive labor "transformed into a natural attribute of [women's] female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration, supposedly coming from the depth of [the] female character."[273] This transformation also served to

[272] Nancy Fraser, "After the Family Wage: Gender Equity and the Welfare State," *Political Theory* 22, no. 4 (November 1994), 605.
[273] Silvia Federici, "Wages Against Housework," in *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Oakland: PM Press, 2012), 16.

justify the unwaged nature of reproductive labor; housework became something that all women were expected to do—even something that all women were expected to *like* doing.[274]

The International Wages for Housework Campaign formed in the 1970s to organize resistance against the naturalization of reproductive labor by calling for its remuneration. First, the movement demanded recognition that housework was indeed work. In fact, the term "reproductive labor" was conceptualized and popularized by feminist scholars during this period as a strategy to define housework in relation to the Marxian notion of "productive labor." Scholars argued that "reproductive labor was indispensable to the ongoing reproduction and maintenance of the productive labor force" and should therefore be recognized as such.[275] Furthermore, the movement protested "the essentialized notions of gender that underlay why women did housework in the first place."[276] In the words of Silvia Federici, one of the leaders of the movement, "*just to want wages for housework means to refuse that work as the expression of [women's] nature*, and therefore to refuse precisely the female role that capital has invented for [women]."[277]

1b. The Case for a System of Universal Child Care

I adopt the "political perspective" of the Wages for Housework movement in my argument for the redefinition of work, if not the movement's

[274] Federici, "Wages Against Housework," 16.
[275] Mignon Duffy, "Doing the Dirty Work: Gender, Race, and Reproductive Labor in Historical Perspective," *Gender and Society* 21, no. 3 (June 2007), 315.
[276] Sarah Jaffe, "The Factory in the Family: The Radical Vision of Wages for Housework," *The Nation*, April 9, 2018, https://www.thenation.com/article/wages-for-houseworks-radical-vision/.
[277] Italicization per the original text. Federici, "Wages Against Housework," 18.

exact demands.[278] More specifically, I do not contend that reproductive labor performed in the household should receive a wage, since such a policy may risk simply extending the jurisdiction of the productivist values attached to work. I do, however, argue for the implementation of a system of universal child care that would provide high-quality, publicly-funded, and universally-accessible care options. I focus on child care instead of addressing reproductive labor more generally not only for simplicity's sake, but also because child care represents the single most time-consuming form of reproductive labor for women.[279]

At the outset, I acknowledge that options to outsource child care, such as through institutional care options or the hiring of domestic workers, do currently exist. Likewise, I acknowledge that care work, when performed outside the household, already receives a wage. Not only are the current options for child care unaffordable for many families, however, but care workers are also poorly remunerated and underappreciated. First, data show that nearly two-thirds of all American families, and 95 percent of all low-income families, spend more than 7 percent of their household income (the federal benchmark for affordability set by the Department of Health and Human Services) on child care.[280] The high costs of child care, however, do not translate to high pay for care workers. A recent report found that child care workers in the United States, 95 percent of whom are

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[278] Federici, "Wages Against Housework," 15-16.
[279] According to the most recent American Time Use Survey released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics in June 2019, women who engage in child care spend an average of 2.34 hours per day on the activity, almost as much time as all other forms of household activities combined (2.57 hours). See: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Table 1."
[280] Maura Baldiga, Pamela Joshi, Erin Hardy, *et al.*, "Child Care Affordability for Working Parents," Research Brief, Diversity Data Kids, November 2018, http://www.diversitydatakids.org/research-library/research-brief/child-care-affordability-working-parents.

female, receive a median hourly wage of $10.31, a pay rate which is almost 40 percent below the $17.00 median hourly wage of workers in other occupations.[281] Despite the importance of their work, child care workers are "among the country's lowest-paid workers, and seldom receive job-based benefits such as health insurance and pensions."[282] The system of universal child care that I propose would therefore seek to address these issues.

First, I argue that such a system of universal child care must provide high-quality care for it to be a feasible (or even desirable) alternative to care provided within the family. The definition of "high-quality" care is of course necessarily subjective and difficult to quantify. However, because quality of care is generally correlated with the higher remuneration of care workers, a lower ratio of children to care workers, and well-resourced facilities, I argue that attention to these factors, combined with the regular assessment of outcomes, would help to ensure that quality standards would be met.

Certainly, this would not be an inexpensive proposition. However, choosing to fund a system of universal child care publicly in spite of its high costs would elevate the social standing of care work by explicitly signaling its value. As Gornick and Meyers note, government policies can function to inaugurate social change by directly indicating what society values and is willing to invest in:

> Policies that support parents' choice to reduce working hours when their children are very young, for example, signal the value of

[281] Elise Gould, "Child Care Workers Aren't Paid Enough To Make Ends Meet," Issue Brief no. 405, Economic Policy Institute, November 5, 2015, https://www.epi.org/files/2015/child-care-workers-final.pdf.
[282] Elise Gould, "Child Care Workers Aren't Paid Enough To Make Ends Meet."

> caregiving work; policies that support this choice by fathers and mothers signal the equal rights and responsibilities of men and women; policies that socialize the cost of substitute child care signal a shared commitment to the wellbeing of children.[283]

In the same way that the public funding of primary and secondary school education communicates the value that society places on education in producing children who grow up to be well-adjusted and contributing members of society, the public funding of child care would recognize its equally important role in producing the same.

Additionally, publicly funding a system of universal child care would help to ensure that *all* households and individuals have access to high-quality care.[284] Following the logic of the Wages for Housework movement, ensuring universal access to high-quality child care would have important implications for the recognition of reproductive labor, even if not all families chose to take advantage of a system of universal child care. First, the increased visibility of care work in the public sphere would lead to increased recognition of reproductive labor as work. Second, since the choice to opt into or out of the system would be entirely discretionary, rather than influenced by socioeconomic circumstances, care work performed in the household would be viewed on a par with (remunerated) care work performed in the public sphere. Each would effectively be substitutable for the other (conceivably, many families might decide to take advantage of a system of public care only intermittently)—as

[283] Gornick and Meyers, *Families that Work*, 100.
[284] Some may argue that ensuring universal access to child care may encourage more people to opt into the system in order to work more. As I will show in the next section, however, it is the discretion inherent in an individual's allocation of free time (such as their choice to work) that makes visible the value they ascribe to different activities.

such, society would logically have to regard the homemaker and the care worker on equal terms.

Finally, the generous remuneration of child care work, combined with society's recognition of its value, would promote a more equitable gender division of reproductive labor. Studies have noted that men are less likely to enter female-typed occupations than women are to enter male-dominated jobs because norms of hegemonic masculinity discourage men from performing "women's work."[285] Similarly, attempts to encourage fathers to participate in a more equal burden of care work within the family, such as through paternal leave policies, have proved unsuccessful.

Additionally, in light of the persistent cultural expectation that men be their household's primary breadwinner, low pay also deters men from seeking and retaining employment as care workers. As Anca Gheaus notes, men, even if they may be inclined towards care work, "do not have the proper incentives to do so under the current social organization of care."[286] Adjusting these incentives by increasing the pay that care workers receive (so that they received comparable pay to schoolteachers, for example) would not only encourage men on an individual level to take up this work, but also gradually transform our perceptions of the value that we accord to care work and the gender norms that govern the division of reproductive labor. The hope, therefore, is that a more

[285] See, for example, Anna-Lena Almqvist, "Why Most Swedish Fathers and Few French Fathers Use Paid Parental Leave: An Exploratory Qualitative Study of Parents," *Fathering* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2008), 192-200.
[286] Anca Gheaus, "Arguments for Nonparental Care for Children," *Social Theory and Practice* 37, no. 3 (July 2011), 489.

equitable gender division of reproductive labor in the public sphere would translate to a more equitable gender division of reproductive labor in the private sphere.

Some may argue that it is inappropriate to socialize the costs of care work given the fact that parenting is ostensibly a private pursuit. The decision to become a parent by conceiving a child in the first place, such an argument goes, is a voluntary private choice, no different from the decision to go on a holiday; and just as it would be inappropriate to provide public funding for someone's plane ticket to Hawaii, it would be inappropriate to provide public funding for child care. But the benefits of high-quality child care extend beyond the immediate family. Society has a strong interest in effective parenting, which raises children to become productive, law-abiding citizens, able and inclined to respect the rights and interests of others. In this way, childrearing produces a necessary social good with positive externalities for society. Publicly funding a system of universal child care therefore recognizes our common interest in childrearing, and compensates for the fact that many in society (often men and husbands) reap the benefits of care work without bearing the costs.[287]

In sum, in this section I have argued for a redefinition of work that includes reproductive labor in addition to paid employment. First, I showed how the Wages for Housework movement struggled against the historical misrecognition of reproductive labor by demanding its remuneration. Next, I

[287] Daniel Engster, "The Place of Parenting within a Liberal Theory of Justice: The Private Parenting Model, Parental Licenses, or Public Parenting Support?" *Social Theory and Practice* 36, no. 2 (April 2010), 239.

argued for the implementation of a system of universal child care as a strategy to accomplish the redefinition of work. I showed that such a strategy would have a variety of benefits: it would elevate the social standing of reproductive labor by explicitly signaling its value, encourage the recognition of reproductive labor performed both in and out of the household as work, and ensure that the gender burden of this work is more equitably borne.

2. Revalorizing Work

In addition to redefining work, I argue that we must also revalorize work in relation to non-work activities to separate work from being the dominant source of social recognition. This argument has three steps: First, I present the arguments of Julie Rose to show how she has positioned the resource of "free time" as a distinct and worthy concern of distributive justice. Second, I show that guaranteeing all citizens their fair share of free time through the implementation of a basic income, insofar as such a guarantee would give people discretion over whether to work, play, or politic, would make visible the value that different people ascribe to different activities according to their individual conceptions of the good life. I ground this claim in commonly-accepted notions of what a liberal society should entail. Finally, I show that non-work activities are comparable, if not preferable, to work in how they enable individuals to achieve self-realization, highlighting the need for society to adopt a more pluralistic system of social recognition.

2a. "Hours For What We Will"

In their book *Discretionary Time*, Robert Goodin *et al.* make the case that because "time" is inherently egalitarian (everybody has 24 hours in a day), inherently scarce (nobody has more than 24 hours in a day), and a universal good (everybody needs time in order to do or become anything), it is a particularly apt "currency of egalitarian justice."[288] Many of the existing indicators of wellbeing that we rely on today, such as average life expectancy at birth or annual GDP, already incorporate a temporal dimension.[289] What Goodin *et al.* argue we ought to focus on, however, is the "just distribution of *control* over the resource of 'time.'"[290] The operative word, "control," hints at the important point—that our experience of time *varies qualitatively* according to how much autonomy we have over it.

As I showed in Chapter One, this variance can be traced to the introduction of the wage, which compelled workers to distinguish between their employer's time and their "own" time and created the "clear demarcation between 'work' and 'life'"[291] that Thompson identified as a feature of postindustrial society. However, the need to engage in paid work to satisfy financial needs is not the only external constraint that we face when managing our time; we must also satisfy household needs (humans generally have to spend at least a minimal amount of time engaging in reproductive labor) as well as bodily needs (humans

[288] Robert E. Goodin, James Mahmud Rice, Antti Parpo, and Lina Eriksson, *Discretionary Time: A New Measure of Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 4.
[289] Goodin *et al*., *Discretionary Time*, 4. See footnote 7.
[290] Goodin *et al*., *Discretionary Time*, 4.
[291] Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism," 93.

have to spend at least a minimal amount of time sleeping, eating, and engaging in other forms of personal care).[292] Only the time that remains after we have satisfied these basic needs can be appropriately regarded as "free time"—time over which we enjoy the autonomy to spend however we choose.

By and large, financial and household considerations are responsible for the inequitable distribution of free time, since the amount of time necessary to satisfy bodily needs is relatively consistent from person to person.[293] Where large inequalities in access to free time can and do obtain, however, is in the amount of time necessary to satisfy financial and household necessities. Given that people differ dramatically in their occupations, qualifications, and wage rates, the amount of time that people must spend in order to secure at least a minimally adequate income also differs dramatically.[294] Similarly, given that people differ in the number of dependents they are responsible for, the amount of time that people need to spend engaging in reproductive labor can also vary substantially. Accordingly, so long as people have differential earning potentials and different household obligations, different people will have access to vastly different amounts of free time.[295] The implementation of a basic income would therefore accomplish a more equitable distribution of free time for all citizens. As I discussed in Chapter Two, a basic income would allow individuals to meet their

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[292] Goodin *et al*., *Discretionary Time*, 4-5.
[293] Although different people may dedicate more or less time to sleeping, eating, or exercising, the time that each person strictly requires (as opposed, perhaps, to takes) in order to satisfy their bodily needs is about the same. See: Goodin *et al*., *Discretionary Time*, 35.
[294] Lucas Stanczyk, "Free Time and Economic Class," *Law, Ethics, and Philosophy* 5 (2017), 65.
[295] The observation that paid work and reproductive labor are necessary activities that both subtract from one's free time coheres with and supports the redefinition of work that I advanced in the preceding section.

basic financial needs and make the decision to work a discretionary one; individuals would be free to work less, or even to withdraw from the labor market and refuse work altogether.

Although it may seem readily apparent that some people in society have more free time than others, contemporary liberal theorists have largely neglected to examine whether such a distribution is just.[296] However, Julie Rose, drawing on the work of Goodin *et al.*, has recently argued that all citizens in society are entitled to a fair share of free time as a matter of justice. She notes that the *effective freedoms* principle—the principle that "citizens have legitimate claims to a fair share of the resources that are generally required to exercise their formal liberties and opportunities"[297]—is a foundational tenet of liberal egalitarian visions of justice. This principle derives from the fact that without the means to make effective use of one's nominal freedoms, those freedoms are of little worth;[298] as Isaiah Berlin has asked, "without adequate conditions for the use of freedom, what is the value of freedom?"[299]

The effective freedoms principle is usually applied to citizens' claims to material resources, but Rose argues that it should apply in the same way to free time. After all, in order to do "any of the things one is legally permitted to do, one

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[296] Julie Rose argues that contemporary liberal theorists have paid little attention to the distribution of free time because they assume the truth of the *time-money substitutability claim*, which holds that "realizing a just distribution of income and wealth is sufficient to ensure a just distribution of free time." Although this claim does not hold when individuals must work in order to obtain income and wealth, the implementation of a basic income would make meeting one's basic financial needs independent of the decision to work. See: Julie L. Rose, *Free Time* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 67.
[297] Rose, *Free Time*, 4.
[298] Rose, *Free Time*, 70.
[299] Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberty* ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 171.

generally requires some amount of both material resources and free time."[300] For example, all adult citizens possess the formal right to vote—but in order to make effective use of this right, one requires not only a form of transportation to get to the polls, but also enough free time in order to do so.[301] Therefore, Rose concludes that the resource of free time must be equitably distributed and available to all in society. As citizens, we have a just claim to "hours for what we will"—some portion of time each day over which we exercise meaningful control, to devote to any pursuits that we might choose.[302]

2b. In Search of the Good Life

Rose's discussion of the need to guarantee all citizens their fair share of free time is rooted in the recognition that individuals differ in their conceptions of the good life. After all, many people find leisure and non-work activities to be more enjoyable and interesting than work. Recent studies of individuals' affective experiences of various activities have found that respondents rank paid work and reproductive labor among the least enjoyable activities that they engage in; by contrast, the activities that people most enjoy include socializing with friends, relaxing, playing sports, exercising, and praying.[303] Given the option to reallocate their time, approximately 80 percent of Americans would prefer to spend more time with their family; approximately two-thirds would prefer to spend more time

[300] Rose, *Free Time*, 66.
[301] Julie L. Rose, "A Précis of *Free Time*," *Law, Ethics, and Philosophy* 5 (2017), 33.
[302] Rose, *Free Time*, 2.
[303] Rose, *Free Time*, 12.

with their friends; and almost three-quarters would prefer to spend more time in leisure activities.[304]

At the same time, there are some in society who prefer to work many hours and have little time for leisure (think, once again, of the super-rich who subscribe to the cult of overwork). For these people, the guarantee of free time may not change their leisure patterns at all; they may continue to work 100-hour workweeks, well past retirement age. But it should also be clear that many of these people *already* enjoy access to their fair share of free time. For example, one would hardly consider Elon Musk, the CEO of Tesla and SpaceX who boasts a net worth of more than $40 billion[305] and yet famously works up to 120 hours per week,[306] on a par with a single parent who commands low wages, works multiple jobs, and moonlights in the gig economy just to get by. Even if they were both to engage in the same number of hours of paid work each week, they would hardly enjoy access to the same amount of free time, for Elon Musk's paid work is discretionary in a way that the single parent's is not.[307] Musk is not contractually-obligated to work such long hours, nor would his standard of living decline if he were to stop working altogether.[308] On any given day, Musk possesses the free time (and the material resources) to engage in whatever

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[304] Tom W. Smith, "A Cross-National Comparison on Attitudes Towards Work by Age and Labor Force Status," Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, December 2000, 17–18.
[305] "Elon R. Musk," Bloomberg Billionaires Index, accessed February 15, 2020, https://www.bloomberg.com/billionaires/profiles/elon-r-musk/.
[306] Catherine Clifford, "Elon Musk: 'You're gonna go a little bonkers if you work 120 hours a week,'" CNBC, November 5, 2018, https://www.cnbc.com/2018/11/05/elon-musk-on-working-120-hours-a-week-youll-go-bonkers.html.
[307] Rose, *Free Time*, 43.
[308] Although I acknowledge that Musk may be beholden to shareholders, I would argue that he has the freedom to step down from his CEO responsibilities and stop working if he so chooses.

activities he so chooses; the single parent, by contrast, must work each day in order to meet their basic needs.[309]

Not all in society who prefer to work long hours are multibillionaires. The point, however, is that the discretion inherent in the allocation of free time makes visible the value that different people ascribe to different activities. Whether an individual chooses to dedicate their free time to work, to play, or to politicking, it is the very exercise of individual autonomy (in its truest sense, as the capacity to "live one's life according to reasons and motives that are taken as one's own and not the product of manipulative or distorting external forces")[310] *inherent in that choice* that confers value upon the end activity, which becomes an accessory to that individual's conception of the good life, whatever it may be.

Accordingly, I argue that the proper role of the state should be to promote a more pluralistic system of social recognition by revising its vision of the public good and incorporating a more diverse set of indicators in its official measurements.[311] Such a system of social recognition would enable all citizens to fulfil the vital human need of self-realization according to their individual conception of the good life. As Rose puts it, the state should "[provide] individuals with the resources they require to pursue their conceptions of the good" and "[give] individuals wider latitude to direct and lead their own lives as they see fit."[312] This conception of the role of the state is consistent with

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[309] Rose, *Free Time*, 43.
[310] "Autonomy in Moral and Political Philosophy," Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, accessed February 15, 2020, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/autonomy-moral/.
[311] I pursue this argument in the next section of this chapter.
[312] Rose, *Free Time*, 27.

commonly-accepted notions of what a liberal society should entail. Ronald Dworkin notes that according to standard liberal egalitarianism approaches to justice, the state must not impose any particular substantive view about the ends of life on its members. Rather, each individual should have the freedom to define their own ends of life, whether or not those ends are consistent with the ideology of work, and society should unite around a robust procedural commitment to treat people with equal respect.[313]

2c. Leisure Activities as a "Practice"

Even if free time is appropriately viewed as a distinct concern of justice, many writers have argued that the prospect of increased leisure for the masses should be one that invites concern. Bertrand Russell has noted that "the idea that the poor should have leisure has always been shocking to the rich."[314] Keynes, meanwhile, who believed that the good life depended on education and an appreciation of the arts and of music, argued that there should be nobody who can "look forward to the age of leisure and of abundance without a dread."[315] He thought that the prospect of increased free time would require humans to face the problem of how to "live wisely and agreeably and well"; certainly no issue for himself, his friends, and other members of the bourgeois cultural elite, already well-versed in the "art of life itself," but a "a fearful problem for the ordinary person, with no special talents… [having been] trained too long to strive and not

[313] Taylor, "The Politics of Recognition," 56. See: Ronald Dworkin, "Liberalism," in *Public and Private Morality*, ed. Stuart Hampshire (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).
[314] Bertrand Russell, "In Praise of Idleness," *Harper's Magazine*, October 1932, https://harpers.org/archive/1932/10/in-praise-of-idleness/.
[315] Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," 328.

to enjoy."[316] More recently, Weeks has noted that some critics fear that increased free time would simply translate to more "mindless consumption"—more time wasted lounging around, watching television, and playing videogames.[317]

These normative criticisms may be attributed to the fact that since the rise of wage labor, and as is certainly true for many people today, work has absorbed and colonized all other areas of life. Guy Standing observes that people who experience a draining day of work often have neither the energy nor the inclination to engage in active leisure pursuits, and prefer instead to "indulge in passive 'play'… by watching a screen or conducting a dialogue with a series of screens."[318] For those in full-time standard employment, and especially for those who must also engage in reproductive labor outside of their jobs, free time cannot be understood on its own but as "the obverse of working time," passively spent in preparation for the next working day.[319] But if a basic income is apportioned generously enough to enable individuals to work less or to even withdraw from the labor market altogether, more and more individuals would have the energy necessary to take full advantage of their free time. They may therefore choose to continue working, or they may instead choose to engage in meaningful non-work activities that develop their capacities and enable self-realization. As Russell argues, "since men will not be tired in their spare time, they will not demand only such amusements as are passive and vapid."[320]

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[316] Keynes, "Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren," 328.
[317] Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 169.
[318] Standing, *The Precariat*, 128.
[319] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 93.
[320] Russell, "In Praise of Idleness."

In order to show how non-work activities can enable self-realization, I will return to Muirhead's conceptualization of work as a "practice." As I discussed in Chapter Two, the ideal of work as a "practice" points to how it can be experienced as meaningful, rewarding, and gratifying. Work as a practice entails jobs that place the individual within an established community of practitioners, that involve internal standards of quality upheld by that community, and that cultivate specific skills and habits of mind which enable greater appreciation of the practice overall. Doctors are one example of a profession that illustrates this ideal. Practicing medicine certainly brings with it a number of external goods, such as occupational prestige and a high salary, but in Muirhead's view, it is neither status nor income that makes being a doctor so fulfilling. Rather, it is by developing and exercising their skills within a framework of aims and norms shared by all in the medical community[321] that doctors generally find meaning in what they do. In a postindustrial world of work wherein the experience of individual agency can often prove elusive, doctors have an objective standard against which to measure their work: their patients' health outcomes. In this sense, the internal goods of medicine may comprise the proficiency that the doctor develops in their chosen field of specialty, the accumulation of experience that enables them to apply their medical skills to diverse situations, or even the knowledge that they have bettered and saved lives.

But the white-collar sector hardly has a monopoly over the types of work that might be experienced as a "practice." In his book *Shop Class as Soulcraft*,[322]

[321] Think, for example, of doctors' obedience to the Hippocratic Oath.
[322] Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*.

Matthew Crawford gives a powerful defense of skilled manual labor by focusing on the competencies and habits of mind that it inculcates. One can easily identify echoes of Muirhead's arguments in Crawford's writing. First, he highlights the sense of responsibility and agency that one obtains through manual labor. In producing tangible, durable *things* that are "more permanent than the activity by which they were produced, and potentially even more permanent than the lives of their authors,"[323] the worker can enjoy enduring reminders of their work's meaning.

Additionally, in contrast to the types of knowledge work performed in the office, which might offer a "proliferation of contrived metrics" but which lack any means of objective measurement,[324] skilled manual labor forces its practitioners to "reckon with the infallible judgment of reality, where one's failures or shortcomings cannot be interpreted away."[325] As Crawford eloquently puts it, "A carpenter faces the accusation of his level, an electrician must answer the question of whether the lights are in fact on, a speed shop engine builder sees his results in a quarter-mile time slip."[326] In each case, just like the doctor who must measure their work against their patients' health outcomes, the skilled manual laborer faces an objective standard with universal validity that can be understood by anybody who sees their work.

Although the success or failure of skilled manual labor may be outwardly apparent in binary terms, Crawford emphasizes that only fellow practitioners are

[323] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), 96.
[324] Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 8.
[325] Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 15.
[326] Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 207.

likely to be able to discern "aesthetic subtleties that may not be visible to the bystander."[327] Therefore, in performing skilled manual labor, the worker situates themselves in a particular community, wherein "the narrow mechanical things [they] concern [themselves] with are inscribed within a larger circle of meaning."[328] In fact, there is a fundamental sociality to the practice: only through direct engagement can somebody, over time, understand the full picture of "what it means to be a good plumber or a good mechanic,"[329] as defined the practice's internal standards that are created and upheld by those in the community. Only by learning from others as part of a dialectic-of-sorts can you perceive the true ends and the true value of your work, can you realize that your skills are becoming sharper, or your judgments truer: "It is a feeling of joining a world that is independent of yourself, with the help of another who is further along."[330]

By and large, Crawford evaluates skilled manual labor in the context of paid work.[331] But nothing of his evaluation *depends* on the activity's remuneration. In fact, one might argue that compensation for its performance may even detract from the point of the activity; when skilled manual labor becomes a job, the worker may have to perform tasks that they do not find particularly interesting, or the same task over and over again. After all, Crawford is not mainly concerned with the external goods associated with skilled manual labor, but with its internal goods: self-reliance, technical know-how, and

[327] Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 207.
[328] Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 207.
[329] Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 206.
[330] Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, 206.
[331] Crawford himself has worked as a mechanic and he runs his own motorcycle repair shop in his personal life.

individual agency. He does not advocate for carpentry, automotive repair, or plumbing *qua occupations*, but rather for increased engagement with the work *associated with those occupations*. In fact, Crawford's ideal, taken to its logical end, would necessarily reduce the amount of skilled manual labor performed as paid work, for it would entail increased participation in the activity by hobbyists and DIY enthusiasts.

Furthermore, it is easy to imagine any number of hobbies, leisure pursuits, and other non-work activities that, like skilled manual labor, accord with the ideal of being a "practice." Chess, skiing, cycling, writing, photography, cooking, painting, or gardening are just a few examples that I will offer. Each of these pursuits fit with the definition of a "practice" that Muirhead advances—they each boast established communities of practitioners, uphold internal standards of quality, and cultivate specific skills and habits of mind.

To demonstrate this point more fully, I will draw on Wayne Booth's book *For the Love of It*,[332] which provides a convincing account of the intellectual, moral, and spiritual rewards (or, to use Muirhead's language, the "internal goods") that "amateuring" can bring. Booth defines his neologism of "amateuring" as "any vigorous, demanding human pursuit *practiced* for love of the pursuit itself rather than for any practical use or payoff."[333] Although his account of amateuring refers specifically to his decades of cello playing as an amateur chamber musician, Booth emphasizes that it is generalizable to any

[332] Wayne C. Booth, *For the Love of It: Amateuring and Its Rivals* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).
[333] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 10.

range of amateur pursuits, including the examples that I offered above—each of these avocations would yield internal goods resembling those that he associates with playing a musical instrument.[334]

First, Booth readily anticipates the objection that amateuring is by definition futile. Some might argue that amateurs, resigned to the impossibility of even coming close to professional competency—knowing that "full success, in the sense of winning, is always out of sight"—are wasting their time by obstinately pursuing improvement.[335] Booth, however, offers a powerful rejoinder to this argument: he counters that the real drive of amateuring consists in "the sheer love of the playing itself—not just the music but the playing of, with, through, *in* the music."[336] Amateurs are usually not motivated by the promise of extrinsic satisfactions (as Booth puts it, "all other motives—fame, money, power, even honor—are thrown out the window the moment [one picks] up that cello bow").[337] Since the purpose of amateuring can only be amateuring for its own sake, amateurs must pursue their activity "for the love of it"—for the love of the activity itself and the internal goods associated with it.

One internal good of amateuring that Booth repeatedly cites is the access that it provides to relationships with fellow amateurs, relationships which together form a community of practitioners. Booth notes that the experience of playing or practicing his cello by himself can be wonderful, but the greatest joy, the "multiplying of pleasure by sharing it," comes only from playing with

[334] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 160.
[335] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 5-6.
[336] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 6.
[337] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 51.

others.[338] For one, Booth argues that the musicians who, whether out of fear or out of laziness, prefer to play alone "miss the best teaching of all"—the generous advice given by other players that enables a shared process of learning.[339] For another, Booth argues that only the harmony (both literal and figurative) that is produced by joining together different musicians with their different instruments can yield the most magical moments of amateuring:

> The way we players join, the way we blend, the way we fuse together, will always elude my verbal celebrations… The gifts of the other players to me—their very existence as produced both by tradition and by their years of practice—have been infinitely greater than anything I could ever have given in return… The paradoxical, boundless fact is that every one in this playing community could say the same thing about the gift of the others: all of us, even the best of players, receive more than we give.[340]

Additionally, Booth notes that communities of fellow amateurs are easily found and always welcoming. Today, it goes unsaid that opportunities to meet and play with other musicians have proliferated on the Internet; they are never more than a Google search or Facebook event away. Booth also stresses that amateur musicians enjoy spending time together outside of music; unlike professional musicians like "the Guarneri Quartet members who claim to avoid one another except when rehearsing or performing," amateurs tend to play together, dine together, and even travel together.[341] Additionally, while professional musicians must practice for months before they play together in a way that approaches their desired level of perfection, amateurs are often content

[338] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 161.
[339] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 97.
[340] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 146.
[341] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 5.

to play for hours at a time with total strangers. But Booth suggests that there is no such thing as a true stranger within the musical community—that a shared interest in music can be enough to bring people together; that "if you love chamber music, you must be okay."[342] Throughout the book, Booth enumerates countless friendships that he made over the course of his amateur career, noting that it may take only the playing of "a movement or two" to convert relationships with once-strangers into ones of "true intimacy."[343]

Furthermore, Booth argues that amateuring is intrinsically fulfilling. He notes that particularly enjoyable rehearsals can produce emotional highs that leave the entire room in silence: "Sometimes, as after the Adagio of Haydn's Opus 77, No. 1, last week, we sit stunned, silent, wiping tears, blowing noses."[344] In other instances, they may produce moments of enduring joy that persist well past the end of a rehearsal:

> Not just the music but the congeniality was the best we've had since… well, maybe since never. I was aglow for hours after they left—it's still with me. That's what life is for, one of the great gifts: hours of love with Phyllis and former strangers and with those not-really-dead composers. It's a kind of spiritual communion unsurpassed by anything else I have known.[345]

These internal goods, Booth wryly notes, are for the amateur alone—for "only rarely does any listener take any pleasure hearing us play."[346] Even practice (and even tedious, frustrating, and exasperating practice) can be its own reward.

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[342] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 138.
[343] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 137.
[344] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 5.
[345] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 5.
[346] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 63.

Booth notes that he has seldom felt his hours of practice as hours wasted, for "the sometimes painful laboring is an essential part of the blossoming that any choice [of amateur pursuit] can yield."[347]

Finally, Booth argues that engagement in an amateur pursuit can produce greater appreciation of that activity as a spectator or listener. He notes, for example, that not only has listening to professional concerts and recordings improved his own playing, but also that his own playing has led him to experience a "deeper listening" of professional musicians.[348] With music, as with any amateur pursuit, Booth argues that it is the illusion of participation that enables authentic appreciation.[349] Only by imagining yourself playing along and creating the sounds that you are listening to; or scoring the game-winning goal in the football game that you are watching; or painting the work of art that you are admiring on a museum wall, can you truly appreciate the skills of the very best at any given activity.

Although I have argued to this point that non-work activities, through their promise of internal goods, are just as capable of enabling self-realization as work is, I would like to briefly suggest that they may in fact be *superior* vehicles for self-realization. As I discussed in Chapter Two, an increasing share of jobs in our postindustrial economy now comprise "bullshit jobs" that make no meaningful contribution to society. Not only may these jobs appear functionally unnecessary to outsiders, but, according to Graeber, they also tend to be

[347] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 69.
[348] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 151.
[349] Booth, *For the Love of It*, 151.

experienced as useless by employees: he wrote his book after soliciting over 250 comments from workers who responded to his call for firsthand testimonies on Twitter. Alphonso, an "Assistant Localization Manager" whom he interviewed, is one such example:

> My job is to oversee and coordinate a team of five translators. The problem with that is that the team is perfectly capable of managing itself: they are trained in all the tools they need to use and they can, of course, manage their time and tasks. So I normally act as a "task gatekeeper"… Other than that, I'm in charge of sending periodic reports to my manager, who, in turn, will incorporate them into "more important" reports to be sent to the CEO.[350]

There are data to support the anecdotes that Graeber offers. One recent Pew survey found that almost 30 percent of Americans derive "little or no meaning," from their jobs,[351] which mirrors the results of a similar survey carried out in the United Kingdom; almost 37 percent of all British workers polled felt that their work served no purpose.[352]

The proliferation of "bullshit jobs" suggests that society will always be able to create "make-work"[353] in the pursuit of full employment. As we continue to automate away "productive" jobs, the economy will always be able to accommodate more service workers, more middle managers, and more administrators, while companies can always introduce more hierarchies, staff more committees and create more workflows. As I noted in Chapter Two, many

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[350] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 52.
[351] Patrick Van Kessel, "How Americans feel about the satisfactions and stresses of modern life," Pew Research Center, February 5, 2020, https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/02/05/how-americans-feel-about-the-satisfactions-and-stresses-of-modern-life/.
[352] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 6.
[353] "Make-work" jobs are jobs that serve no useful purpose other than to employ somebody who would otherwise have no work to perform. See: Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 84.

of these jobs that are created may even accord with widely-accepted notions of a "good job." But if these jobs make no meaningful contribution to society—and if the workers who occupy them find no meaning in their work—then it becomes difficult to maintain that promoting job creation will ensure that all individuals in society are able to achieve self-realization.

In sum, I have drawn on the arguments of Julie Rose to show that the distribution of free time should be a distinct concern of justice. Humans experience a range of activities as meaningful, enjoyable, and fulfilling. Different people have different preferences about how to allocate their time between activities based upon their individual conceptions of the good life. Some may prefer to spend most of their time in paid work; others may prefer to spend most of their time engaging in meaningful non-work activities; others still may prefer to spend most of their time at leisure. The point, however, is that the discretion inherent in the allocation of free time makes visible the value that different people ascribe to different activities.

I have also mobilized Muirhead's conceptualization of work as a "practice" to show that non-work activities are just as capable of enabling self-realization as work is. Virtually all hobbies and leisure pursuits boast established communities of practitioners, uphold internal standards of quality, and cultivate specific skills and habits of mind. In fact, given the proliferation of "bullshit jobs," non-work activities may be *superior* to work as a vehicle for self-realization.

However, in the United States today, the state implicitly endorses a paternalistic and restrictive conception of the good life that depends on participation in paid work. By instead embracing a more pluralistic system of social recognition, we can empower all citizens to pursue their individual conception of the good life as they see fit.

3. A Revised Understanding of the Public Good

In this final section, I argue that society must embrace a revised understanding of the public good. By adopting a holistic set of indicators of wellbeing in official government statistics, the state will promote a more pluralistic system of social recognition that enables individuals to achieve self-realization through non-work activities. First, I show how GDP is an inadequate standard of measurement for economic (and overall) wellbeing in today's economy. Next, I discuss the need to incorporate reproductive labor in our measures of productivity. I conclude by arguing for the adoption of a "dashboard" concept of social wellbeing that accounts for the full range of factors that make life worth living.

3a. GDP and Wellbeing

When we measure economic wellbeing today, we do so against a single yardstick: GDP. More specifically, countries today tend to define growth, development, and overall welfare in economic terms, by measuring the rate of increase in the level of GDP per capita. We assume that if the economy is growing, then things must be going well—but if it is shrinking, or stagnant, there

should be cause for concern. In some ways, such assumptions are well-founded. For example, a higher level of GDP per capita is often positively correlated with material standards of living, life expectancy, health outcomes, education levels, and other measures that we generally value.[354]

Still, treating GDP as an all-encompassing proxy for the overall wellbeing of society can be misleading. At the end of the day, GDP is a measure of *market* production. Defined as the monetary value of all final goods and services produced by a nation's economy, GDP measures only what we pay for things, not how much we might actually benefit from them.[355] Furthermore, GDP does not account for the value of non-market activities like health, education, and free time that may nevertheless significantly affect wellbeing—as Robert Kennedy has put it, GDP "measures everything… except that which makes life worthwhile."[356]

First, GDP, as a purely quantitative measure, ignores the quality and the consequences of economic growth. Simon Kuznets, the main originator of the modern concept of GDP, himself warned against its use as a proxy for wellbeing. In his first report to Congress on the subject, he wrote, "The welfare of a nation can… scarcely be inferred from a measurement of national income as defined [by GDP].[357] Kuznets recognized that GDP, as a measure of the performance of the

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[354] David Pilling, *The Growth Delusion: Wealth, Poverty, and the Well-being of Nations* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018), 287.
[355] Karen Dynan and Louise Sheiner, "GDP as a Measure of Economic Well-being," (working paper, Hutchins Center no. 43, Brookings Institution, August 2018), 4.
[356] Robert F. Kennedy, "Remarks at the University Of Kansas" (speech, University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS, March 18, 1968), https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/the-kennedy-family/robert-f-kennedy/robert-f-kennedy-speeches/remarks-at-the-university-of-kansas-march-18-1968.
[357] Simon Kuznets, "National Income, 1929–1932," 73rd U.S. Congress, 2nd session, Senate document no. 124, January 4, 1934, 6-7.

economy as a whole, makes no distinctions between the quantity and quality of growth, nor does it account for inequalities that obtain among individuals. Today, economists generally agree that trends in citizens' material living standards are better understood through measures of household income and consumption—and the available data show that in the United States, as well as in a number of other OECD countries, real household income has grown at a much lower rate than real GDP.[358]

In fact, interpreting GDP at face value can often lead to deceptive indications about wellbeing. For example, although the United States spends around 17 percent of its GDP on healthcare (almost twice the amount spent by most OECD countries), its health outcomes are no better than its peers'—and in some cases, they are considerably worse.[359] Much of our healthcare spending can be attributed to inflated costs and unnecessary procedures: David Pilling notes that the disproportionately high costs of prescription drugs, the costs of administrative overhead, and hospitals' fears of litigation for negligence all contribute to healthcare's outsized share of our GDP.[360] But it would be implausible to argue that all this economic activity is a good thing; that the more we spend on healthcare, the greater its positive impact on the economy.[361]

In addition to often being misleading, GDP is problematic for only recognizing paid work. Because it does not count transactions where no money

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[358] Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi, *Mismeasuring Our Lives: Why GDP Doesn't Add Up* (New York: The New Press, 2010), 57.
[359] Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 54.
[360] Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 56.
[361] Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 57.

changes hands, it ignores the value of unpaid reproductive labor. Depending on the context in which it is performed, the exact same activity can either contribute to the economy or be statistically invisible. For example, if somebody provides in-home care to their aging parents by cooking them meals, washing their clothes and sheets, and helping them around the house, their efforts are viewed as economically worthless in the eyes of GDP; but if that same person worked in a nursing home and earned a wage for looking after *other people's* aging parents, then their efforts would suddenly become economically worthwhile.[362] The unspoken assumption, irrational as it may be, is that only paid work is valuable to the economy. The economist Arthur Pigou admitted the absurdity of it when he quipped, "Thus, if a man marries his housekeeper or his cook, the national dividend is diminished."[363]

Similarly, GDP does not register the true value of government-provided services. Even in a market-oriented society like the United States, the government is responsible for a number of free (or heavily-subsidized) services such as education, emergency services, and public parks. But because governments do not charge for these services, it is difficult to measure their true value. Traditionally, GDP has measured government-provided services' contribution to the economy based on the inputs used to produce the service, rather than its actual outputs.[364] In the case of public schools, for example, the inputs in question might include "wages for teachers, rents for buildings, the cost of electricity, and so on."[365] But

[362] Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 62.
[363] Standing, *The Precariat*, 117.
[364] Stiglitz *et al*., *Mismeasuring Our Lives*, 33.
[365] Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 58.

because no market price is attached to the output, education, GDP does not register the added value that public schools provide. Meanwhile, intangible goods, such as the public safety that police officers, fire departments, and a robust legal system provide, go completely unmeasured.

Finally, because GDP was originally designed for the physical production of material goods, it encounters difficulty when trying to measure the endless amounts of information and entertainment services that consumers obtain (seemingly for free) through the digital economy.[366] Internet platforms like Google, Facebook, and YouTube, which play outsized roles in most of our lives, are all nominally free to use. But judging the value of using internet search engines, keeping in contact with long-distance friends and family, or binge-watching videos by the price that people pay (which is often zero), or even by what it costs to set up and operate these platforms, grossly underestimates their contribution to wellbeing.[367] As a result, the true value of these services, which provide their consumers access to higher quality and a greater variety of goods than their predecessors, is not captured in GDP calculations.

This is not a new problem. The concept of consumer surplus has existed since the middle of the 19th century.[368] But many economists have argued that our transition to a postindustrial economy has exacerbated the problem and widened the gap between consumer surplus and GDP. As Banerjee and Duflo note, our

[366] Will Page, the ex-Chief Economist at Spotify, has called this as a "square peg, round hole dilemma." See Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 92.
[367] Banerjee and Duflo, *Good Economics for Hard Times*, 153.
[368] Consumer surplus is defined as the difference between the price that a consumer actually pays and the price that they are willing to pay. See: Peter C. Dooley, "Consumer's Surplus: Marshall and His Critics," *The Canadian Journal of Economics* 16, no. 1 (Feb. 1983), 27.

economy's recent slowdown in measured productivity growth coincided with the explosion of social media, which begs the question: "Could it be that there was real productivity growth, in the sense that true wellbeing increased, but our GDP statistics are missing this entire story?"[369] The available data suggest that the answer is yes—the measured contribution of the information sector (which includes phones, computers, media products like television and movies, and so on) as a share of total GDP in the United States has hardly changed since the 1980s, in spite of the radical changes in our consumption habits over the same time period.[370] As technology marches ahead, as our consumption of the digital economy continues to grow, and as the price of internet services tends toward zero, the deficiencies of GDP in accurately measuring economic growth will become only more pronounced.

3b. A New GDP

So far, I have largely accepted that continued economic growth, as long as it is equitably distributed, is a good thing, even if our current definition of GDP proves inadequate to accurately measure it. But there is evidence to show that once a certain level of prosperity has been achieved, additional income and wealth become diminishingly less valuable in relation to other competing goods,[371] undermining the notion that maximizing economic growth is the best

[369] Banerjee and Duflo, *Good Economics for Hard Times*, 153.
[370] The contribution of the information sector as a share of total GDP has hovered between 4 to 5 percent annually. See Erik Brynjolfsson and Avinash Collis, "How Should We Measure the Digital Economy?" *Harvard Business Review* (November/December 2019), https://hbr.org/2019/11/how-should-we-measure-the-digital-economy.
[371] See, for example, Richard A. Easterlin, "Does Economic Growth Improve the Human Lot? Some Empirical Evidence," in *Nations and Households in Economic Growth: Essays in Honor of Moses Abramovitz*, ed. Paul A. David and Melvin W. Reder (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

way to improve overall wellbeing.[372] After all, people require more than just material resources in order to flourish—I have already shown how a minimum amount of free time is necessary in order to not only exercise one's formal liberties and opportunities, but also to pursue one's original and authentic conception of the good life.

If a society's general quality of life may be more reliably enhanced through means other than continued economic growth, such as through increased free time, a more sustainable environment, or more robust political participation, then it becomes important to measure how well we are securing these means. In the next two subsections, therefore, I not only address the question of how we might revise our concept of GDP to account for the value of reproductive labor and sharpen its accuracy as a measure of productivity, but I also advocate for a more holistic set of statistical indicators, one that accounts for the full range of factors that make life worth living.

First, as I showed earlier in this chapter, making reproductive labor statistically visible is important for augmenting its perceived importance. Pilling notes that "if we do not measure something, it is undervalued," because (even if only subconsciously) "policymakers and regulators are biased toward what they can see and what they can count."[373] After all, governments support industries

[372] I am aware that the critique of economic growth has amassed a growing body of literature and led to the emergence of "degrowth" political movements, especially in light of the growing alarm about climate change and other environmental threats. Given the scale and importance of this topic, however, I would not be able to do it justice in a single subsection (it is a subject that would deserve its own chapter). And since the critique of economic growth lies outside the scope of my main argument, I have chosen not to examine it in depth in this thesis. For one departure point on the topic, however, see: Julie L. Rose, "On the Value of Economic Growth," *Politics, Philosophy & Economics*, advance online publication (November 2019).
[373] Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 66.

that pay taxes, promote jobs growth, and otherwise contribute to the economy. Pilling cites the baby-formula industry as an example—although nutritionists are almost unanimous in recommending that mothers breastfeed their children for the first six months of infancy, "those who advocate government policies to encourage breastfeeding are outgunned by lobbyists working for baby-formula companies, who can point to the economic benefits of their industry."[374] The economic worth that we ascribe to breastfeeding—as valuable as it is—is precisely zero.

Measuring the economic contribution of reproductive labor is possible through a process called *imputation*. In fact, imputation is already applied to home ownership in our current GDP calculations. Rent is registered in GDP as the tenant's expenditure on one side, and the landlord's income on another. But because homeowners don't pay rent, the value of home ownership is effectively invisible in standard GDP calculations, even though people clearly derive consumption value from living in their own homes.[375] To get around this problem, statisticians *impute* the value of the rent that a homeowner would have to pay if they did not own their residence (usually by comparing it to a nearby rented property with similar characteristics and amenities). Through this accounting trick, "the imputed rent figure appears in the national income accounts as if it had actually been paid—even though no transaction has taken place and no money has changed hands."[376]

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[374] Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 65.
[375] Stiglitz *et al*., *Mismeasuring Our Lives*, 26.
[376] Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 53.

Such a process of imputation can easily be applied to reproductive labor. In fact, it already has been: the exercise of calculating the value of reproductive labor as a share of conventionally-measured GDP *is already routinely performed in many countries*; the results are just not incorporated into the official statistics.[377] The approach is simple: just like with home ownership, one simply estimates the value of reproductive labor by measuring its cost when it is outsourced (*e.g.*, by using the prevailing wage rate for care workers in the system of universal child care that I have proposed). In 2012, a number of researchers performed a study[378] for the Bureau of Economic Analysis that found that incorporating the value of "nonmarket household production" such as child care, cooking, gardening, or housework (*i.e.*, the activities that I associate with reproductive labor) would have raised the level of nominal GDP in 2010 by 26 percent and added roughly $3.8 trillion to the size of the American economy.[379]

Accurately measuring the value of government-provided services and the "free" online goods of the digital economy may prove less straightforward, but strategies to do so have been proposed. For example, following the logic of imputation, some researchers have run online experiments that directly ask consumers their willingness to pay for certain goods and services. One such study found that the median consumer would demand $48 to forgo Facebook for

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[377] Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 55.
[378] Benjamin Bridgman, Andrew Dugan, Mikhael Lal, *et al*., "Accounting for Household Production in the National Accounts, 1965–2010," *Survey of Current Business* 92, no. 5 (May 2012), 23.
[379] Two years earlier, the economists Joseph E. Stiglitz, Amartya Sen, and Jean-Paul Fitoussi performed a similar calculation in a report to the French Government on the adequacy of GDP as a measure of wellbeing. They obtained comparable findings, estimating that reproductive labor amounted to approximately 30 percent of conventionally-measured GDP in the United States between 1995 and 2006. See: Stiglitz *et al*., *Mismeasuring Our Lives*, 52.

just one month.[380] In fact, researchers have found that consumers rank internet access as the second-most valued good in their lives, digital or otherwise, behind only access to toilets at home (the median consumer values search engines and email more than meeting friends in person).[381]

3c. Towards a Dashboard Concept of Wellbeing

Revising our conception of GDP to account for the value of reproductive labor and to more accurately capture the economic growth supplied by the rise of the digital economy is a good first step towards a more nuanced concept of the public good. But given the fact that humans value more than just material resources, we must also adopt a more holistic set of statistical indicators that can account for the full range of factors—including health, education, free time, political voice and governance, social connections, and environmental conditions—that make life worth living. Measuring economic growth has its logic, but as Pilling puts it, GDP (even the revised form of GDP that I have proposed) is still "a very narrow measure, a slit of a window through which to view our world. We need to broaden our perspective so that the image we capture is more reflective of our lives."[382]

A number of conceptual alternatives to GDP have emerged in recent years.[383] These range from efforts to quantify "subjective wellbeing" by asking

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[380] Brynjolfsson and Collis, "How Should We Measure the Digital Economy?"
[381] Erik Brynjolfsson, Felix Eggers, and Avinash Gannamaneni, "Measuring Welfare with Massive Online Choice Experiments: A Brief Introduction," *AEA Papers and Proceedings* 108 (May 2018), 475.
[382] Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 14.
[383] Many of these alternatives are indebted to Amartya Sen's "capability approach," which holds that when we evaluate wellbeing, we must focus directly on what people are actually able to *be* and *do*, *i.e.*, the actual "functionings" that people have effective access to. Sen's "capability approach" lay the conceptual groundwork for the United Nations' Human Development Index,

people how happy they are, such as the United Nations' World Happiness Report,[384] to complex measures of multiple social and environmental outcome indicators, such as the OECD Better Life Index.[385] Perhaps the most ambitious measurement tool that has been proposed is the Social Progress Index,[386] which ranks countries based on over 50 indicators across the three dimensions of "basic human needs," "foundations of wellbeing," and "opportunity."[387] The Social Progress Index, by trying to broadly capture all of the factors that influence a country's wellbeing rather than boiling wellbeing into a single number, epitomizes the "dashboard" concept. The benefit of this concept is that different countries can decide for themselves how much to weight the various dimensions and indicators that comprise Social Progress Index based upon the preferences of their citizens. Americans might value "freedom of expression" more than "access to online governance" compared than citizens of other countries, for example, and could therefore weight those indicators accordingly.

Whatever the exact weighting of the indicators—or, indeed, whatever the exact indicators are—the point is that a "dashboard" like the Social Progress Index communicates what exactly a society values. As Pilling notes, "indexes are

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one of the first measures that shifted the emphasis of developmental economics from GDP to human-centered measures of quality of life. See: Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000) and Sen, "Equality of What?" in *Liberty, Equality, and Law (Selected Tanner Lectures on Moral Philosophy)*, ed. Sterling M. McMurrin (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987).

[384] John F. Helliwell, Richard Layard, and Jeffrey D. Sachs, *World Happiness Report*, United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network, 2019.

[385] "OECD Better Life Index," Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, accessed March 1, 2020, http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/.

[386] "Social Progress Index," Social Progress Imperative, accessed March 1, 2020. https://www.socialprogress.org/index/global.

[387] Scott Stern and Tamar Epner, "2019 Social Progress Index Methodology Summary," Social Progress Imperative, 5-6.

self-referential"[388]—they measure things that we already consider important (or else we wouldn't bother measuring them). Simply deciding to measure something can also have powerful effects: in the same way that policymakers today tend to fixate on boosting economic growth because of how influential GDP is, choosing to measure other factors and incorporating them in our official statistics will lead policymakers to maximize those particular variables.[389]

In sum, I have argued that the state must promote a more pluralistic system of social recognition through a revised understanding of the public good. We must not only redefine GDP but also incorporate a more holistic set of indicators in our official statistics by turning to a "dashboard" concept of social wellbeing.

Conclusion

In this chapter, my goal has been to outline a program for reform that would constitute a just society. I argued that given the current economic and social importance of work, we must not only *redefine* and *revalorize* work, but also promote a *more expansive conception of the public good*.

First, I argued that we must bring reproductive labor into our definition of work and ensure that its gender burden is more equitably borne. I suggested that one strategy to accomplish this redefinition is through a system of universal child care that would provide high-quality publicly-funded care options that reduce the care responsibilities of the family.

[388] Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 275.
[389] Pilling, *The Growth Delusion*, 277.

Second, I argued that we must revalorize work in relation to non-work activities. Drawing on Julie Rose's arguments in her book *Free Time*, I showed that the resource of free time is a distinct and worthy concern of distributive justice. I argued that the discretion inherent in the allocation of free time makes visible the value that different people ascribe to different activities according to their individual conceptions of the good life. Additionally, I showed that non-work activities are comparable, if not superior, to work in how they enable individuals to achieve self-realization, underscoring the need for society to adopt a more pluralistic system of social recognition.

Lastly, I argued that society must embrace a more expansive and nuanced understanding of the public good that depends on more than just economic productivity. I showed not only how GDP is an inadequate standard of measurement for wellbeing in today's economy, but also how it fails to account for the value of reproductive labor and other goods and resources that cannot be fully captured by monetary measures. I argued, therefore, for the adoption of a "dashboard" concept of wellbeing—a more holistic set of statistical indicators that accounts for the full range of factors that make life worth living.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have contemplated the proper role of work in a just society. I first argued that work, as a source of social recognition, cannot be evaluated simply in economic terms. I showed that the ideology of work promotes a paternalistic and restrictive conception of the good life that permits self-realization only through engagement in paid work. I therefore proposed strategies to provide income and social recognition independent of work, including the implementation of a basic income scheme, a system of universal child care, and a "dashboard" concept of social wellbeing. Overall, I have argued for the "re-embedding" of the economy, and that work must be performed in service to social relationships in a just society.

To support my argument, in Chapter One I showed how work asserted its primacy in the lives of individuals and in society. I began by adopting a Polanyian framework to describe the subordinate role that work tended to play in preindustrial society, before showing how the Industrial Revolution and its attendant ideology of market liberalism led to the "disembedding" of the economy. I argued that this "disembedding" had two main effects: first, it created the normative expectation of universal employment by forcing individuals into wage labor; second, it substituted the *motive of gain* for the *principle of use*, legitimating the idea of accumulation for accumulation's own sake. I then showed how the interaction of neoliberalism and meritocracy has reinforced these effects and rendered work a source of social recognition.

In Chapter Two, I examined the present problems affecting the world of work in order to show why a program of reform is necessary. From fears of technological unemployment arising from the increased adoption of automation and AI in the workplace, to the forms of insecurity introduced by the rise of the gig economy and other nonstandard work arrangements, I showed that "good jobs" are becoming increasingly scarce, and employment increasingly insecure. I then evaluated two strategies that have been proposed in response to these problems. I first argued that insofar as the "good jobs" approach assumes that economic production is necessary and that work is essential to human flourishing, it promotes a one-dimensional view of the good life that permits self-realization only through engagement in paid work. Such a view, I argued, is at odds with the values of diversity, toleration, and anti-paternalism that should characterize a liberal society. I then argued that although the "basic income" approach would be an effective mechanism for large-scale wealth redistribution, it fails to take into account not only the non-economic benefits attached to employment, but also the inequitable gender division of reproductive labor. To draw out the problematic consequences of a basic income pursued as a standalone policy, I turned to the recognition theories of Charles Taylor, Axel Honneth, and Nancy Fraser.

In view of the limits of the "good jobs" approach and the "basic income" approach, in Chapter Three I outlined a program for reform that would constitute a just society. First, I argued for the *redefinition* of work to include reproductive labor as well as paid work. I showed how the implementation of a system of universal child care would not only make reproductive labor more visible, but

would also ensure that the gender burden of this work is more equitably borne. Next, I argued for the *revalorization* of work in relation to non-work activities. I showed that the discretion inherent in the allocation of free time makes visible the value that people ascribe to different activities according to their individual conception of the good life. Finally, I argued for a *more expansive conception of the public good* that does not depend simply on economic growth and productivity, but instead accounts for the full range of factors that make life worth living.

In this thesis, I have also endeavored to shine a different light on the contemporary policy discourse and media coverage surrounding work. Over the past few months, as this thesis has been taking shape, discussion about the "future of work" has featured prominently in presidential candidates' campaign rhetoric. Senator Bernie Sanders proposed enacting a federal jobs guarantee that would ensure all citizens have access to stable employment that pays a living wage.[390] The central plank of Andrew Yang's campaign platform was his Freedom Dividend, a form of basic income that would pay $1,000 to all American citizens over the age of 18 each month with no strings attached.[391] The former policy exemplifies the "good jobs" approach; the latter the "basic income" approach. On the surface, both may seem like attractive proposals, but it is my hope that this thesis has familiarized the reader with each policy's respective limits from the viewpoint of justice.

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[390] "Jobs and an Economy for All," Bernie 2020, accessed March 5, 2020, https://berniesanders.com/issues/jobs-for-all/.
[391] "The Freedom Dividend, Defined," Yang 2020

The implications of this thesis are of course limited by its social and geographical focus on the United States and (by extension) other Western postindustrial countries. Future research would benefit from expanding this inquiry to different contexts, and incorporating the cultural perspectives and economic histories of other countries. A country such as China—whose people exhibit different cultural norms, practices, and attitudes towards work and welfare, and which boasts a radically different trajectory of industrialization and economic development—might prove especially fruitful for investigation.

Here too seems like an appropriate juncture for me to acknowledge that this thesis owes its title to Russell Muirhead, whose book *Just Work* I have cited at various points, most notably in my discussion of "fitting" work in Chapter Two. I agree with Muirhead that "work is rarely *just* work in the diminutive sense of being *only* work."[392] Much of the previous discussion, after all, has focused on establishing that work is in many ways an extrinsically valuable activity, especially insofar as it grants workers access to social recognition. Contrary to Muirhead, however, I have argued that individuals should not simply accept the injunction to "just work!" Instead, in posing the question of "just work?" I have argued that individuals should not necessarily privilege work over other activities, and that we must reconceptualize the social role of work to constitute a just society.

I acknowledge the ambitious nature of the program that I have proposed. The implementation of my ideas presupposes a number of crucial background

[392] Muirhead, *Just Work*, 3.

preconditions including a wholesale restructuring of our approach to social welfare, the dismantling of the ideology of work as a civic requirement, the ability (and desire) of our legislative and judicial systems to accommodate radical reform, and a shared commitment by all in society to economic and gender equality. It is unlikely that many of these preconditions will be realized in the near future.

The goal of this thesis, however, has not been to advocate for the most realistic set of small-scale reforms that would be appropriate for the current political and social moment, but to articulate the end vision of a just society that we might collectively strive towards. I do not wish to campaign for the end of work, nor do I suggest that all individuals must view work in a certain way. Rather, I have argued simply that individuals should have as much discretion as possible to spend their time as they see fit.

I have in mind a society in which people shape the pattern of their lives according to their individual conceptions of the good life—a society in which all citizens are better able to balance their work with reproductive labor, time spent with friends and family, participation in community activities, political and civic engagement, and leisure.

Whether or not such a society is worth striving for is a separate question that "we the people" must answer.

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