WORK, CONSUMERISM AND THE NEW POOR
Second Edition

Reviewers' comments on the first edition:

"Zygmunt Bauman presents a cogently argued and compelling thesis…an important book from a distinguished scholar that adds a new dimension to the poverty debate."

British Journal of Sociology

"[Bauman] provides a very forceful and sophisticated statement of the case; and a very well written one too. As a wide ranging analysis of our present discontents it is an admirable example of the sort of challenge which sociology at its best can offer to us and our fellow citizens to re-assess and re-think our current social arrangements."

Work, Employment and Society

It is one thing to be poor in a society of producers and universal employment; it is quite a different thing to be poor in a society of consumers, in which life projects are built around consumer choices rather than on work, professional skills or jobs. Where 'being poor' was once linked to being unemployed, today it draws its meaning primarily from the plight of a flawed consumer. This has a significant effect on the way living in poverty is experienced and on the prospects for redeeming its misery. *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* traces this change over the duration of modern history. It makes an inventory of its social consequences, and considers how effective different ways of fighting poverty and relieving its hardships are.

The new edition of this seminal work features:
• Updated coverage of key thinkers in the field
• Discussion of recent work on redundancy, disposability and exclusion
• Current thinking on the effects of capital flows on different countries and the changes on the shop floor through, for example, business process re-engineering
• New material on security and vulnerability

Key reading for students and lecturers in sociology, politics and social policy, and those with an interest in contemporary social issues.

Zygmunt Bauman is Emeritus Professor of Sociology at the University of Leeds, UK. He is recognized worldwide as one of the foremost commentators on the postmodern condition. He is the author of many books on social thought, including *Freedom* (Open University Press), *Modernity and the Holocaust, Globalization: the Human Consequence, The Individualised Society* and *Society under Siege*.
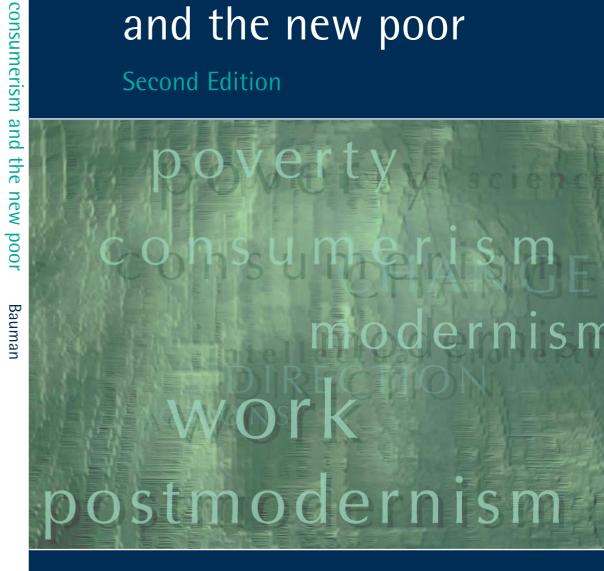
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Work, consumerism and the new poor

Second Edition

poverty
consumerism
modernism
work
postmodernism

● **Zygmunt Bauman**

Work, Consumerism and the New Poor

Second Edition

Issues in Society

Series editor: Tim May

Current and forthcoming titles:

Work, Consumerism and the New Poor

Second Edition

ZYGMUNT BAUMAN

OPEN UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Series editor's foreword

The social sciences contribute to a greater understanding of the working of societies and dynamics of social life. However, they are often not given due credit for this role and much writing has been devoted to why this should be the case. At the same time, we are living in an age in which the role of science in society is being re-evaluated. This has led to both a defence of science as the disinterested pursuit of knowledge and an attack on science as nothing more than an institutionalized assertion of faith with no greater claim to validity than mythology and folklore. These debates tend to generate more heat than light.

In the meantime, the social sciences, in order to remain vibrant and relevant, will reflect the changing nature of these public debates. In so doing, they provide mirrors upon which we gaze in order to understand not only what we have been and what we are now, but to inform ideas about what we might become. This is not simply about understanding the reasons people give for their actions in terms of the contexts in which they act as well as about analysing the relations of cause and effect in the social, political and economic spheres, but about the hopes, wishes and aspirations that people, in their different cultural ways, hold.

In any society that claims to have democratic aspirations, these hopes and wishes are not for the social scientist to prescribe. For this to happen it would mean that the social sciences would be able to predict human behaviour with certainty. This would require one theory and one method applicable to all times and places. The physical sciences do not live up to such stringent criteria, while the conditions in societies which provided for this outcome, were it possible, would be intolerable. Why? Because a necessary condition of human freedom is the ability to have acted other-wise and to imagine and practice different ways of organizing societies and living together.

It does not follow from the above that social scientists do not have a valued role to play, as is often assumed in ideological attacks upon their place and function within society. After all, in focusing upon what we have been and what we are now, what we might become is inevitably illuminated. Therefore, while it may not be the province of social scientists to predict our futures, they are, given not only their understandings but also their equal position as citizens, entitled to engage in public debates concerning future prospects.

This new international series was devised with this general ethos in mind. It seeks to offer students of the social sciences, at all levels, a forum in which ideas are interrogated in terms of their importance for understanding key social issues. This is achieved through a connection between style, structure and content that is found to be both illuminating and challenging in terms of its evaluation of topical social issues, as well as representing an original contribution to the subject under discussion.

Given this underlying philosophy, this series will contain books on topics which are driven by substantive interests. This is not simply a reactive endeavour in terms of reflecting dominant social and political preoccupations, it is also proactive in terms of being an examination of issues which relate to and inform the dynamics of social life and the structures of society that are often not part of public discourse. What is distinctive about this series is an interrogation of the assumed characteristics of our current epoch in relation to its consequences for the organization of society and social life, as well as its appropriate mode of study.

Each contribution will contain, for the purposes of general orientation as opposed to rigid structure, three parts. First, an interrogation of the topic which is conducted in a manner that renders explicit core assumptions surrounding the issues and/or an examination of the consequences of historical trends for contemporary social practices. Second, a section which aims to 'bring alive' ideas and practices by considering the ways in which they directly inform the dynamics of social relations. A third section will then move on to make an original contribution to the topic. This will encompass possible future forms and content, likely directions for the study of the phenomena in question, or an original analysis of the topic itself. Of course, it might be a combination of all three.

With the above structure, content and ethos in mind, I was pleased to be able to launch the series with a contribution to an important social issue by a leading social commentator. Zygmunt Bauman has distinguished himself, through numerous publications, as a leading analyst of contemporary conditions and social practices. His work represents an all too rare combination: a concern to point out the likely consequences of current trends while refusing to abandon himself to idle speculations concerning the future, accompanied by a methodical, yet passionate, approach to his subject.

The first edition of *Work, Consumerism and the New Poor* was no exception to those themes that are evident in his work. In this second

edition he has added new material on security, vulnerability, the effects of capital flows on different countries and changes on the shop floor through, for example, business process re-engineering. As new policies are devised, in seeking to reduce poverty one must ask in whose name, with what consequences and for what reasons? The settlers and the nomads link to issues to do with affluence, unemployment and redundancy. When we cease to ask those questions that are ignored through indifference as much as by their challenge to the powerful, the plight of the excluded by the relatively affluent inevitably grows, and we have seen this through the increasing gap between rich and poor.

Where Zygmunt Bauman is disconcerting for some to read, he is at his most challenging. His analysis refuses to employ those ideas and practices that are characteristic of what many have defined as modernity, as solutions to contemporary problems. Western societies, he argues, are no longer societies of full employment based on the productive capability of labour. As a result, people are now judged in terms of their abilities to be part of the consumer society. No longer seen in terms of productive potential, the poor are excluded on the grounds of being what he terms 'flawed consumers'. This creates new sets of social relations with different consequences for society and the organization of its social policies. Where social policy once sought to address these issues in the communities of which people are a part, they are now often addressed through the penal system as the justice model of punishment perpetuates the separation between people and the environment of which they are a part.

Tracing this history via the work ethic and changes from production to consumption and its effects on the organization of welfare states, he looks at the consequences of this for the poor and concludes with a look at possible futures in relation to past and current trends. He writes with an appeal to those who 'have' in their considerations of those who 'have not' and of the indifferences and deafening silences which surrounded the most atrocious acts in history. Thus, a complacent world view is to be guarded against by those who find moral indifference to the plight of the excluded to be unacceptable.

New solutions which require a questioning of the ways in which societies are ordered are needed. Growth for its own sake without due regard for the overall good of humanity, and the forward march of policies which individualize blame for social ills, are not the answer. In contemporary debates over poverty in which such perspectives are marked by their absence from 'official' deliberations, Zygmunt Bauman's work deserves serious discussion and consideration.

Tim May

Introduction to the first edition

The poor will be always with us: this much we can learn from popular wisdom. What popular wisdom is not as confident and outspoken about is the tricky question of how the poor are made to be poor and come to be seen as poor, and how much the way they are made and seen depends on the way we all – ordinary people, neither rich nor poor – live our daily lives and praise or deprecate the fashion in which we and the others live them.

This is a regrettable omission: not just because the poor need and deserve all the attention we may give them, but also because it so happens that it is in the image of the poor that we tend to invest our hidden fears and anxieties, and so looking closely on the way we do this may tell us quite a few important things about our own condition. This book attempts therefore to answer these 'how' questions, and so to tell the often over-looked, glossed over or wilfully concealed part of the story of modern poverty. While attempting to find such answers, it may also add a bit to our self-knowledge.

The poor will be always with us, but what it means to be poor depends on the kind of 'us' they are 'with'. It is not the same to be poor in a society which needs every single adult member to engage in productive labour as it is to be poor in a society which, thanks to the enormous powers accu-mulated by centuries of labour, may well produce everything needed without the participation of a large and growing section of its members. It is one thing to be poor in a society of producers and universal employment; it is quite a different thing to be poor in a society of consumers, in which life-projects are built around consumer choice rather than work, profes-sional skills or jobs. If 'being poor' once derived its meaning from the condition of being unemployed, today it draws its meaning primarily from the plight of a flawed consumer. This is one difference which truly makes a

difference to the way living in poverty is experienced and to the chances and prospects of redemption from its misery.

This book attempts to trace this change which took place over the duration of modern history, and to make an inventory of its consequences. On the way, it also tries to consider to what extent the well-remembered and tested means of fighting back the advancing poverty and mitigating its hardships are fit (or unfit, as the case may be) to grasp and tackle the problems of poverty in its present form.

The first chapter recalls the origins of the work ethic, which from the beginning of modern times was hoped to attract the poor to regular factory work, to eradicate poverty and assure social peace – all in one go. In practice, it served to train and discipline people, instilling in them the obedience necessary to make the new factory regime work.

The story told in the second chapter is of the gradual yet relentless passage from the early to the later stage of modern society: from a 'society of producers' to a 'society of consumers', and accordingly from a society guided by the work ethic to one ruled by the aesthetic of consumption. In the society of consumers, mass production does not require any more mass labour and so the poor, once a 'reserve army of labour', are re-cast as 'flawed consumers'. This leaves them without a useful social function – actual or potential – with far-reaching consequences for the social standing of the poor and their chances of improvement.

The third chapter traces the rise and fall of the welfare state. It shows the intimate connection between the transformations described in the previous chapter, the sudden emergence of public consensus in favour of collective responsibility for individual misfortune, and the equally abrupt emergence of the present consensus against that principle.

The fourth chapter is concerned with the consequences of all that: a new way in which the poor are socially produced and culturally defined. The recently fashionable concept of the 'underclass' is scrutinized and found to act mainly as a tool of the 'power-assisted' condensation of widely different forms and causes of deprivation into the image of one inferior category of people afflicted with faults common to them all and therefore presenting one 'social problem'.

Finally, the likely futures of the poor and poverty are considered, as well as the possibility of giving the work ethic a new meaning, more relevant to the present condition of developed societies. Can poverty be fought and conquered with the help of orthodox means, made to measure for a society no longer in existence? Or should we seek new solutions, such as the 'decoupling' of the right to livelihood from the selling of labour, and the extension of the socially recognized concept of work beyond that recognized by the labour market? And just how urgent is it to confront such questions and try to find practical answers to them?

PART I

The meaning of work: producing the work ethic

What is the work ethic? It is, in a nutshell, one commandment with two outspoken premises and two tacit presumptions.

The first outspoken premise is that in order to get something which one needs to stay alive and happy, one must do something which is seen by others as valuable and worthy of being paid for; there are no 'free lunches', it is always *quid pro quo*, 'tit for tat'; you need to give first, in order to be given later.

The second outspoken premise is that it is wrong – morally mischievous as well as silly – to be satisfied with what one has already got and so to settle for less rather than more; that it is unworthy and unreasonable to stop stretching and straining oneself once what one has seems to be satisfying; that it is undignified to rest, unless one rests in order to gather force for more work. In other words working is a value in its own right, a noble and ennobling activity.

The commandment follows: you should go on working even if you do not see what that could bring you which you do not have already or don't think you need. To work is good, not to work is evil.

The tacit presumption without which neither of these premises nor the commandment would seem as obvious as they do is that most people have their working capacity to sell, and indeed may earn their living selling it and getting what they deserve in exchange; whatever they possess is a reward for their past work and their willingness to go on working. Work is the normal state of all humans; not working is abnormal. Most people fulfil their duty, and it would be unfair to ask them to share their benefits or profits with others, who could also fulfil their duties but for one reason or another fail to do so.

The other tacit presumption is that it is only such labour that has a value recognized by others – labour which commands salaries or wages, which

can be sold and is likely to be bought – that has the moral value the work ethic commends. This is, albeit a simple, summary of the form which the work ethic assumed historically in our kind of society, registered under the name of 'modernity'.

Whenever you hear people talking about ethics, you should be pretty sure that someone somewhere is dissatisfied with the way some other people behave and would rather have them behaving differently. Hardly ever has this advice made more sense than in the case of the work ethic.

Since it erupted into the European consciousness in the early stages of industrialization, and in its many avatars throughout the twisted itinerary of modernity and 'modernization', the work ethic served politicians, philosophers and preachers alike as a clarion call to, or an excuse for, attempts to uproot, by hook or by crook, the popular habit which they saw as the prime obstacle to the new brave world they intended to build: the allegedly widespread inclination to avoid, if one could, the ostensible blessings of factory employment, and to resist docile submission to the rhythm of life set by the foreman, the clock and the machine.

The morbid and dangerous habit that the work ethic was meant to fight, destroy and eradicate at the time it entered the public debate, was rooted in the traditional human inclination to consider one's own needs as given and to desire no more than to satisfy them. Once their habitual needs had been met, the 'traditionalist' workers saw no rhyme nor reason to go on working, or for that matter to earn more money; what for, after all? There were so many other interesting and decent things to do, things one could not buy but could well overlook, neglect or lose if one was running after money from dawn to dusk. The threshold of decent life was set low, was fixed and forbidden to cross, and there was no urge to climb higher once that threshold was reached. This is, at any rate, how the entrepreneurs of the time, and the economists who zealously made sense of their troubles, as well as the moral preachers eager to improve things, painted the picture.

Historical memory is held in safe keeping and history is written by victors. No wonder that this composite painting entered the classic canon of history telling, becoming the official record of the valiant battle waged and won by pioneers of modern reason against the irrational, ignorant, totally unreasonable and completely inexcusable popular resistance to progress. According to that record, the stake of the war was to make the blind see light, to force the silly and retarded to use intelligence, and to teach people how to wish for a better life, to desire things new and improved, and by desiring them to self-improve, to become better persons. Or, if need be, to compel the recalcitrant to act as if they had such desires.

As it happened, the true course of events was exactly the opposite to what the early entrepreneurs implied in their complaints against shiftless and laggard factory hands, and what the economists and sociologists took later for the tested truth of history. It was in fact the advent of the factory system that spelled the collapse of the love affair between the craftsman and his work which the 'work ethic' postulated. The moral crusade recorded as

the battle for the *introduction* of the work ethic (or as the training in the application of the 'performance principle') was in fact an attempt to *resuscitate* basically pre-industrial work attitudes under new conditions which no longer made them meaningful. The moral crusade aimed at the re-creation, inside the factory under owner-controlled discipline, of the commitment to the wholehearted, dedicated workmanship and the 'state of the art' task performance which once upon a time came to the craftsman naturally when he himself was in control of his work.

Getting people to work

When John Stuart Mill complained that 'we look in vain among the working classes in general for the just pride which will choose to give good work for good wages; for the most part, the sole endeavour is to receive as much and return as little in the shape of service as possible',[1] he bewailed in fact the too rapid conversion of the craftsmen-turned-workers to the market's unemotional, cost-and-effect rationality, and the too fast shedding of the last remnants of pre-modern workmanship instincts. Paradoxically, the appeals to the work ethic seem in this context to cover up the erstwhile drive to *exempt* factory employees from the rule of market rationality which seemed to have a deleterious effect on their dedication to the task. Under the guise of the work ethic, a discipline ethic was promoted: don't mind pride or honour, sense or purpose – work with all your strength, day by day and hour by hour, even if you see no rhyme nor reason to exert yourself and are unable to adumbrate the meaning of the exertion.

The true problem which the pioneers of modernization confronted was the need to force people, used to putting meaning into their work through setting its goals and controlling its course, to expend their skill and their work capacity in the implementation of tasks which were now set and controlled by others and hence meaningless for their performers. The way to solve this problem was a blind drill aimed at habitualizing the workers to an unthinking obedience, while at the same time being denied pride in a job well done and performing a task the sense of which escaped them. As Werner Sombart commented, the new factory system needed part-humans: soulless little wheels in a complex mechanism. The battle was waged against the other, now useless, 'human parts' – human interests and ambitions irrelevant for productive effort and needlessly interfering with the parts deployed in production. The work ethic was, basically, about the surrender of freedom.

That true meaning, which the moral preachings masqueraded as the 'work ethic' had for the people on the receiving end of the crusade, was vividly portrayed in a statement left by an anonymous hosier in 1806:

> I found the utmost distaste on the part of the men, to any regular hours or regular habits ... The men themselves were considerably

dissatisfied, because they could not go in and out as they pleased, and have what holidays they pleased, and go on just as they had been used to do; and were subject, during after-hours, to the ill-natured observations of other workmen, to such an extent as completely to disgust them with the whole system, and I was obliged to break it up.[2]

For all intents and purposes, the work-ethic crusade was a battle for control and subordination. It was a power struggle in everything but name, a battle to force the working people to accept, in the name of the ethical nobility of working life, a life neither noble nor responding to their own standards of moral decency.

The crusade was also aimed at detaching things people did from what they saw as worthy of doing and thus as sensible things to do; detaching the work itself from any tangible and understandable purpose it might have served. If fully implemented and absorbed by the logic of life, the work ethic would have replaced all other human activities, such as reflecting, evaluating, choosing and goal-setting, by 'going through the motions'. The motions, moreover, were dictated by rhythms not of one's own making. No wonder that the critics of up-and-coming modernity, in the name of the preservation of what they conceived as the truly human values, spoke in support of the 'right to laziness'.

If implemented, the work ethic would have also separated productive effort from human needs; for the first time in history, it would have given priority to 'what can be done' over the 'what needs to be done'. It would render the satisfaction of human needs irrelevant to the logic, and most importantly to the limits, of productive effort; it would make possible the modern paradox of 'growth for the growth sake'.

> . . . a result of the introduction of machinery and of large-scale organ-isation was the subjection of the workers to a deadening mechanical and administrative routine. Some of the earlier processes of produc-tion afforded the workers genuine opportunities for the expression of their personalities in their work, and some of them even permitted the embodiment of artistic conceptions affording pleasure to the crafts-men . . . The anonymous author of *An Authentic Account of the Riots of Birmingham* (1799) explains the participation of workers in the riots by saying that the nature of their employments is such that 'they are taught to act, not to think'.[3]

In the poignant summary by J.L. and Barbara Hammonds:

> . . . the upper classes allowed no values to the workpeople but those which the slave-owner appreciates in the slave. The working man was to be industrious and attentive, not to think for himself, to owe loyalty and attachment to his master alone, to recognise that his proper place in the economy of the state was the place of the slave in the economy of the sugar plantation. Take many virtues we admire in a man, and they become vices in a slave.[4]

Indeed, in the chorus of exhortations to submit, placidly and unthinkingly, to the impersonal, inhuman and mechanical rhythm of factory work, there was a curious blend of such an essentially pre-industrial and anti-modern mentality of slave economy and the new bold vision of the wonderful, miraculously plentiful world which once the fetters of traditional ways were broken was bound to emerge as a result of human invention, and above all of human mastery over nature.

As Wolf Lepenies observed, the language in which 'nature' (that is, all things already shaped through divine creation, things 'given', unprocessed and untouched by human reason and skills) was talked about from the end of the seventeenth century on was saturated with military concepts and metaphors.[5] Francis Bacon left nothing to the imagination: nature ought to be conquered and set to work hard so that it could serve human interests and comfort better than it ever could when left alone. Descartes compared the progress of reason to a string of victorious battles waged against nature, while Diderot called the practitioners and the theorists to unite in the name of the conquest and subjugation of nature; Karl Marx defined historical progress as the unstoppable march towards human dominion over nature. No difference of opinion here, whatever their other disagreements, with Claude Saint-Simon or August Comte.

Once the ultimate goal had been spelled out, the sole significance ascribed to practical undertakings was the shortening of the distance which still separated people of the time from the final triumph over nature. The authority of other criteria could be successfully contested and gradually yet relentlessly rendered null and void. Among the progressively dismissed criteria of evaluation, the precepts of pity, compassion and care figured most prominently. Pity for the victims weakened the resolve, made the compassionate slow down the pace of change, and whatever arrested or slackened progress could not be moral. On the other hand, whatever served the ultimate conquest of nature was good and 'in the last account' ethical, serving 'in the long run' the improvement of mankind. The craftsmen's defence of their traditional rights, the resistance to the rational, effective and efficient regime of mechanized work which the pre-industrial poor had shown, were seen as another obstacle among the many which nature in its bland stupor had stood in the way of progress as if to stave off its imminent defeat. That resistance had to be broken with as little compunction as all nature's other shrewd contrivances had already been broken, debunked and defused, or merely swept out of the way.

The leading lights of the glorious world which was to be built with human wits and skills – the designers of machines and the pioneers of their use – had no doubts that the real carriers of progress were the creative minds of the inventors. James Watt argued in 1785 that all the others, whose physical exertion was needed to make the inventors' ideas into flesh, 'are to be considered in no other light than as mere acting mechanical powers . . . it is scarcely necessary that they should use their reason'.[6] While Richard Arkwright complained that:

it was difficult to train human beings 'to renounce their desultory habits of work, and identify themselves with the unvarying regularity of the complex automaton'. To be efficiently used, the complex automaton required to be constantly watched; and few countrymen or women relished the idea of spending ten or more hours a day shut up in a factory watching a machine.

Their resistance to join in the concerted effort of humanity was itself the oft quoted proof of the moral laxity of the poor and the moral virtue of a tough and rigid, no-punches-held factory discipline. Getting the poor and 'voluntarily idle' to work was not just an economic, but a moral task. The enlightened opinions of the time, differing as they might have been from each other in all other respects, had little to quarrel about on this point. *Blackwood's Magazine* wrote that 'the influence by the master over the man, is of itself a point gained in the direction of moral improvement',[7] while the *Edinburgh Review* acidly remarked, about the ongoing cultural crusade, that:

> . . . it is not in [the charity] spirit that the new schemes of benevolence are conceived . . . They are celebrated as the beginning of a new moral order . . . in which the possessors of property are to resume their place as the paternal guardians of those less fortunate . . . to extinguish, not indeed poverty – that hardly seems to be thought desirable – but the more abject forms of vice, destitution, and physical wretchedness.[8]

P. Gaskell, the author and social activist who went down in history as one of the most philanthropic, warm-hearted and compassionate friends of the poor, held, despite this, little doubt that the objects of his compassion 'differ but little in inherent qualities from the uncultivated child of nature'[9] and that they needed other, more mature people to watch their moves and take responsibility for their actions. Among the contributors to the learned opinion the agreement was common that the present or would-be labourers were not capable of managing their lives on their own. No more than silly, unruly children were they able to govern themselves, to tell what was right and what was wrong, what was good for them and what harmful, let alone to see what might prove in the long run to be 'in their best interest'. They were but a raw human material to be processed and given the right shape; at least for some considerable time to come they were bound to remain on the receiving end of social change – to be the objects, not the subjects, of the ongoing rational overhaul of human society. The work ethic was one of the pivotal items on the sweeping moral/educational agenda, and the tasks it set for the men of thought and action alike constituted the core of what came to be dubbed later by the eulogists of modern departures the 'civilizing process'.

Like every other set of ethical precepts for proper, decent, meritorious conduct, the work ethic was simultaneously a constructive vision and a prescription for a demolishing job. It denied legitimacy to the habits,

preferences or desires entertained by the human targets of the ethical crusade. It painted the pattern for the right kind of behaviour, but above all it cast suspicion upon everything that the people earmarked for ethical training might have been doing while unschooled and unforced. Their inclinations could not be trusted; free to act as they wished and left to their own whims or predilections, they would rather starve than make an effort, wallow in filth rather than care about self-improvement, put a momentary, ephemeric diversion above more distant yet steady happiness, and all in all prefer doing nothing to doing work. All these morbid, uncontrolled impulses were part of the 'tradition' the emerging industry had to stand up to, fight against, and in the end exterminate. As Max Weber (in Michael Rose's apt summary) was to point out, looking back on the job already performed, the work ethic 'amounted to an attack' on the 'traditionalism of ordinary workers' who 'had operated with a fixed image of their material needs which led them to prefer leisure and to forego opportunities to increase their income by working harder or longer'. Traditionalism 'was disparaged'.[10]

Indeed, for the pioneers of the brave new world of modernity, 'tradition' was a dirty word. It stood for the morally disgraceful and condemnable inclinations that the work ethic rose up against: the inclinations of the creatures of habit to settle today for what they had yesterday, for eschewing 'the more' and neglecting the better if getting it called for an extra effort (in fact, for surrendering to a crude, cruel, off-putting and incomprehensible, alien regime). The officially named enemies in the war declared by the work ethic against the 'traditionalism' of the pre-industrial poor were ostensibly the modesty of human needs and the mediocrity of human wants. The actual battles – most ferocious and merciless battles – were waged against the reluctance of would-be factory hands to suffer the discomfort and indignity of a work regime they neither desired nor understood, and most certainly would not have chosen by their own volition.

Work or perish

The work ethic was meant to kill two birds with one stone: resolve the labour-supply problems of burgeoning industry, and dispose of one of the most vexing nuisances the post-traditional society had to encounter – the necessity to provide for the needs of those who for one reason or another could not catch up with the change of circumstances, make ends meet and eke out their own existence under the new conditions. Not everyone could be pushed through the treadmills of factory labour; there were invalids, the weak, sick and old who by no stretch of imagination could be envisaged as coping with the harsh demands of industrial employment. Brian Inglis portrayed the mood of the time:

...the case gained ground that the destitute were expendable, whe-
ther or not they were to blame for their condition. Had there been
any way simply to get rid of them, without risk to society, Ricardo
and Malthus would certainly have recommended it, and governments
would equally certainly have given it their favourable attention,
provided that it did not entail any increase in taxation.[11]

But no such method 'simply to get rid of them' was available, and in its
absence another, less perfect, solution needed to be found. The precept of
work – any work, on any condition – as the sole decent, morally passable
way of gaining one's right to live went a long way towards finding it. No
one spelled out this 'second best' strategy in more blunt and candid terms
than Thomas Carlyle in his 1837 essay on Chartism:

> If paupers are made miserable, paupers will needs decline in
> multitude. It is a secret known to all rat-catchers: stop up the granary-
> crevices, afflict with continual mewing, alarm, and going-off of traps,
> your 'chargeable labourers' disappear, and cease from the establish-
> ment. A still briefer method is that of arsenic; perhaps even a milder,
> where otherwise permissible.

Gertrude Himmelfarb, in her monumental study of the idea of poverty,
unpacks this view in the following fashion:

> Paupers, like rats, could indeed be eliminated by this method, or at
> least driven out of sight. All that was required was the determination
> to treat them like rats, on the assumption that the 'poor and luckless
> are here only as a nuisance to be abraded and abated'.[12]

In the efforts to cause the paupers to 'decline in multitude' the con-
tribution of the work ethic was indeed priceless. That ethic asserted, after
all, the moral superiority of any kind of life, however miserable, providing
it was supported by the wages of labour. Armed with such an ethical
canon, the well-wishing reformers could proclaim the principle of 'less
eligibility' of all 'unearned' assistance which society might have offered its
poor, and consider that principle a deeply moral step towards a more
humane society. 'Less eligibility' meant that the conditions purveyed to
people relying on relief instead of wages must make their life yet less
attractive than the life of the poorest and the most wretched among the
hired labourers. It was hoped that the more the life of the non-working
poor were degraded and the deeper they descended into destitution, the
more tempting or at least the less unendurable would appear to them the
lot of those working poor who had sold their labour in exchange for
the most miserable of wages; and so the cause of the work ethic would be
helped and its triumph brought nearer.

These and similar considerations must have been high in the minds of
the 'Poor Law' reformers of the 1820s and 1830s, who after protracted and
at times acrimonious debate came to a virtually unanimous decision to

confine all the available assistance to the indigent part of the population (the part which Jeremy Bentham preferred to call the 'refuse' or the 'dross' of the population) to the *inside* of the poorhouses. This decision had a number of advantages, as far as the advancing of the work–ethic's cause was concerned.

First and foremost, it sorted out the 'true paupers' from those who were suspected of merely masquerading as such in order to avoid the discomforts of regular work. No one but the 'true pauper' would choose confinement to the poorhouse if the conditions inside were made sufficiently horrifying. The limitation of assistance to such as could be obtained in the drab and squalid interior of the poorhouse made the 'means test' redundant, or rather self-administered by the poor themselves: whoever agreed to be locked up inside a poorhouse must indeed have had no other way of staying alive.

Second, the abolition of outside assistance made the poor think twice before deciding that the requirements of the work ethic were 'not for them', that they could not cope with what regular work demands, or that the stern and in many ways abhorrent demands of factory work were a choice worse than its alternative; even the most niggardly wages and the most gruelling and tedious drudgery on the factory floor would appear bearable – even desirable – in comparison.

The principles of the new Poor Law also set a clear and 'objective' dividing line between those who could be reformed and converted to abide by the precepts of the work ethic, and those who were fully and truly beyond redemption and from whom no service for the benefit of society could be squeezed, however ingenious or unscrupulous were the measures taken.

Finally, the Poor Law guarded the working (or potentially working) poor from contamination by the hopelessly idle, separating them from trouble with the help of massive, impenetrable walls, soon to be duplicated by the invisible, yet no less tangible for that reason, walls of cultural estrangement. The more terrifying the news leaked from behind the poor-house walls, the more the slavery of factory hands would look like freedom and their wretchedness like a stroke of luck and a blessing.

It can be guessed from what has been said so far that the project of sorting out once and for all the 'true paupers' from the merely pretending, malingering and counterfeit ones, and so setting apart the hopeless from the hopeful objects of working drill in order to stave off the danger of morally morbid contamination, was never to succeed in full. The poor of the two legally distinguished categories of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' did influence each other a lot, though not necessarily in the fashion which the reformers declared to be the main reason for the construction of poor-houses.

True, the establishment of new and particularly appalling and repulsive conditions for those who had been administered the plight of the paupers (or, as the reformers preferred to say, 'had chosen' it) made the poor more

receptive to the doubtful attractions of hired labour and so warded off the much publicized threat of contaminating them with idleness, but it *did* contaminate them with poverty, and so contributed heavily to the perpetuation of the same bane which the work ethic was meant, once triumphant, to eliminate. The dreadful ugliness of poorhouse existence, which served as the reference point for assessing the quality of factory life, lowered further the depths to which employers could push their employees' endurance without fear of either rebellion or withdrawal of labour. In the end, there was little to distinguish between the lot of those who embraced the instructions of the work ethic and those who refused to do so or had fallen by the wayside while trying to embrace it and to live according to its commandments.

The most insightful, sceptical or cynical among the moral reformers of early modernity did not in any case entertain the illusion that the theoretically elegant distinction between the two – genuine and pretending – categories of the poor could be expressed in two distinct strategies. Nor did they believe that such bifurcation of strategy would make much practical sense either in terms of economy of resources or in the form of a tangible ethical benefit.

Notably, Jeremy Bentham made no distinction between the regimes of 'houses of industry': workhouses, poorhouses and manufactories (as well as prisons, lunatic asylums, hospitals and schools, for that matter).[13] Whatever their ostensible purpose, he insisted, all faced the same practical problem and shared the same concerns: all of them had to impose one, uniform pattern of regular and predictable behaviour upon a variegated and essentially unruly population of inmates. All of them, in a nutshell, had to neutralize or cancel out the variety of human habits and inclinations so that one standard of conduct could be attained for all. The same task confronted the supervisors of industrial plants and the wardens of poorhouses. In order to obtain what they desired – a disciplined, repetitive routine – both kinds of inmates, the 'working' and 'non-working' poor alike, had to be subjected to an identical regime. No wonder that the differences in moral quality of the two categories, given such close attention and assigned such a crucial importance in the arguments of the ethical preachers and reformers, hardly ever appear in Bentham's reasoning. After all, the hub of his strategy was precisely to render such differences totally irrelevant to the stated purpose, and sufficiently impotent so as not to interfere with the outcome.

In taking such a stance, Bentham spoke in unison with the economic wisdom of his times. As John Stuart Mill was to write shortly after, political economy is not interested in human passions and motives, 'except those which may be regarded as perpetually antagonizing principles to the desire for wealth, namely aversion to labour, and desire of the present enjoyment of costly indulgences'.[14] Like all scholars searching for the 'objective', impersonal, will-independent laws of economic life, Bentham stripped the task of promoting the new social order of evangelical adornments so common in the work ethic debate right down to its hard core, which was

the entrenchment of routine, regular behaviour based on unconditional discipline aided and guarded by effective supervision from top to bottom. He had no time for worries about spiritual enlightenment or mind reform; he did not expect the inmates of a panopticon-like establishment to love their work (he took their incurable aversion to work virtually for granted) and did not bother to eulogize over the work's morally ennobling impact. If the inmates were to behave in line with the precepts of the work ethic, this could happen not so much thanks to their moral conversion, as to their being cast in a situation of no choice, one containing no alternative to acting *as if* the commandments of the work ethic had been embraced and absorbed into their consciences. Bentham did not vest his hopes in the cultivation of the choosers' virtues, but in the simplicity of the choice they faced, or the complete absence of all choice. In the panopticon, be it a poorhouse, a workhouse or a factory, 'if a man won't work nothing has he to do, from morning to night, but to eat his bad bread and drink his water, without a soul to speak to . . . This encouragement is necessary to his doing his utmost; but more than this is not necessary'.

Promotion of the work ethic inspired a lot of preaching from the church pulpits, the composition of many moralizing tales, and the mushrooming of Sunday schools which did their best to fill young heads with the right rules and values; but for all the practical intents and purposes it boiled down – as Bentham with his characteristic straightforwardness and sobriety of mind revealed – to the radical reduction of choice that the present and the intended factory hands were facing. The principle of no relief outside the poorhouse was one manifestation of the thrust to establish the 'no-choice' situation. The other manifestation of the same strategy was the induction of the hand-to-mouth existence – keeping wages at a level low enough to allow for no more than physical survival until the dawn of the next day of hard work, and so make another day of hard work a 'no choice', a necessity.

Both expedients entailed, though, an element of risk, since in the end they appealed willy-nilly to the rational faculties of their objects, in however demeaned a version: to be effective, both needed thinking, calculating persons at the receiving end. But thinking could be a double-edged sword; or, rather, a dangerous crevice left in an otherwise tight wall, through which troublesome, unpredictable and incalculable factors such as the human passion for dignified life or a motivation towards self-assertion, could crawl back from enforced exile. An additional insurance needed to be taken up, and none promised more security than physical coercion. Corporal punishment, cutting the wages or food supply below the sub-sistence level, and above all a continuous and ubiquitous surveillance and prompt penalty for the violation of any rule, however trivial, could be trusted to bring the plight of the poor yet closer to the situation of no choice.

This made the preaching of the work ethic look suspiciously duplicitous. Indeed, counting on moral integrity of the human objects of industrial drill

would have to entail the expanding of their realm of freedom – the only soil in which moral selves can grow and moral responsibilities can come to fruition. But the work ethic, in its early history at least, opted for the cutting down, or a complete elimination of, choice.

Duplicity was not necessarily intended, nor always conscious. There is no reason to suppose that the promoters of the work ethic were indifferent to the moral consequences of their actions, let alone that they were immoral themselves. The cruelty of the proposed and applied measures was honestly viewed as an indispensable part of a moral crusade, itself a powerful moralizing agent and so by itself a highly moral act. Hard work was praised as an uplifting experience – a spiritual enhancement which could be achieved only by the all-brakes-released service of the common good. If inducing people to hard work and making hard work their habit called for the affliction of pain, then this was a reasonable price to pay for future gains, not least for the moral benefits which the life of hard work would secure. As Keith McClelland pointed out, if 'manual work was seen by many as a necessary, burdening, compulsion', it was 'also seen as an activity to be celebrated',[15] on account of the honour and wealth it would bring to the nation, and not least for the moral improvement it would bestow upon the workers themselves.

Producing the producers

Societies tend to hold an idealized view of themselves which allows them to 'keep on course': to spot and locate the scars, warts, and other blemishes spoiling their present look, as well as to conceive of a remedy sure to heal or smooth them up. Going to work – taking up employment, having a master, doing things which the master must have considered useful since he is prepared to pay to have them done – was thus the way to become a decent human fellow for all those whose decency or indeed humanity had not been assured in any other way, was doubted and had yet to be proved. Giving work to all and making all into workers was commonly seen as the recipe for all ills and troubles society might have endured because of its (transitory, as it was hoped) imperfection or immaturity.

Neither on the right nor on the left of the political spectrum was this historical role of work questioned. The dawning realization of living in an 'industrial society' went hand in hand with the conviction and the confidence that the number of people transformed into industrial workers was bound to grow unstoppably and that the ultimate shape the industrial society was obliged to assume would be a sort of gigantic factory, in which every able-bodied male was productively employed. Universal employment was the norm not–yet–fully-met, but represented the shape of things to come. In the light of that norm, being out of work appeared as *un*employment, *ab*normality, a breach of the norm. 'Get to work' and 'get people to work' were the twin exhortations/conjurations that it was hoped

would put paid simultaneously to personal troubles and shared, social ills. These were *modern* slogans, reverberating on both sides of the great divide which was to separate the capitalist and the communist versions of modernity. The war cry of the Marxist-inspired opposition to capitalism was 'who does not work, does not eat', and the vision of the classless society to come was that of a society built in all its aspects after the likeness of a factory. In that classic era of modern industrial society, work was simultaneously the pivot of individual life, social order and the survival capacity ('systemic reproduction') of society as a whole.

To start with individual life. The work a man performed supplied his livelihood; but the *kind* of work performed defined the standing a man could reasonably hope for or claim inside his immediate neighbourhood and in that imagined totality called 'society'. Work was the main factor of one's social placement as well as of self-assessment: for all people except those who thanks to hereditary or acquired wealth could combine a life of leisure with self-sufficiency, the question 'who are you' was answered by pointing to the company by which the asked man was employed and the capacity in which he was employed by it. In a society known for its knack and fondness for categorizing and classifying, the type of work was the decisive, pivotal classification from which everything else relevant to living among others followed. It defined a man's equals, to whom he could compare himself and orient himself with, his superiors, to whom he owed respect, and those lower down, from whom he was entitled to expect or demand deference. The type of work defined the life standards which one should match and obey, the kind of Joneses to which one ought to 'live up to' and other Joneses one should steer clear of in social life. The work career marked the itinerary of life and retrospectively provided the prime record of one's life achievement or one's failure; that career was the principal source of self-confidence and uncertainty, self-satisfaction and self-reprobation, pride amd shame.

In other words, for the large and growing majority of males in post-traditional, modern society – a society which assessed and rewarded its members on the assumption of their capacity for choice and the duty of self-assertion – work stood at the centre of the lifelong construction and defence of a man's identity. The life-project could spring from many ambitions, but they were all wrapped around the type of work to be chosen or be assigned to. The type of work coloured the totality of life; it determined not just the rights and duties directly relevant to the work process, but the expected standard of living, the pattern of the family, social life and leisure, norms of propriety and daily routine. It was that one 'independent variable' which allowed a person to shape up and to forecast, with little error, all other aspects of their existence. Once the type of work had been decided and the scheme of career ascribed, all the rest fell into place and one could be pretty certain what was to be done in virtually every field of life. To sum up: work was the main orientation point, in reference to which all other life pursuits could be planned and ordered.

As to the role of the work ethic in the regulation of social order, since most of the male members of modern society in its industrial phase spent most of their waking hours and most years of their mature life at work (according to Roger Sue's calculations, 70 per cent of waking life was on average taken up by work in 1850),[16] the workplace was the primary site of social integration; the setting in which the essential habits of obedience to norms and of disciplined behaviour were expected to be trained and absorbed and in which the 'social character' was to be formed – at least in all its aspects relevant to the perpetuation of an orderly society. Alongside the mass conscript army, another of the great modern inventions, the factory was the main 'panoptical institution' of modern society.

Factories turned out many and varied commodities, but all of them, in addition, produced the compliant and conforming subjects of the modern state. This second though by no means subsidiary productive line, albeit less salient and less talked about, secured for industrial work a function more basic for society's survival than one might deduce from the work's ostensible role – that of the production of material wealth. Just how crucial that other, latent function was, one can gather from the panics which periodically erupted throughout the modern era whenever the news broke out that a considerable part of the adult population was physically unfit for regular factory employment and/or army service. Whatever explicit rea-sons were given to justify the concern, invalidity, weakness of the body and mental impairment were seen as a threat and were feared because they cast their victims outside the reach of the panoptical drill on which the maintenance of social order relied; people out of employment were also masterless people, people out of control – not surveilled, not monitored, not subjected to any regular, sanctions-fortified, routine. No wonder that the model of health developed during the nineteenth century by socially conscious medical sciences was that of a male capable of the kind of physical exertion required by factory work and military service.

If the subjection of the bulk of the male population to the drilling impact of factory work was the principal method of production and maintenance of social order, the strong and stable patriarchal family with the employed ('bread providing') male as its absolute, uncontested ruler was its necessary supplement; not by chance the preachers of work ethics were as a rule also the advocates of family virtues and the unshakable rights and duties of the family heads. Inside the family, husbands/fathers were prompted to perform the same surveilling/disciplining role towards womenfolk and chil-dren as factory foremen and army sergeants performed in relation to them on the factory floor or on the exercise range. Modern disciplining power, as Foucault insisted, was dispersed and distributed after the pattern of capillary vessels which conduct the blood pumped by the heart to the most distant tissues and cells of a living organism. The husband/father's authority inside the family conducted the disciplining pressures of the order-producing and order-servicing network to the parts of the population which the panoptical institutions would not be otherwise able to reach.

Finally, a decisive role was allotted to work in what the politicians habitually presented as the question of society's survival and prosperity, and what made its way into sociological discourse under the name of 'systemic reproduction'. The substance of modern industrial society was the reprocessing of natural resources with the help of (again natural) supplies of workable energy, 'wealth' being the outcome of that reprocessing. Such reprocessing was organized under the auspices of the owners/managers of capital, but achieved through the application of hired labour. The continuity of that reprocessing depended therefore on the owners of the capital successfully engaging the rest of the population in the role of producers.

The volume of product, utilized as the essential resource in the expansion of wealth, depended on the direct involvement of 'living labour' in the productive effort and its subordination to that effort's logic; productive roles were the essential units of the system. The coercive powers of governments were used primarily to make this possible – that is, for the purpose of 'commodification' of capital and labour. In other words, for realizing the potential of wealth as *capital* (i.e. such wealth as can be used to produce more wealth), and of individual members of society as the 'value-adding' labour. The growth of active capital and employment were the main issues of politics. The successes or failures of policies were measured by the extent to which that task had been fulfilled: by the hiring powers of the capital and the extent of engagement of the population in the process of production.

To sum up: work occupied the focal position on all three analytically distinguishable levels of modern arrangement – individual, social and systemic. In addition, work served as a linchpin bringing the three levels together, and as the main factor through which communication and coordination between the three levels was negotiated, achieved and preserved.

The work ethic was thus crucially instrumental in bringing the modern arrangement about. The mutual engagement of capital and labour indispensable for the daily functioning and perpetuation of modern industrial society were presented by the work ethic as the moral duty, mission and vocation of all its members (more exactly, all its male members); the work ethic called men to embrace willingly, gladly, enthusiastically, what was in fact an unavoidable necessity – a plight which the practitioners of the new economy, aided and abetted by the legislators of the new state, did their best to render inescapable. But to embrace that necessity willingly meant giving up all resistance to rules experienced as an alien and painful imposition. In the workplace, autonomy of workers was not tolerated. The work ethic called people to *choose* a life devoted to labour; but a life devoted to labour meant no choice, inaccesibility of choice and prohibition of choice.

From 'better' to 'more'

The precepts of the work ethic were preached with a zeal proportional to the resistance of the would-be labourers to their loss of freedom. Preaching was aimed at overcoming that resistance. The work ethic was an instrument, while the end that instrument was to bring closer was the compliance with the factory regime and the loss of independence it entailed.

Instrumental reason allows all means to be chosen, critically assessed and – if need be – discarded and replaced according to their effectiveness in bringing the desired result about. The work ethic, and more generally the appeal to the sentiments and the consciences of the current and would-be factory workers, was but one of several alternative means of making the wheels of the industrial system turn. It was not necessarily the most efficient one, and certainly not the only one conceivable. Neither was it the most reliable; work morality which the preachers of the work ethic sought to instil was likely to remain, like all morality, fickle and erratic – a poor guide to expected human behaviour and a pressure not steady enough to match the strict, unyielding and monotonous work effort required by the factory routine. The latter could not rely on moral sentiments, on appeals to moral responsibility (and so in the end to *choice*), for securing the immutable rhythm of physical exertion and unqualified obedience to the work regime.

We have already noted that when addressed to the poor and indolent the preaching of the work ethic went hand in hand with resorting to more reliable means of pressure, like compulsory confinement, legal bonding, refusal of all relief except that available inside the poorhouses, ending with the threat of corporal punishment. The *preaching* of the work ethic called for moral choice; the *practice* of work reduced or eliminated the choice altogether, striving to make sure that its objects would behave as if they have been converted whether the conversion was sincere or not, whether the work ethic's gospel was believed or not. The general trend in the modern organizations, which the modern factories shared, was towards rendering the moral sentiments of human agents *irrelevant* to their actions ('adiaphoric') so that those actions were regular and predictable to an extent which notoriously non-rational moral impulses would never be counted on to reach.

The work ethic seems to be a mainly European invention; most American social historians agree that it was the spirit of enterprise and the desire for upward mobility, rather than the work ethic, that lubricated the wheels of American industry. Work, dedicated work, and ever more dedicated work, was seen almost from the beginning by both the immigrant and the American-born workers as a means rather than a value in its own right, a way of life or a vocation: the means to get richer, and so more independent; the means to get rid of the repulsive necessity to work for others. Even the semi-slavery of sweatshops was accepted and placidly endured in the name of future freedom, without any pretence as to its

ennobling quality. Work did not need to be loved or believed to be the sign of moral virtue; it could be openly resented without incurring the risk of the collapse of discipline, as long as bearing with even the most horrid conditions was seen as a price temporarily paid for the happiness of freedom never too far away.

In Michael Rose's opinion,[17] the trend to disregard and push aside the ethics of work deepened in America and acquired a new speed at the dawn of the twentieth century; main managerial innovations which gained popularity by that time operated 'in such a way as to destroy moral commitment to work effort. But they took on the character they did, it seems likely, because moral commitment to work effort was generally undependable' – or so it was seen in the acquisitive atmosphere of the land of riches and enrichment. The overall tendency culminated in the scientific management movement initiated by Frederick Winslow Taylor:

> Appeal to a Work Ethic played virtually no part in his package of management techniques. Positive work commitment was encouraged primarily through carefully manipulated money incentives. Taylor's model labourer was not a native-born American, but a Dutch immigrant, a certain Schmidt. What fascinated Taylor in Schmidt was certainly not any sense of moral obligation on Schmidt's part to work effectively and ingeniously, but his excitable response to the sight of a dollar bill and his willingness to do whatever Taylor told him to do in order to get his hands on it.

Not counting on the labourers' belief in the intrinsically ennobling quality of work was a sensible choice, as inequality of human conditions grew more and more salient and the pressure of the incapacitating factory discipline ever more merciless. And yet the advantages of playing down the promise of the American Dream – that all factory-floor sufferings would prove in the end but a temporary nuisance and that the surrender to the whims of the bosses was but a means to become a boss in one's own right – became also increasingly obvious. After all, the chance to firm up one's feet enough to stand on them became increasingly vague and remote, and the passages leading from manual labour to the freedoms of 'working on one's own account' shrunk and clotted. Independence of the work effort from moral commitment to work and from the elevated views of the virtues of working life had to be secured by other means.

Another means was found, in America as well as elsewhere, in the 'material incentives to work': rewards attached to the obedient acceptance of factory discipline and so to the renunciation of the worker's independence. What had been achieved with sermons, aided or not by the threat of a stick, was more and more often sought through the seductive powers of a carrot. Rather than asserting that work effort is a road to a morally superior way of life, it was now to be advertised as a means to *earn more money*. Do not mind the 'better', the 'more' is the sole thing that counts.

What was at the start of industrial society a power conflict, a fight for

autonomy and freedom, has been gradually yet relentlessly channelled into the struggle for a greater share of the surplus while tacitly accepting the extant power structure and striking its rectification out from the agenda. Increasingly, it was the ability to win a greater share of the surplus that came to be seen as the definitive way to restore that human dignity which was lost when the craftsmen turned into factory hands. Appeals to the morally ennobling capacity of the work effort fell, in the process, by the board. It was now wage differentials, not the genuine or putative virtues or vices of keen dedication or a lukewarm attitude to work, that measured the prestige and social standing of the producers.

The fact that the power conflict about the quality of social existence was channelled into the struggle for the quantity of monetary income and that economic gains became the sole expression of the ambitions to autonomy and self-assertion, has had a profound influence on the whole course of development of modern, industrial society. It elicited the kind of conduct which the original work ethic, supported by the means of economic and occasionally physical coercion, strove to achieve in vain. It instilled in the minds and the actions of modern producers not so much the 'spirit of capitalism' as the tendency to assess human value and dignity in terms of monetary rewards. It also shifted human motivation and the craving for freedom firmly and thus irretrievably into the sphere of consumption. These effects came to determine in large measure the later history of modern society as it moved from a society of producers to that of consumers.

This latter path was not followed in the same measure or with the same consequences in all branches of modern society. Though a mixture of coercion and possessive stimuli was used to assure the obedience to the work ethic in all parts of the modern world, the ingredients were blended in different proportions. Most notably, the appeal to the consumer hiding in the producer was to remain inconsistent, half-hearted and unconvincing in the communist version of modern society. It was for that reason among others that the hiatus between the two versions of modernity grew in time ever deeper, and that the ascent of consumerism which profoundly transformed the modality of life in the West made the communist regime awe-struck, and found it totally unprepared, unable to catch up, and ever more inclined to cut its losses, admit its inferiority and throw in the towel.

From the work ethic to the aesthetic of consumption

Ours is a consumer society.

We all know, more or less, what it means to be a 'consumer'. A consumer is a person who consumes, and to consume means using things up: eating them, wearing them, playing with them and otherwise causing them to satisfy one's needs or desires. Since in our part of the world it is money which in most cases 'mediates' between desire and its satisfaction, being a consumer also means – normally means – *appropriating* most of the things destined to be consumed: buying them, paying for them and so making them one's exclusive property, barring everybody else from using them without the one's permission.

To consume also means to destroy. In the course of consumption, the consumed things cease to exist, literally or spiritually. Either they are 'used up' physically to the point of complete annihilation, such as when things are eaten or worn out, or they are stripped of their allure, no longer arouse and attract desire, and forfeit their capacity to satisfy one's needs and wishes – for example, an overused toy or an overplayed record – and so become unfit for consumption.

This is what being a consumer means, but what do we mean when we speak of a consumer society? Is there something special about being a consumer in a consumer society? And besides, is not every known society a society of consumers, to a greater or lesser extent? All the features listed in the preceding paragraph, except perhaps the need to pay money for things meant to be consumed, are surely present in any kind of society. Of course, what sort of objects we see as the potential stuff of consumption, and how we consume them, may differ from time to time and from one place to another, but no human being anywhere or at any time can stay alive without consuming.

And so when we say that ours is a 'consumer society' we must have in

mind something more than the trivial, ordinary and not particularly illuminating fact that all members of that society consume. Ours is a 'consumer society' in a similarly profound and fundamental sense in which the society of our predecessors (modern society in its industrial phase described in the previous chapter) used to deserve the name of a 'producer society' in spite of the fact that people have produced since the beginning of the human species and will go on producing until the species' demise. The reason for calling that older type of modern society a 'producer society' was that it engaged its members *primarily* as producers; the way in which that society shaped up its members was dictated by the need to play this role and the norm that society held up to its members was the ability and the willingness to play it. In its present late-modern, second-modern or post-modern stage, society engages its members – again *primarily* – in their capacity as consumers. The way present-day society shapes up its members is dictated first and foremost by the need to play the role of the consumer, and the norm our society holds up to its members is that of the ability and willingness to play it.

The difference between then and now is not as radical as abandoning one role and replacing it with another. Neither of the two societies could do without at least some of its members taking charge of producing things to be consumed, and all members of both societies do, of course, consume. The difference is one of emphasis, but that shift of emphasis does make an enormous difference to virtually every aspect of society, culture and individual life. The differences are so deep and ubiquitous that they fully justify speaking of our society as a society of a separate and distinct kind – a consumer society.

The passage from producer to consumer society has entailed many profound changes; arguably the most decisive among them is, however, the fashion in which people are groomed and trained to meet the demands of their social identities (that is, the fashion in which men and women are 'integrated' into the social order and given a place in it). Panoptical institutions, once crucial in that respect, have fallen progressively out of use. With mass industrial employment fast shrinking and universal military duty replaced with small, voluntary and professional armies, the bulk of the population is unlikely ever to come under their direct influence. Technological progress has reached the point where productivity grows together with the tapering of employment; factory crews get leaner and slimmer; 'downsizing' is the new principle of modernization. As the editor of the *Financial Times* Martin Wolf calculates, between 1970 and 1994 the proportion of people employed in industry fell from 30 per cent to 20 per cent in the European Union and from 28 per cent to 16 per cent in the USA, while industrial productivity progressed on average by 2.5 per cent per annum.[1]

The kind of drill in which the panoptical institutions excelled is hardly suitable for the training of consumers. Those institutions were good at training people in routine, monotonous behaviour, and reached that effect

through the limitation or complete elimination of choice; but it is precisely the absence of routine and the state of constant choice that are the virtues (indeed, the 'role prerequisites') of a consumer. And so, in addition to being much reduced in the post-industrial and post-conscription world, the panoptical drill is also irreconcilable with the needs of a consumer society. The qualities of temperament and life attitudes which the panoptical drill excels in cultivating are counter-productive in the pro-duction of ideal consumers.

Ideally, acquired habits should lie on the shoulders of the consumers just like the religiously/ethically inspired vocational and acquisitive passions used to lie, as Max Weber repeated after Baxter, on the shoulders of the protestant saint: 'like a light cloak, ready to be thrown aside at any moment'.[2] And habits are indeed continually, daily, at the first opportunity thrown aside, never given the chance to solidify into the iron bars of a cage. Ideally, nothing should be embraced by a consumer firmly, nothing should command a commitment forever, no needs should be ever seen as fully satisfied, no desires considered ultimate. There ought to be a proviso 'until further notice' attached to any oath of loyalty and any commitment. It is the volatility, the in-built temporariness of all engagement that counts; it counts more than the engagement itself, which should not outlast the time necessary for consuming the object of desire (or for the desirability of that object to wane).

That all consumption takes time is in fact the bane of a consumer society and a major worry of the merchandisers of consumer goods. Ideally, the consumer's satisfaction ought to be instant, and this in a double sense. Consumed goods should bring satisfaction immediately, requiring no delay, no protracted learning of skills and no lengthy groundwork; but the satisfaction should end the moment the time needed for their consumption is up, and that time ought to be reduced to a bare minimum. This reduction is best achieved if the consumers cannot hold their attention nor focus their desire on any object for long; if they are impatient, impetuous and restive, and above all easily excitable and equally susceptible to losing interest.

When waiting is taken out of wanting and wanting out of waiting, the consumptive capacity of consumers may be stretched far beyond the limits set by any natural or acquired needs or determined by the physical endurability of the objects of desire. The traditional relationship between needs and their satisfaction will then be reversed: the promise and hope of satisfaction will precede the need and will be always greater than the extant need, yet not too great to preclude the desire for the goods which carry that promise. As a matter of fact, the promise is all the more attractive the less the need in question is familiar; there is a lot of fun in living through an experience one did not even know existed and was available. The excitement of the new and unprecedented sensation is the name of the consumer game. As Mark C. Taylor and Esa Saarinen put it, 'desire does not desire satisfaction. To the contrary, desire desires desire';[3] the desire of

an *ideal* consumer at any rate. The prospect of the desire fading off, dissipating and having nothing in sight to resurrect it, or the prospect of a world with nothing left in it to be desired, must be the most sinister of the ideal consumer's horrors.

To increase their capacity for consumption, consumers must never be given rest. They need to be constantly exposed to new temptations in order to be kept in a state of a constantly seething, never wilting excitation and, indeed, in a state of suspicion and disaffection. The baits commanding them to shift attention need to confirm such suspicion while offering a way out of disaffection: 'You reckon you've seen it all? You ain't seen nothing yet!'

It is often said that the consumer market seduces its customers. But in order to do so it needs customers who are ready and keen to be seduced (just as, in order to command his labourers, the factory boss needed a crew with the habits of discipline and command-following firmly entrenched). In a properly working consumer society consumers seek actively to be seduced. They live from attraction to attraction, from temptation to temptation, from swallowing one bait to fishing for another, each new attraction, temptation and bait being somewhat different and perhaps stronger than those that preceded them; just as their ancestors, the producers, lived from one turn of the conveyer belt to an identical next.

To act like that is, for the fully-fledged, mature consumer, a compulsion, a must; yet that 'must', that internalized pressure, that impossibility of living one's life in any other way, reveals itself to them in the form of a free exercise of will. The market might have already picked them up and groomed them as consumers, and so deprived them of their freedom to ignore its temptations, but on every successive visit to a market place consumers have every reason to feel in command. They are the judges, the critics and the choosers. They can, after all, refuse their allegiance to any one of the infinite choices on display – except the choice of choosing between them, that is. The roads to self-identity, to a place in society, to life lived in a form recognizable as that of meaningful living, all require daily visits to the market place.

In the industrial phase of modernity one fact was beyond all questioning: that everyone must be a producer first, before being anything else. In 'modernity mark two', the consumers' modernity, the brute unquestionable fact is that one needs to be consumer first, before one can think of becoming anything in particular.

The making of a consumer

In recent years we heard politicians of all political hues speaking in unison, wistfully and enticingly, of 'consumer-led recovery'. Falling output, empty order books and sluggish high-street trade all tend to be blamed on lack of consumer interest or 'consumer confidence' (which means the consumer's desire to buy on credit strong enough to outweigh their fear of insolvency).

The hopes of all these troubles being chased away, of things starting to hum anew, are pinned on the consumers doing their duty again – wishing once more to buy, to buy a lot, and to buy ever more. 'Economic growth', the main modern measure of things being normal and in good order, the main index of a society working as it should, is seen in the consumer society as dependent not so much on the 'productive strength of the nation' (healthy and plentiful labour force, full coffers and daring entrepreneurship of the capital owners and managers), as on the zest and vigour of its consumers. The role once performed by work in linking together individual motives, social integration and systemic reproduction, has now been assigned to consumer activity.

Having dismantled the 'pre-modern' – traditional, ascriptive mechanisms of social placement, which left to men and women only the relatively straightforward task of 'sticking to one's own kind', of living up to (but not above) the standards attached to the 'social category' into which they were born – modernity charged the individual with the task of 'self-construction': building one's own social identity if not fully from scratch, at least from its foundation up. Responsibility of the individual – once confined to obeying the rules that defined in no uncertain terms what it meant to be a nobleman, a tradesman, a mercenary soldier, a craftsman, a farm tenant or a farm hand – now extended to include the choice of social definition itself and having this socially recognized and approved.

Initially, work was offered as the prime tool in coping with this new, modern duty. The sought-after and diligently built social identity took working skills, the site of employment and the career scheme attached to employment as its major determinants. Identity, once selected, had to be built once and for all, for life, and so was in principle at least the employment, the vocation, the life-work. The building of identity was to be steady and consistent, proceeding through a succession of clearly defined stages (no wonder the metaphor of 'building' was picked to convey the nature of 'identity work' to be done), and so was the work-career. The fixed itinerary of work-career and the prerequisites of lifelong identity construction fit each other well.

A steady, durable and continuous, logically coherent and tightly structured working career is however no longer a widely available option. Only in relatively rare cases can a permanent identity be defined, let alone secured, through the job performed. Permanent, well guarded and assured jobs are now a rarity. The jobs of the old, 'for life', sometimes even hereditary, character are confined to a few old industries and old professions and are rapidly shrinking in number. New vacancies tend to be fixed term, until further notice and part-time. They are often combined with other occupations, and deprived of any safeguards of continuity, let alone of permanence. The catchword is flexibility, and this increasingly fashionable notion stands for a game of hire and fire with very few rules attached, but with power to change the rules unilaterally while the game is still being played.

Nothing truly lasting could be reasonably hoped to be erected on this kind of shifting sand. Purely and simply, the prospect of constructing a lifelong identity on the foundation of work is, for the great majority of people (except, for the time being at least, the practitioners of a few highly skilled and highly privileged professions), dead and buried.

Nevertheless, this momentous departure has not been experienced as a major earthquake or an existential threat. This is because the nature of common preoccupations with identities has also changed in a way which would render the old-fashioned work-careers utterly unsuitable and indeed out of joint with the kind of tasks and worries which the new kind of identity-care entails. In the world in which, according to George Steiner's pithy aphorism, all cultural products are calculated for 'maximal impact and instant obsolescence', a lifelong construction of an a priori designed identity would indeed spell trouble. As Ricardo Petrella put it, the present global trends direct 'economies towards the production of the ephemeral and the volatile – through the massive reduction of the life-span of products and services – and of the precarious (temporary, flexible and part-time jobs)'.[4]

Whatever identity one may contemplate and desire must possess, just like today's labour market, the quality of flexibility. It must be amenable to a change at short notice or without notice and be guided by the principle of keeping all options, or at least as many options as possible, open. The future is bound to be full of surprises, and so proceeding otherwise would amount to a self-deprivation: to the cutting off of the yet unknown, only vaguely intuited benefits that the future meanderings of fate, as well as the unprecedented and unanticipated life-offers, may bring.

Cultural fashions dynamite their entry into the public vanity fair, but they also grow obsolete and turn ludicrously old-fashioned even faster than it takes to grasp public attention. It is therefore better to keep each current identity temporary, to embrace it lightly, to make sure that it will fall away once the arms are open to embrace its new, brighter, or just untested replacement. Perhaps it would be more to the point to speak of self-identity in the plural: the life-itinerary of most individuals is likely to be strewn with discarded and lost identities. Each successive identity is likely to remain incomplete and conditional, and so the snag is how to stave off the danger of its ossification. Perhaps even the very term 'identity' has lost its usefulness, since it belies more than it reveals of the most common life-experience: more and more often concerns with social placement are fed by the fear of an identification too tough and stiff to be revoked if need be. The desire of identity and horror of satisfying that desire, the attraction and the repulsion that the thought of identity evokes, mix and blend to produce a compound of lasting ambivalence and confusion.

Concerns of this kind are much better served by the volatile, infinitely inventive and erratic market of consumer goods. Whether meant for durable or momentary consumption, consumer goods are not, by definition, intended to last forever – no resemblance here to a 'lifelong work

career' or 'jobs for life'. Consumer goods are meant to be used up and to disappear; the idea of temporariness and transitoriness is intrinsic to their very denomination as objects of consumption; consumer goods have *memento mori* written all over them, even if with an invisible ink.

And so there is a sort of preordained harmony or resonance between these qualities of consumer goods and the ambivalence endemic to contemporary identity concerns. Identities, just like consumer goods, are to be appropriated and possessed, but only in order to be consumed, and so to disappear again. As in the case of marketed consumer goods, consumption of an identity should not – must not – extinguish the desire for other, new and improved identities, nor preclude the ability to absorb them. This being the requirement there is not much point in looking any further for the tools than the market place. 'Aggregate identities', loosely arranged of the purchasable, not-too-lasting, easily detachable and utterly replaceable tokens currently available in the shops, seem to be exactly what one needs to meet the challenges of contemporary living.

If this is what the energy released by identity problems is expended on, then no specialized social mechanisms of 'normative regulation' or 'pattern maintenance' are necessary; neither do they seem desirable. The traditional, panoptical methods of drill would clearly go against the grain of the consumer's tasks and prove disastrous to the society organized around desire and choice. But would any alternative method of normative regulation fare any better? Is not the very idea of normative regulation, at least on a global-societal scale, a thing of the past? Once crucial to 'get people to work' in a society of working people, did it not outlive its usefulness in the society of consumers? The sole purpose of any norm is to use the human agency of free choice to limit or altogether eliminate freedom of choice; to elbow out or to cut off completely all possibilities except one – the one promoted by the norm. But the side effect of killing choice, and particularly the choice most abominable from the point of view of normative, order-instilling regulation – a volatile, whimsical and easily revokable choice – would be equal to the killing of the consumer in the human being; the most horrifying disaster that may befall the market-centred society.

Normative regulation is thus 'dysfunctional' and so undesirable for the perpetuation, smooth functioning and prosperity of a consumer market, but it also appears repulsive to its clients. The interests of consumers and market operators meet here; in a curious and unanticipated form the message conveyed by the old adage 'what is good for General Motors is good for the United States' comes true (with the proviso that 'United States' is nothing else but an aggregate of its citizens). The 'consumer spirit', much like the merchandising companies which thrive on it, rebels against regulation. A society of consumers is resentful of all legal restrictions imposed on freedom of choice, of any delegalization of potential objects of consumption, and manifests its resentment by widespread support willingly offered to most 'deregulatory' measures.

Similar resentment is shown in the hitherto unheard-of approval given in the US and elsewhere to the reduction of social services – centrally administered and guaranteed provisions of necessities – providing the reduction goes hand in hand with the lowering of taxes. The slogan of 'more money in the taxpayer's pocket', so popular on the left and right of the political spectrum that it is no longer seriously contested, appeals to consumers' duty to exercise choice, a duty already internalized and reforged into the life-vocation. The promise of more money left in the pocket after taxes is attractive to the electorate not so much for the promise of more consumption, as for the prospect of more choice of what is to be consumed, more pleasures of shopping and choosing; it is to that promise of more frequently exercised choice that it is believed to owe its astonishing seductive power.

For all practical intents and purposes, it is the means, not the end, that counts. Fulfilling the vocation of the consumer means more choosing, whether or not this results in more consumption. To embrace the modality of the consumer means first and foremost falling in love with choice; only in the second, and not at all indispensable place, does it mean consuming more.

Work as judged by aesthetics

Producers can fulfil their vocation only collectively; production is a collective endeavour, it presumes the division of tasks, cooperation of actors and coordination of their activities. Certain partial actions can be performed on occasion singly and in solitude, but even then dovetailing them with other actions which converge on the creation of the final product remains the crucial part of the task and stays high on the performer's mind. Producers are together even when they act apart. The work of each one can only gain from more inter-individual communication, harmony and integration.

Consumers are just the opposite. Consumption is a thoroughly individual, solitary and, in the end, lonely activity; an activity which is fulfilled by quenching and arousing, assuaging and whipping up a desire which is always a private, and not easily communicable sensation. There is no such thing as 'collective consumption'. True, consumers may get together in the course of consumption, but even then the actual consumption remains a thoroughly lonely, individually lived-through experience. Getting together only underlies the privacy of the consuming act and enhances its pleasures.

Choosing is more satisfying when performed in the company of other choosers, preferably inside a temple dedicated to the cult of choosing and filled to the brim with worshippers of choice; this is one of the foremost pleasures of going out to dinner in a heavily booked-up restaurant, of milling around a crowded shopping mall or amusement park, of group sex. But what is jointly celebrated in all these and similar cases is the *individuality*

of choice and consumption. The individuality of each choice is restated and reconfirmed through being replicated by the copy-cat actions of the crowd of choosers. Were this not so, there would be nothing to be gained by the consumer from consuming in company. The activity of consumption is a natural enemy of all coordination and integration. It is also immune to their influence, rendering all efforts of bonding impotent in overcoming the endemic loneliness of the consuming act. Consumers are alone even when they act together.

Freedom to choose sets the stratification ladder of consumer society and so also the frame in which its members, the consumers, inscribe their life aspirations – a frame that defines the direction of efforts towards self-improvement and encloses the image of a 'good life'. The more freedom of choice one has, and above all the more choice one freely exercises, the higher up one is placed in the social hierarchy, the more public deference and self-esteem one can count on and the closer one comes to the 'good life' ideal. Wealth and income do count, of course; without them, choice is limited or altogether denied. But the role of wealth and income as *capital* – that is, money which serves first and foremost to turn out more money – recedes to a second and inferior place if it does not disappear from view (and from the pool of motivations) altogether. The prime significance of wealth and income is in the stretching of the range of consumer choice.

Hoarding, saving or investing would make sense solely for the promise they hold for the future widening of consumer choice. They are not, however, the options intended for the bulk of ordinary consumers, and were they embraced by a majority of consumers, they would spell disaster. Rising savings and shrinking credit purchases are bad news; the swelling of consumer credit is welcomed as the sure sign of 'things moving in the right direction'. A consumer society would not take lightly a call to delay gratification. A consumer society is a society of credit cards, not savings books. It is a 'now' society. A wanting society, not a waiting society.

Again, there is no need for 'normative regulation' with its attendant disciplining drill and ubiquitous policing to make sure that human wants are harnessed to the market-operators' profits, or any need to reforge the 'needs of economy', the consumer-goods economy, to match the desires of consumers. Seduction, display of untested wonders, promise of sensations yet untried but dwarfing and overshadowing everything tried before, will do nicely. Providing of course, that the message falls on receptive ears and that all eyes are focused on thrill-presaging things when scanning the signals. Consumption, ever more varied and rich consumption, must appear to the consumers as a right to enjoy, not a duty to suffer. The consumers must be guided by aesthetic interests, not ethical norms.

It is aesthetics, not ethics, that is deployed to integrate the society of consumers, keep it on course, and time and again salvage it from crises. If ethics accord supreme value to duty well done, aesthetics put a premium on sublime experience. Fulfilment of duty has its inner, time-extensive logic and so it structures time, gives it a direction, makes sense of such

notions as gradual accumulation or delay of fulfilment. The search for experience, however, has no good reason to be postponed, since nothing but 'waste of opportunity' may follow the delay. Opportunity of experience does not need nor justify groundwork, since it comes unannounced and vanishes if not instantly grasped (waning, to be sure, shortly after having been grasped). Opportunity of experience is something to be caught in full flight. There is no peculiar moment especially suitable for doing this. One moment does not differ in this respect from another, each moment is equally good – 'ripe' – for the purpose.

Besides, the choice of the moment is the one choice not available to those who have chosen choice-making as their mode of life. It is not for the consumer to decide when the opportunity of a mind-boggling experience may arise, and so she or he must be ever ready to open the door and welcome it. He or she must be constantly on the alert, permanently capable of appreciating the chance when it comes and doing whatever is needed to make the best of it.

If the producer society is Platonian by heart, seeking unbreakable rules and the ultimate patterns of things, the consumer society is Aristotelian – pragmatic, flexible, abiding by the principle that one worries about crossing the bridge no earlier (but no later either) than one comes to it. The sole initiative left to a sensible consumer is to be on that spot where opportunities are known to be thick on the ground, and be there at the time when they are known to be particularly dense. Such initiative can accommodate only wisdom of a 'phronesis' kind, a collection of rules of thumb, not foolproof recipes and algorithmic commands. Hence it requires a lot of trust, and above all it needs safe havens where that trust can be securely anchored. No wonder a consumer society is also a counselling and advertising paradise, as well as a fertile soil for prophets, fortune-tellers or pedlars of magic potions and distillers of philosophical stones.

To sum up: it is the aesthetics of consumption that now rules where the work ethic once ruled. For the successful alumni of consumer training the world is an immense matrix of possibilities, of intense and ever more intense sensations, of deep and deeper still experiences (in the sense conveyed by the German notion of *Erlebnis*, as distinct from *Erfahrung*; both German terms translate into English as 'experience'. Roughly speaking, *Erlebnis* is 'what I live through', while *Erfahrung* is 'what happens to me'). The world and all its fragments are judged by their capacity to occasion sensations and *Erlebnisse* – the capacity to arouse desire, the most pleasurable phase of the consumer's life pursuits, more satisfying than the satisfaction itself. It is by the varying volumes of that capacity that objects, events and people are plotted on the map; the world map in most frequent use is aesthetic, rather than cognitive or moral.[5]

The status occupied by work, or more precisely by the job performed, could not but be profoundly affected by the present ascendancy of aesthetic criteria. As we have seen before, work has lost its privileged position – that of an axis around which all other effort at self-constitution and identity-

building rotate. But work has also ceased to be the focus of particularly intense ethical attention in terms of being a chosen road to moral improvement, repentance and redemption. Like other life activities, work now comes first and foremost under aesthetic scrutiny. Its value is judged by its capacity to generate pleasurable experience. Work devoid of such capacity – that does not offer 'intrinsic satisfaction' – is also work devoid of value. Other criteria (also its supposedly morally ennobling impact) cannot withstand the competition and are not powerful enough to save work from condemnation as useless or even demeaning for the aesthetically guided collector of sensations.

Vocation as privilege

There is nothing particularly new about jobs differing widely in terms of their capacity to bring satisfaction. Some jobs were always sought after as being richly satisfying and 'fulfilling', while many others were suffered as drudgery. Certain jobs were 'meaningful' and lent themselves more easily than other kinds of work to being regarded as a vocation, a source of pride and self-esteem. However, the point was that from the ethical per-spective no job could be seriously argued to be deprived of value and demeaning; all work added to human dignity and all work equally served the cause of moral propriety and spiritual redemption. From the work ethic point of view, any work – work *as such* – 'humanized', whatever immediate pleasures (or their absence) it held in store for its performers. Ethically speaking, the feeling of a duty fulfilled was the most direct, decisive and in the end sufficient satisfaction work could bring, and in this respect all kinds of work were equal. Even the engrossing, intoxicating sensation of self-fulfilment experienced by the lucky few who could live their trade or profession as a true calling, as a secular mission of sorts, tended to be ascribed to the same awareness of the 'duty well done' which was in principle open to the performers of all jobs, even the meanest and the least engaging. The work ethic conveyed a message of equality; it played down the otherwise obvious differences between jobs, their potentials for satisfaction, their status- and prestige-bestowing capacities, as well as the material benefits they offered.

Not so the aesthetic scrutiny and evaluation of work. This emphasizes distinction, magnifies the differences and elevates certain professions to the rank of engrossing, refined objects of aesthetic, indeed artistic, experience, while denying to other kinds of remunerated livelihood-securing occu-pations any value at all. The 'elevated' professions call for the same qualities which are demanded for the appreciation of art – good taste, sophistication, discernment, disinterested dedication and a lot of schooling. Other types of work are regarded as so uniformly abject and worthless that by no stretch of the imagination can they become objects of willing, unforced choice.

One is likely to perform jobs of that kind only out of necessity and only if one is denied access to any other means of survival.

Jobs in the first category are 'interesting'; jobs in the second category are 'boring'. These two brief verdicts encapsulate complex aesthetic criteria which gives them substance. Their 'no justification needed', 'no appeal allowed' bluntness bear an oblique testimony to the ascendancy of aesthetics now spreading through the land of work, previously a province of ethics. Like everything else which may reasonably hope to become the target of desire and an object of free consumer choice, jobs must be 'interesting' – varied, exciting, allowing for adventure, containing certain (though not excessive) measures of risk, and giving occasion to ever-new sensations. Jobs that are monotonous, repetitive, routine, unadventurous, allowing no initiative and promising no challenge to wits nor a chance for self-testing and self-assertion, are 'boring'. No fully fledged consumer would conceivably agree to undertake them on her or his own will, unless cast in a situation of no choice (that is, unless his or her identity as a consumer, a free chooser, has already been forfeited, withdrawn or otherwise denied). Such jobs are devoid of aesthetic value and for that reason stand little chance of becoming vocations in a society of experience-collectors.

The point is, though, that in the world where aesthetic criteria rule supreme the jobs in question have not retained their formerly assumed ethical value either. They would be chosen willingly only by people as yet unprocessed by the society of consumers and unconverted to consumerism, and thus satisfied with selling their labour in exchange for bare survival (first generation immigrants and 'guest workers' from poor countries, or the residents of poor countries drawn into factories set by the immigrant capital travelling in search of cheap labour could be said to fall into this category). Others need to be forced into accepting jobs that offer no aesthetic satisfaction. Rough coercion once hidden under the veneer of the work ethic now appears bare-faced and unconcealed. Seduction and arousal of desires, those otherwise unfailingly effective integrating/motivating vehicles of a consumer society, are in this case appallingly irrelevant and toothless. In order to fill jobs that fail the aesthetic test with people already converted to consumerism, a situation of no choice, enforcement and fight for elementary survival must be artificially re-created. This time, though, without the saving grace of moral ennoblement.

Like freedom of choice and mobility, the aesthetic value of work has turned into a potent stratifying factor in the society of consumers. The trick is no longer to limit work time to the bare minimum, so vacating more space for leisure, but on the contrary to efface altogether the line dividing vocation from avocation, job from hobby, work from recreation; to lift work itself to the rank of supreme and most satisfying entertainment. An entertaining job is a highly coveted privilege. And those privileged by it jump headlong into the opportunities of strong sensations and thrilling experience which such jobs offer. 'Workaholics' with no fixed hours of work, preoccupied with the challenges of their jobs twenty-four hours a

day and seven days a week, may be found today not among the slaves, but among the elite of the lucky and successful.

Work that is rich in gratifying experience, work as self-fulfilment, work as the meaning of life, work as the core or the axis of everything that counts, as the source of pride, self-esteem, honour and deference or notoriety, in short, work as *vocation*, has become the privilege of the few; a distinctive mark of the elite, a way of life the rest may watch in awe, admire and contemplate at a distance but experience only vicariously through pulp fiction and the virtual reality of televised docu-dramas. That rest is given no chance of living-through their jobs in a way the vocations are lived.

The 'flexible labour market' neither offers nor permits commitment and dedication to any currently performed occupation. Getting attached to the job in hand, falling in love with what the job requires its holder to do, identifying one's place in the world with the work performed or the skills deployed, means becoming a hostage to fate; it is neither very likely nor to be recommended, given the short-lived nature of any employment and the 'until further notice' clause entailed in any contract. For the majority of people other than the chosen few, in the present-day flexible labour market, embracing one's work as a vocation carries enormous risks and is a recipe for psychological and emotional disaster.

Under these circumstances, exhortations to diligence and dedication sound insincere and hollow, and reasonable people would be well advised to perceive them as such – to see through the trappings of apparent vocation into the game their bosses play. Bosses do not really expect employees to believe that they mean what they say – they wish only that both sides *pretend* to believe that the game is for real, and behave accordingly. From the bosses' point of view, inducing the employees to treat the pretence of a vocational pattern to their employment seriously means storing trouble which will erupt whenever the next 'downsizing' exercise or another bout of 'rationalizing' occurs. A short-term success of moralizing sermons would in any case prove counter-productive in the long run, as it would divert people's attention from what ought to be their true vocation – their consumer pursuits.

All this complex intertwining of 'dos' and 'don'ts', of dreams and their costs, of enticements to surrender and warnings against falling into such traps, is offered to the vocation-hungry audience as a spectacle. We see great sportsmen or other stars who reach the peak of their professional skill, but climb to such heights of achievement and fame at the cost of emptying their lives of anything standing in the way of that achievement. They deny themselves all the pleasures that ordinary folk set great store by. Their achievement has all the symptoms of being real. There is hardly a less controversial and more convincing arena in which 'real quality' is tested than the athletics track or the tennis court. And who would doubt the singer's excellence reflected in the riotous delirium of packed theatres? In this public spectacle, there seems to be no room for pretence, confidence

tricks, putting on an act, behind-the-scene plots. All this is for real, for everyone to see and pass judgment upon. The drama of vocation is played from the beginning to the end in the open, in front of the faithful crowds. (Or so it seems. The truth, the trustworthiness of the performance, in fact takes a lot of scripting and staging.)

The saints of the stardom cult are, like all saints, to be admired and held as an example, but not emulated. They embody, at the same time, the ideal of life and its inachievability. The stars of the stadium and the stage are all inordinately rich. Obviously, their dedication and self-denial bring the fruits that work-lived-as-a-vocation is famed to gestate; recitation of the mind-boggling sums of prizes for the winners of tennis, golf, snooker or chess championships or the footballers' transfer fees are as vital a part of the cult as the recitation of miracles performed or the stories of the martyrdom suffered were in the cult of the saints of faith and piety.

What the saints of the stardom cult surrender in exchange is however as spine-chilling as the gains are awe-inspiring. One of the costs is the transience of their glory. The stars shoot onto the firmament from nowhere and to that nowhere they are bound, and in it they will vanish. No wonder it is the sportsmen and sportswomen who are arguably the best actors of the vocation's morality plays: it is in the nature of their achievement that it must be short-lived, as brief and doomed an episode as youth itself. As displayed by sportswomen and men, work-lived-as-a-vocation is self-destructive, a life towards a speedy end. Vocation may be many things, but what most emphatically it is not − not in this rendition at any rate − is a proposition for the life-project or a whole-life strategy. As displayed by the stars, vocation is, like any other experience in the life of post-modern sensation-gatherers, an *episode*.

Weber's 'Puritan saints' who lived their working lives as deeply ethical endeavours, as fulfilment of divine commandments, could not but see the work of others − any work − as essentially a matter of morality. Today's elite equally naturally tends to view all work as mainly a matter of aesthetic satisfaction. As far as the reality of life at the bottom of the social hierarchy is concerned, this conception, just like the one which preceded it, is a gross travesty.[6] However, it allows one to believe that the voluntary 'flexibility' of the work condition freely and enthusiastically chosen by those at the top, and once chosen cherished and keenly protected, must be an unqualified blessing to everybody else, including those to whom 'flexibility' means not so much freedom of choice, autonomy and the right to self-assert, as lack of security, forced uprooting and an uncertain future.

Being poor in a consumer society

In its halcyon days, in the society of producers, the work ethic reached well beyond the factory floor and the walls of poorhouses. Its precepts informed the vision of a right and proper society yet to be achieved, and until then

served as the horizon by which the present moves were oriented and the present state of affairs critically assessed. The vision of the ultimate condition to be reached was that of full employment, of a society consisting solely of working people.

'Full employment' occupied the somewhat ambiguous position of being simultaneously a right and a duty. Depending on which side of the 'labour-hiring contract' the principle was invoked, either one or the other of its two modalities came to the fore; but as with all norms, both aspects had to be present to secure the overall hold of the principle. The idea of full employment as an indispensable feature of 'normal society' implied both a duty universally and willingly accepted and a commonly shared will lifted to the rank of a universal right.

Defining the norm defines also the abnormal. The work ethic encapsulated abnormality in the phenomenon of unemployment – 'abnormal' was not to work. Expectedly, the persistent presence of the poor tended to be explained alternatively by the shortage of work or the shortage of the will to work. The messages of the likes of Charles Booth or Seebohm Rowntree – that one can remain poor while *in* full employment, and therefore the phenomenon of poverty cannot be explained by the insufficient spread of the work ethic – came to the British enlightened opinion as a shock. The very notion of the '*working* poor' had all the markings of a blatant contradiction in terms, certainly as long as the universal acceptance of the work ethic figured most prominently in public thinking about social problems and continued to be seen as the cure-all for social ills.

As work gradually moved away from its central position of the meeting point between individual motives, social integration and systemic reproduction, the work ethic – as we have already noted – was slowly demoted from its function of supreme regulatory principle. By now it had backed out or has been elbowed out from many areas of social and individual life it previously directly or obliquely regimented. The non-working section of the population remained perhaps its last retreat, or rather its last chance of survival. Blaming the misery of the poor on their unwillingness to work, and so charging them with moral depravity and presenting poverty as the penalty for sin, was the last service the work ethic performed in the new society of consumers.

For most of human history the condition of poverty has meant direct jeopardy to physical survival – the threat of death from hunger, medically unattended disease or the lack of shelter. It still means all those dangers in many parts of the globe. Even when the condition of the poor is lifted above the level of sheer survival, poverty always means malnutrition, inadequate protection against vagaries of climate, and homelessness – all defined in relation to what a given society perceives to be the proper standards of nourishment, dress and accommodation.

The phenomenon of poverty does not boil down, however, to material deprivation and bodily distress. Poverty is also a social and psychological condition: as the propriety of human existence is measured by the standards

of decent life practised by any given society, inability to abide by such standards is itself a cause of distress, agony and self-mortification. Poverty means being excluded from whatever passes for a 'normal life'. It means being 'not up to the mark'. This results in a fall of self-esteem, feelings of shame or feelings of guilt. Poverty also means being cut off from the chances of whatever passes in a given society for a 'happy life', not taking 'what life has to offer'. This results in resentment and aggravation, which spill out in the form of violent acts, self-deprecation, or both.

In a consumer society, a 'normal life' is the life of consumers, pre-occupied with making their choices among the panoply of publicly displayed opportunities for pleasurable sensations and lively experiences. A 'happy life' is defined by catching many opportunities and letting slip but few or none at all, by catching the opportunities most talked about and thus most desired, and catching them no later than others, and preferably before others. As in all other kinds of society, the poor of a consumer society are people with no access to a normal life, let alone to a happy one. In a consumer society however, having no access to a happy or merely a normal life means to be consumers *manquées*, or flawed consumers. And so the poor of a consumer society are socially defined, and self-defined, first and foremost as blemished, defective, faulty and deficient – in other words, inadequate – consumers.

In a society of consumers, it is above all the inadequacy of the person as a consumer that leads to social degradation and 'internal exile'. It is this inadequacy, this inability to acquit oneself of the consumer's duties, that turns into bitterness at being left behind, disinherited or degraded, shut off or excluded from the social feast to which others gained entry. Over-coming that consumer inadequacy is likely to be seen as the only remedy – the sole exit from a humiliating plight.

As Peter Kelvin and Joanna E. Jarett discovered in their pioneering study of the social-psychological effects of unemployment in a consumer society, one aspect of the situation is particularly painful to people out of work:[7] a 'seemingly unending amount of free time' coupled with their 'inability to make use of it . . . Much of one's day-to-day existence is unstructured', but the unemployed have no means to structure it in any way recognized as making sense, as satisfying or worthwhile:

> Feeling shut away at home is one of the most frequent complaints of the unemployed . . . unemployed man not only sees himself as bored and frustrated [but] seeing himself like that (as well as actually being so) also makes him irritable. Irritability becomes a regular feature of the day-to-day existence of the unemployed man.[8]

From his respondents (young male and female unemployed) Stephen Hutchens got the following reports of their feelings about the kind of life they led: 'I was bored, I got depressed easily – most of the time I just sat at home and looked at the paper'. 'I have no money or not enough. I get really bored'. 'I lay in a lot, unless I go to see friends and go to pubs when

we have money – not much to boast about'. Hutchens sums up his findings with this conclusion: 'Certainly the most popular word used to describe the experience of being unemployed is "boring" ... Boredom and problems with time; having "nothing to do"'.[9]

Boredom is one complaint the consumer world has no room for and the consumer culture set out to eradicate it. A happy life, as defined by consumer culture, is life insured against boredom, life in which constantly 'something happens', something new, exciting, and exciting because it is new. The consumer market, the consumer culture's faithful companion and indispensable complement, insures against spleen, ennui, oversaturation, melancholy, acidia, being fed up or blasé – all the ailments which once haunted the life of affluence and comfort. The consumer market makes sure that no one at any time may despair or feel disconsolate because of 'having tried it all' and having thus exhausted the pool of pleasures life had to offer.

As Freud pointed out before the onset of the consumer era, there is no such thing as the *state* of happiness; we are happy only for a brief moment when satisfying a vexing need, but immediately afterwards boredom sets in. The object of desire loses its allure once the reason to desire it has disappeared. The consumer market however proved to be more inventive than Freud was imaginative. It conjured up the state of happiness which Freud deemed unattainable. It did this by seeing to it that desires were aroused faster than the time it took to placate them, and that objects of desire were replaced quicker than the time it took to get bored and annoyed with their possession. Not being bored – ever – is the norm of the consumers' life, and a realistic norm, a target within reach, so that those who fail to hit it have only themselves to blame while being an easy target for other people's contempt and condemnation.

To alleviate boredom one needs money – a great deal of money if one wishes to stave off the spectre of boredom once for all, to reach the 'state of happiness'. Desiring comes free, but to desire realistically, and so experience desire as a pleasurable state, requires resources. Medicines against boredom are not available on NHS prescriptions. Money is the entry permit to places where remedies for boredom are peddled (such as shopping malls, amusement parks or health and fitness centres); the places the presence in which is by itself the most effective of prophylactic potions to ward off the onset of the disease; the places whose principal destination is to keep desires seething, unquenched and unquenchable, yet deeply pleasurable thanks to anticipated satisfaction.

And so boredom is the psychological corollary of other stratifying factors specific to the consumer society: freedom and amplitude of choice, freedom of mobility, ability to cancel space and structure time. Being the psychological dimension of stratification, it is the one likely to be most painfully felt and most irately objected to by those with low scores. The desperate desire to escape boredom or to mitigate it is also likely to be the main motive for their action.

The odds against their action achieving its objective are, however, enormous. Common remedies against boredom are not accessible to those in poverty, while all unusual, irregular or innovative counter-measures are bound to be classified as illegitimate and bring upon their users the punitive powers of the defenders of law and order. Paradoxically, or not that paradoxically after all, tempting fate by challenging the forces of law and order may itself turn into the poor man's favourite substitute for the affluent consumer's well-tempered anti-boredom adventures, in which the volume of desired and permissible risks are cautiously balanced.

If the constitutive trait of the poor's plight is that of being a defective consumer, there is very little that those in a deprived neighbouhood can do collectively to devise alternative ways of structuring their time, particularly in a fashion recognizable as making sense and being gratifying. The charge of laziness, always hovering dangerously close over the homestead of the unemployed, could be (and was, notably during the Great Depression of the 1930s) fought against with exaggerated, ostentatious and in the end ritualistic busyness around the house – scrubbing floors and windows, washing walls, curtains and children's skirts and trousers, tending to back gardens. There is nothing, though, that one can do to resist the stigma and shame of being an inadequate consumer, even within the ghetto of similarly deficient consumers. Keeping up to the standards of the people around you will not do, since the standards of propriety are set, and constantly raised, far away from the area under the neighbourhood watch, by daily papers and the televised glossy twenty-four-hours-a-day commercials for consumer bliss. None of the substitutes that the local neighbourhood's ingenuity could invent are likely to withstand the competition, warrant self-satisfaction and assuage the pain of glaring inferiority. The assessment of one's own adequacy as a consumer is remotely controlled and the verdict cannot be protested in the court of home-grown opinion.

As Jeremy Seabrook reminds his readers,[10] the secret of present-day society lies in 'the development of an artificially created and subjective sense of insufficiency', since 'nothing could be more menacing' to its foundational principles 'than that the people should declare themselves satisfied with what they have'. What people do have is thus played down, denigrated, dwarfed by obtrusive and all too visible displays of extravagant consumption by the better-off: 'The rich become objects of universal adoration'.

Let us recall that the rich who were put on display as personal heroes for universal adoration used to be 'self-made men', whose lives epitomized the benign effects of the work ethic strictly and doggedly adhered to. This is no longer the case. The object of adoration now is wealth itself – wealth as the warrant for a most fanciful and prodigal lifestyle. It is what one *can* do that matters, not what is to be done or what has been done. Universally adored in the persons of the rich is their wondrous ability to pick and choose the contents of their lives – places to live, partners to live with – and to change these things at will and without effort. They never seem to reach points of

no return, there seems to be no visible end to their reincarnations, their future is forever richer in content and more enticing than their past. Last but not least, the only thing that seems to matter to them is the vastness of the prospects which their wealth seems to throw open. These people seem, indeed, to be guided by the aesthetic of consumption; it is their mastery of this aesthetic, not obedience to the work ethic, not their financial success, but their connoisseurship, that lie at the heart of their greatness and their right to universal admiration.

'The poor do not inhabit a separate culture from the rich', Seabrook points out. 'They must live in the same world that has been contrived for the benefit of those with money. And their poverty is aggravated by economic growth, just as it is intensified by recession and non-growth.' It is 'aggravated by economic growth', let us add, in a double sense.

First, whatever is being referred to by the concept of 'economic growth' in its present phase, goes hand in hand with the replacement of jobs by 'flexible labour' and of job security by 'rolling contracts', fixed-term appointments and incidental hire of labour; with downsizing, restructuring and 'rationalizing' – all boiling down to the cutting of the volume of employment. Nothing manifests the connection more spectacularly than the fact that post-Thatcher Britain, the pioneer and the most zealous defender of all such 'factors of growth' and the country widely acclaimed as the most astonishing 'economic success' of the Western world, has been found also to be the site of poverty most abject among the affluent countries of the globe. The latest *Human Development Report* from the UN (United Nations) Development Programme's authorship finds the British poor poorer than those in any other Western or Westernized country. Nearly a quarter of old people in Britain live in poverty, which is five times more than in 'economically troubled' Italy and three times more than in 'falling behind' Ireland. A fifth of British children live in poverty – twice as many as in Taiwan or Italy and six times as many as in Finland. All in all, 'the proportion of poor people in "income poverty" jumped by nearly 60 per cent under [Mrs Thatcher's] government'.[11]

Second, while the poor get poorer, the very rich – those paragons of consumer virtues – get richer still. While the poorest fifth in Britain, the country of the most recent 'economic miracle', are able to buy less than their equivalents in any other major Western country, the wealthiest fifth are among the richest in Europe, enjoying purchasing power equal to that of the legendary rich Japanese elite. The poorer are the poor, the higher and more whimsical are the patterns of life set in front of their eyes to adore, covet and wish to emulate. And so the 'subjective sense of insuf-ficiency' with all the pain of stigma and humiliation which accompany that feeling, is aggravated by a double pressure of decreasing living standards and increasing relative (comparative) deprivation, both reinforced rather than mitigated by economic growth in its present, deregulated, *laissez-faire* form.

The sky which is the limit of consumer dreams rises ever higher while

the publicly managed magnificent flying machines once designed to lift those low down to heaven, first run out of petrol and then are dumped in the scrapyards of 'phased-out' policies or recycled into police cars.

PART II

The rise and fall of the welfare state

The concept of the 'welfare state' conveys the idea that it is the duty and the obligation of the state to guarantee the 'welfare' (that is, something more than sheer survival: survival with *dignity*, as understood in a given society at a given time) of all its subjects. The concept imposed upon the state-run and state-financed institutions the responsibilities implied by a wider idea of *public welfare*[1] – that of a collective guarantee of individual dignified survival. Public welfare could be seen as a form of collective insurance drawn jointly and extended over every individual member of the collectivity; an insurance policy which promised compensations proportional to the scale of individual need, not to the size of individually-paid premiums. The principle of *public* welfare in its pure form is equality in need, which overrides inequality in the ability to pay. The idea of the welfare state charges state organs with the responsibility for implementing this principle of public welfare.

The idea of public welfare in general and the welfare state in particular has an ambiguous relationship with the work ethic. Indeed, the idea of welfare relates to the core ideas of the work ethic in two opposite ways that are difficult to reconcile, which makes it a topic of a long-standing contention, so far without a resolution acceptable to all sides.

On the one hand, the advocates of a collective guarantee of individual welfare recognized the normality of life supported by work; they pointed out however that the norm is far from being universally upheld because of the lack of permanent employment for all, and that to make the precepts of the work ethic realistic one needs to bail out those who fall by the board. One needs also to see the temporarily unemployed through hard times, keeping them ready to 'behave normally', i.e. to enter employment, once the economy recovers and jobs are again available. By this argument, the welfare state is needed to uphold the power of the work ethic as the norm

and the measure of social health, while helping to minimize the adverse effects of the difficulties involved in that norm's constant and universal implementation.

On the other hand, by proclaiming that decent and dignified life should be assured at all times and to all members of the polity 'as a right', *regardless* of their own contribution to common wealth, the idea of public welfare allowed (explicitly or implicitly) for the possibility of separating livelihood from the 'socially useful', productive contributions deemed to be possible solely in employment, and by the same token sapped the work ethic's most sacrosanct and least questioned premise. It rendered the right to dignified life a matter of political citizenship, rather than economic performance.

The contradiction between these two implications is genuine, and so it is little wonder that since its inception at the turn of the century, the welfare state has stood in the centre of controversy. With good reasons, the welfare state was presented by some as the necessary complement of the work ethic, while by others it was viewed as a politically motivated conspiracy against it.

This was not, however, the sole bone of contention. Is the welfare state 'an agency of repression, or a system for enlarging human needs and mitigating the rigours of the free-market economy? An aid to capital accumulation and profits or a social wage to be defended and enlarged like the money in your pay packet? Capitalist fraud or working-class victory?' asked Ian Gough, trying to make sense of the confusion which seemed to be the sole outcome of protracted controversy.[2] The most reasonable answer is that the welfare state has been all these things and many more in addition.

The welfare state emerged at a meeting point between: the pressures of the ailing capitalist economy, incapable of recreating the conditions of its own survival on its own and without political help; the pressures of organized labour, incapable of insuring itself, again on its own and without political help, against the vagaries of 'economic cycles'; the urge to protect and reassert the principle of social inequality through mitigating its most iniquitous and least-endurable manifestations; the desire to stimulate acceptance of inequality by marginalizing those who failed to participate in its reproduction; and the pressing need to help the membership of polity to weather the eroding impact of a politically uncontrolled economy.

Thanks to all these powerful and converging, though heterogeneous drives, the coming of the welfare state at a certain advanced stage of modern (industrial, capitalist, market, democratic) society was indeed 'over-determined'. The pressures which brought it into being and kept supplying it over the years with renewed vigour were so overwhelming that common wisdom came to see state-administered welfare provisions as a natural ingredient of modern living, much like some form of elected authorities, or some form of currency.

Until quite recently, the enlightened opinion loyally supported that kind of popular wisdom. Even the most perceptive and insightful of observers found it hard to envisage modern society without a welfare state.

In February 1980, in a paper presented in Perugia and published in October 1981, one of the most astute analysts of contemporary trends, Claus Offe, asserted that the welfare state had in a sense 'become an irreversible structure, the abolition of which would require nothing else than the abolition of political democracy and the unions, as well as fundamental changes in the party system'. Offe was in full agreement with the prevailing opinion when he dismissed 'the vision of overcoming the welfare state' as 'not much more than the politically impotent day-dream of some ideologues of the old middle class'. Indeed, the odds against life after the welfare state seemed all but overpowering:

> In the absence of large-scale state-subsidised housing, public education and health services, as well as extensive compulsory social security schemes, the working of an industrial economy would be simply inconceivable ... the embarassing secret of the welfare state is that, while its impact upon capitalist accumulation may well become destructive ... its abolition would be plainly disruptive ... The contradiction is that while capitalism cannot coexist *with*, neither can it exist *without*, the welfare state.[3]

All this rang true, certainly at the time Offe wrote it, and as long as it did, the idea of the abolition or even the serious curtailment of the welfare state, of leaving collective insurance to private initiative and of 'de-etatization' or 'deregulation' of welfare provisions in general, looked to be not much more than a pipe-dream held by ideological fossils. Less than two decades later, though, the unthinkable became thinkable and a state which is not a welfare state and a capitalist economy without the safety net of state-administered securities have become a distinct possibility, if not quite yet the reality in the most affluent and 'economically successful' societies. The pressures to make such a situation a reality appear presently to be overwhelming.

Just what role did the work ethic play, or was it portrayed as playing, in this, by any standards, dramatic reversal of the welfare state's fortune? And what impact may this upheaval have on its future prospects?

Between inclusion and exclusion

It may be difficult for many people today, after the years of 'neo-liberal' mental drill under the political auspices of Margaret Thatcher, Norman Tebbit or Keith Joseph, and the 'neo-liberal' *coup d'état* of Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek, to conceive of Sir William Beveridge – if not the father than certainly the midwife of the British welfare state – as a liberal rather than a socialist (if not a leftist critic of social democratic policies). And yet Beveridge saw his blueprint for the comprehensive welfare state as both the legitimate and inevitable fulfilment of the liberal idea of good society: 'I believe that the things I most desire to see done are

essentially Liberal things – a carrying forward into the new world of the great living traditions of Liberalism.' Because 'equal enjoyment of all essential liberties' was the 'ultimate aim of Liberalism . . . we can and should use the organised power of the community to increase the rights of individuals'. And the enjoyment of such enhanced liberties and rights will not be equal to all individuals if the community fails to secure, for all of them, 'freedom from Want and fear of Want; freedom from Idleness and fear of Idleness enforced by unemployment'.[4]

For a liberal like William Beveridge, it was not enough to declare freedom for all. It was also necessary to see to it that all had the means and the inclination to use that freedom which, according to the law, they had. It was with these preconditions of freedom in mind that Beveridge composed the *Report on Social Insurance and Allied Services* submitted to a government concerned with winning the peace about to follow the war about to be won. That report, in Beveridge's own words:

> . . . sets out a plan for Social Security to ensure that every citizen of the country, on condition of working and contributing while he can, has an income to keep him above want when for any other reason – of sickness, accident, unemployment, or old age – he can not work and earn an income sufficient for the honourable subsistence of himself and all who depend on him, an income sufficient though he has nothing else of his own and not cut down by any means test if he has anything of his own.

It is evident that the report came in the wake of two centuries of the work ethic's unchallenged ascendancy. The work ethic had done its job. It had ground the message home that every sane and able-bodied (male) person would work if he could, and by the middle of the twentieth century this was taken for granted. The sole problem left to be solved was what to do if and when, for whatever reason, work was not available or could not be taken up when it was. It was the fear of such a situation that cut people's wings, paralysed their initiative and deprived them of the courage they needed to face the risks. A communal insurance against such a situation would disperse incapacitating fears and thus give individuals the freedom to take the risks which any effort at self-assertion must entail. Freedom of self-assertion required freedom from want and idleness, and from the fear of either of them.

This idea, understood as primarily a preventive/enabling measure, would not make sense, of course, if such freedoms did not extend to *every* member of the community, not just (after the harm has been done) to those who had already failed – those unlucky or improvident members who 'have nothing else of their own'. To focus help on those who need it most, as most politicians propose today, would not come anywhere near to reaching Beveridge's ambitious objective. Offering assistance only after the fear had already done its devastating job and want and idleness had turned from a frightening eventuality into reality, would do nothing at all to fulfil

the liberal dream of daring, self-asserting, self-confident and self-reliant humans.

Even in terms of a purely cost-and-effects calculation, 'focused', means-tested assistance would make a bad business deal. If Beveridge's strategy worked, the welfare state could gradually work itself out of a job; but allowing the fear to haunt people as it did in the past could only multiply the ranks of its victims and so relentlessly push upwards the costs of bailing out those already in need of such assistance. The task therefore was to do away with fear itself, and this could be achieved only if the provisions on offer were 'not cut down by any means test' in the case of the lucky or provident who 'have something of their own'.

It was because of that promise to do away with means tests that Beveridge's vision met with almost universal acclaim. Few, if any people frowned upon the fiscal costs it implied for themselves, while virtually no one complained that 'we cannot afford it' (just like members of an ordinary family accept that everyone has an equal right to food without making first an inventory of the food available and finding out if there is enough to quell everybody's appetite). As Alan Deacon and Jonathan Bradshaw point out in their excellent history of the means test,[5] it was indeed to the promise to abolish the means test that the Beveridge Report owed its 'tremendous popularity'.

When the National Insurance Bill finally became law, *The Economist* (2 February 1946) interpreted it as the 'virtual abolition of the means test'. As a matter of fact, the abolition never really happened: by the end of 1948 there were in Britain three means-tested benefits, used by around two million people. This number has, however, been dwarfed into insignificance by the unstoppable rise in the number of means-tested social services in later years. By December 1982 some form of means test already affected twelve million people – a pace of growth hardly matched in any other field of public life.

Universal and selective (means tested) provisions of social benefits create two entirely different models of the welfare state; different in their social and cultural impact, in the way they are perceived by various categories of population, and in the prospects of their political fortunes.

No one perhaps fought more passionately against the gradual yet relentless replacement of universalist ambitions with selective practices than Richard Titmuss and Peter Townsend. In his desperate attempt to stem the rising tide, Titmuss reminded his readers in 1968[6] that 'services for the poor were always poor services' – when confined to the poor part of the population notorious for its lack of political muscle and public audibility, selective social provisions tend to attract on the whole the worst, rather than the best, professionals and managers. Both authors repeatedly argued, however, that whether this already very serious handicap was or was not real, confinement of social provisions to the means-tested poor had yet farther reaching deleterious consequences for the community as a whole. Only when social services are aimed at the community as a whole

and so are seen as benefiting everybody, can they 'foster social integration and a sense of community as they had done during the war'.[7]

Indeed, abolition of the means test invites the community of beneficiaries (overlapping in such cases with the totality of the population) to view the welfare state's expenditures as money well spent; the money spent was used, after all, to cover the cost of the best, most generous and most trustworthy insurance against all sorts of bad luck which 'one can buy'. The community itself is then seen as a secure home and the site where the proper (and optimal) balance of rights and duties is day-by-day drawn. Confine the provision of services to a means test and the community is immediately split into those who give without getting anything in exchange, and those who get without giving (a perception well illustrated recently by David Blunkett, a minister of the newly-elected 'New Labour' government, who in a letter to the *Guardian* of 29 July 1997 reduced the welfare state idea – which he proclaimed 'innefective and unsustainable' – to 'passing cash from one section of the community to another'). Rationality of interest is thereby set against the ethics of solidarity and the ethics themselves become a matter of what one 'can afford', or rather what one politically wills to share.

The overall effect of means testing is division instead of integration; exclusion instead of inclusion. The new, smaller community of taxpayers constitutes itself by using its political muscle to constitute the category of deficient citizens, and then pulling its own ranks together in a determined effort to marginalize that category and punish it for failing to live up to the standards advertised as the trademark of the constituting and self-constituting core. The indignant and self-righteous verdict, like that of R. Boyson,[8] that money is taken 'from the energetic, successful and thrifty to give to the idle, the failures and the feckless', finds then a growing number of sympathetic ears. The receivers of what now bears an uncanny resemblance to extorted pay-outs *must be* feckless, so that the majority can ascribe its own good fortune to thriftiness, and they *must be* failures, so that the majority can treat its own kind of life as a success story. As Joel F. Handler remarked, through the stigmatization of the outcasts the genuine or putative values of the dominant part of society are reaffirmed: 'observers construct themselves by constructing others'.[9]

The inventory of damages does not end here. Arguably the most seminal long-term effect of the kind of welfare state which has been reduced to servicing the needs of a small and, in popular opinion, inferior section of the population, is the impoverishment of politics and fading of political interest among the citizenship at large. For the majority of citizens, interest in the polity boils down to keeping the hands of the exchequer away from their pockets. There are virtually no other stakes – there is little else they would expect the state to offer, and so they see less and less reason to engage actively in the political life of the community. The 'downsizing' of the welfare state goes hand in hand with the wilting and shrinking of the politically active citizenship.

The welfare state unemployed

Such seem to be the 'unanticipated consequences' (or, as Zsuzsa Ferge and S. M. Miller would suggest,[10] the 'quasi-intentional', 'directed but unplanned' outcomes) of the relentless drift towards means testing. One wonders, though, whether deleting the generation of 'community feeling' from the list of the welfare state's tasks was indeed – as it has been alternatively suggested by Titmuss and Townsend on the one hand and the advocates of 'focused assistance' on the other – just a matter of fatal short-sightedness or an unwanted, but unavoidable outcome of worsening economic balances.

As has been indicated before, the explosive entry of the welfare state into the industrialized part of the world, its initially astounding political success and the virtual absence of serious resistance to its progress, were all due to its 'over-determination': to the convergence of many interests and pressures coming from otherwise antagonistic corners. Keeping the provisions of the welfare state intact used to be ascribed time and again to an unwritten 'social contract' between the social classes who without it would be at each other's throats. The amazing persistence of the welfare state used to be explained by its peace-making and peace-keeping function: it better protected the acceptance by the workers of the rules set by their capitalist bosses, and did this at a lower cost than the work ethic, supported solely by coercive measures, would ever have been able to do.

Conversely, the present-day implosion of the welfare state, the fast evaporation of support in quarters once eager to make it work, and the equanimity with which the curtailment and withdrawal of its provision and even the abandonment of its ostensibly unshakeable principles are viewed, all suggest a similar 'over-determination'. To explain the reversal of the welfare state's fortunes by an ideological change of guard and the inroads made into the public mood by neo-liberal, monetarist or neo-conservative propaganda, would be equal to putting the cart before the horse. The question that needs to be answered first is why the neo-liberal propaganda found such a wide and grateful audience and seemed to hit the target almost hands down. Claus Offe got it right when he wrote in 1987, in an article under the pertinent title 'Democracy Against the Welfare State?', that the fact that the welfare state is rapidly losing its political support 'cannot be fully explained either by economic and fiscal crisis arguments, or by political arguments emphasizing the rise of neoconservative elites and ideologies; nor can it be undone by moral appeals to the justice and legitimacy of existing welfare state arrangements'.[11]

Indeed, all such common arguments are in the end political rationalizations and ideological justifications of the measures taken, rather than their explanation. The rise of neo-conservative elites is not an explanation, but itself a phenomenon to be explained. Another mystery which needs explanation is why the 'moral appeals to justice and legitimacy', which once prompted and boosted the welfare state's steady expansion, are now

deployed almost without exception in the service of its radical reduction and disbanding.

With all its over-determination, the initial political popularity of the welfare state would be inconceivable inside a capital–dominated society if not for the resonance between welfare-state style public insurance and the needs of a capitalist economy. Among its many other functions, the welfare state performed a crucially important role in the perpetual 'recommodification of labour'; by providing good quality education, an adequate health service, decent housing and healthy nourishment for the children of poor families, it assured a steady supply of the capitalist industry with employable labour – an effect no individual company or group of companies would be able to secure on their own. As the perpetuation of the capitalist mode of production depends on the constant purchase of labour, prospective labour must be made into a commodity which the prospective employers would be willing to buy; the employers could not and would not purchase an inferior product. The welfare state kept a 'reserve army' of labour in a state of constant readiness for active service, and kept it in the right shape and condition while its services were not needed.

However, the prospect of employers needing again the services of the reserve army of labour presently under state-administered care are growing increasingly remote. Presently redundant labour may never again become a commodity – not so much because of its own defective quality, as due to the absence of demand. Such a demand as is still likely to emerge on the domestic labour market – demand for casual, occasional and 'flexible' (that is, not 'exceedingly profiled' or 'overtrained') labourers, is likely to ignore the kind of well educated, robust and self-confident labour force that the welfare state in its halcyon days sought to cultivate. Even those relatively small quantities of old-style labour that parts of modern industry may still need are likely to be sought and found far beyond the reach of any single state, given finance's new unbound freedom of movement and the much cherished flexibility of deregulated capitalist enterprise. A recent commentary by Martin Woollacott grasps this trend well:

> The Swedish-Swiss conglomerate Asea Brown Boveri announced it would be cutting its West European work force by 57,000, while creating other jobs in Asia. Electrolux followed with the announcement that it will cut its global work force by 11 per cent, with most of the cuts in Europe and North America. Pilkington Glass also announced significant cuts. In just ten days, three European firms had cut jobs on a scale large enough to be compared with the numbers mentioned in the new French and British governments' proposals on job creation . . . Germany, notoriously, has lost 1 million jobs in five years, and its companies are busy building plants in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Latin America. If West European industry is massively relocating outside Western Europe, then all these arguments about the

best government approach to unemployment would have to be seen as of limited relevance.[12]

Employers were glad to shift the cost of the 'recommodification of labour' to the Treasury as long as the fate of profitable production hung on the labour force being increased. This has gradually ceased to be the case, however. Most of the gains in company results have been attained through 'up-front' expenditures (reaching around 80 per cent of total costs) which do not include the engagement of more labour. More and more, the hiring of labour is turning from an asset into a liability. Managers, particularly the top managers of top companies, are richly rewarded for the successful 'downsizing' of their staff – for example, Thomas Labrecque, the director-general of Chase Manhattan Bank, who was voted a salary of nine million dollars in recognition of his role in eliminating 10,000 jobs. The priorities of shareholders are shared and reinforced by the Stock Exchange. Louis Schweitzer, the boss of Renault, was justly baffled and aggrieved by the angry reaction of public opinion to the closure of Renault plants in Belgium; the move had, after all, the unqualified backing of the Stock Exchange – the ultimate expression of business wisdom – which reacted to it by adding 12 per cent to the value of Renault shares.[13]

However cumbersome tax-wise, the state-administered welfare services were from the companies' point of view good investments, assuming that an additional labour force would need to be hired if a company wished to expand, and that it was from the pool of the state-welfare users that companies would need to draw whenever they wished to replenish their labour resources. Given however the present-day tendency to measure the effects of business by the share-and-dividends value rather than the volume of product, as well as the rapidly falling role of labour in production and the global dimensions of companies' freedom, the investment in welfare provision does not seem all that profitable after all; the same and better effects may be obtained at much less cost. The 'flags of convenience' cheaply obtained in the far-away places under the aegis of less demand-burdened governments seem to be a much better idea. What they promise is opportunity without responsibility, and when such 'making economic sense' opportunities come by, few sound-minded businessmen, hard pressed by the stern demands of competitiveness, would insist on their responsibilities.

This newly obtained freedom of movement comes together with freedom from the financial burden of replenishing the pool of labour: seemingly inexhaustible reservoirs of raw, pliable and unspoiled labour beckon and lure from afar. On a planet covered in part by societies of sophisticated consumers, there are still vast virgin territories where submissiveness of labour may be obtained without the need to whip up consumer desires; where the rough demands of the struggle for survival will do the job which elsewhere calls for inventing ever-new desires clamouring for satisfaction and for keeping wages up so that these desires can turn into universal needs.

This seems to be the logic of capitalist reproduction: having manoeuvred itself into the use of consumer desires as the major mobilizing and integrating force and the royal road to confiict-resolution and order–maintenance, the capitalist approach tends in the long run to 'price labour out of work'. Each successive plot ploughed up by the capitalist mode of production suffers sooner or later from soil exhaustion and falls victim to the law of diminishing returns. In order to keep production profitable, new – virgin, uncultivated – lands must be sought. This predicament goes a long way towards explaining the pressure to dismantle all the barriers to free trade and above all to the free movement of capital. All the more so, as that pressure goes hand in hand with another pressure to make the walls barring free movement of labour watertight. What is happening now on a global scale is the Mohammeds of capital finding travel to the mountains of labour much more convenient and less expensive than calling the mountains to join them at home.

And so the 'reserve army of labour' and the costs of its readiness for active service are now global, while all welfare provisions are state-bound and – like the state authority itself – local. The arms of the state are much too short to reach where it truly counts. To the expansion and security of capital the old-style state's assistance has become largely irrelevant. The local businessmen knowing only too well that to remain businessmen they had better stop being local, need their prime-ministers and foreign secretaries mostly as their trade agents to introduce and endear them to the authorities of the targeted localities during their diplomatic voyages, and if need be to subsidize the trips.

And so the paramount interest, arguably the main axis in the cluster of interests which stood at the cradle of the welfare state, has been removed from the project it once held together. Without it, the whole cluster falls apart, losing, above all, its economic foundation. Seeing no benefit in paying for the 'recommodification' of labour which they are unlikely ever again to need, businessmen worth their salt use their new global freedoms to take their money and their enterprise abroad, to less demanding places, the moment they are asked to partake of the costs of welfare. The governments who insist on keeping the standards of welfare intact are therefore haunted by the fear of a 'double whammy': the homeless and disinherited flocking in, the capital (and so the potential income sources) flocking out.

Conceivably, employers could be persuaded to stay only if allowed to push down the costs of local labour; but in this the state guarantee of minimum survival, that hard core of the welfare-state idea, is a major obstacle, rather than a help. Besides, and perhaps more importantly yet, the successful pauperization of the local labour force on a massive scale would in the long run, or perhaps quicker than that, prove counter-productive. Local employees are also the local consumers, and it is in their solvency and willingness to pay that the producers of consumer goods vest their hope of economic success and seek their insurance against falling profits and bankruptcies.

Despite being threatened by the crumbling of its economic foundation, cannot the welfare state still be kept on course by the cross-party and cross-class political support it once enjoyed? After all, history kept showing us until recently that the more inclusive democracy becomes, the more decisively it presses towards the defence of the weak and the collective insurance against weakness. The right to vote, from the moment it became universal, was used over and over again to bring into power the politicians who promised to do just that – to repair collectively the blights and pains suffered individually. The principle of the welfare state seemed safe in democracy's hands. Indeed, the unstoppable growth of the state-administered protection of the weak inspired political scientists from T.H. Marshall on to include social rights into the very notion of democratic citizenship; to see such rights as the inevitable product of democracy's logic.

Popular theories explained that logic by suggesting, somewhat romantically, that democratic practices as such cultivate a feeling of shared responsibility for the well-being of the community as a whole. Some analysts added that since no one – including the currently better-off – among the members of the political community can be truly safe in her or his status as a citizen without a reliable safety net, insuring against a fall beneath the standards required for a dignified life, some form of collective protection, was indispensable also to those who at the moment could stand on their own feet. In other words, for almost a century the visible logic of democratic politics led observers to assume that although some people need more social services than others and need them more urgently than the others do, the existence of such services and their universal availability is in the 'well understood' interest of all.

The contented majority?

For two decades now the facts of political life seem to deny the above deductions. In one country after another the majority of voters give their support to parties that explicitly demand the curtailment of welfare provisions, or promise more benign taxation of individual incomes which would inevitably have the same effect. 'Raising taxes' has become an anathema on politicians' lips and an abomination to electors' ears.

The astounding unanimity on this point among the parties across the political spectrum served some analysts as a main argument to assert the advent of a new 'solidarity' of sorts; of a new political consensus 'beyond left and right'. What is glossed over in such an assertion, though, is the fact that not that long ago the support for the welfare state was also a virtually non-party issue, 'beyond left and right', and a basis and expression of genuine cross-class solidarity. The attitude to welfare-state policies has traditionally commanded wide democratic consensus. It still commands consensus today, just as it did half a century ago, only the attitude which commands consensus today is the very opposite of that which enjoyed

almost universal support then. It is this change of axis around which the democratic consensus is built that needs explaining.

No one explained better this amazing sea-change in public mood and its political effects – still unpredictable a mere two decades ago even for the most perceptive of scholars – than John Kenneth Galbraith in his discussion of the 'contented majority'. How can it be, asks Galbraith, that the majority of voters in a democratic polity give freely their support to the increase of social inequality? It never happened before, not since voting rights became truly democratic, not since they had been extended from the propertied classes to all adults and made universal.

There must have been a good reason for this being the case. After all, the poor and indolent, people who could not eke out a passable life and make ends meet on their own, were always a minority – even a politically insignificant minority. Besides, they were the least likely to register their vote at the polling booths; neglecting their interests and wishes was always comparatively easy and in no way jeopardized the chances of a politician. That majority which favoured some redistribution of wealth, the levelling up of inequalities and above all the collective guarantees of individual well-being, must have therefore come from different quarters. They most certainly included the 'median voter', placed comfortably at a secure distance from the extremes of poverty. Those who voted in favour of the state-serviced safety net must have been people who did not necessarily intend to use that net right away; even such people who earnestly hoped never to need to use it at all. On the face of it, they must have acted altruistically: ready to make a personal sacrifice unlikely to be rewarded in a foreseeable future, and optimally not to be rewarded at any time. What made them to behave like this?

In all probability, the genuine reason to act in this way was their lack of self-confidence. They might have managed on their own *so far*, but how could they know that their luck – since this *was* a matter of luck – would last forever? The world around them was notorious for making any prosperity uneven, patchy and shaky. This was a world that saw the most spectacular of fortunes vanish without trace, drawing into abyss myriads of lesser, more vulnerable existences. Just how resourceful did one need to be, to be really sure of one's security? Is it not rather the case that security requires foundations more powerful and reliable than anything which the most diligent of individual efforts may conjure up? Under the circumstances, this seemed to be a fairly reasonable question to ask; and a rhetorical question at that, inviting one and only one answer.

Circumstances must have changed, though, since the question is now seldom asked and, if asked, suggests an entirely different answer. Most middle-range voters seem to be pretty sure that they will be better off when managing their affairs on their own. They still need an insurance against bad luck and other contingencies, since they control them no better than their fathers did, but they reckon that the kind of insurance they can afford to buy privately will offer them more and better benefits than the

degraded, averaged-down services of the state are likely to provide. To put it in a nutshell, the new mood is not so much a question of self-confidence, but merely a sober reflection on the fact that all alternatives to self-reliance now seem even less prepossessing than the risks the self-reliance inevitably entails.

This new conviction (or new resignation to the inevitable) changes the balance between the sacrifices made to keep welfare provisions available and the value of such provisions; or, at least, it modifies the way in which that balance is weighed in tranquil and happy moments, when resorting to state assistance seems an utterly improbable emergency. Money left in one's own pocket thanks to the lowering of taxes seems a much better prospect than the largely abstract possibility of public care, whose standards, and attractiveness, are falling, in any case, by the day. Public provision, to put it simply and in a form readily understandable nowadays, is *not* 'good value for money'.

The way in which the median voter views the balance between fiscal costs and welfare benefits has changed for two further reasons as well (which, to be sure, obliquely reinforce the feeling of confidence and the desire of self-reliance simply by rendering the alternative ever less appetizing).

The first reason is the long-term effects of the principle of means-testing. One of these effects is the steady and relentless deterioration of the quality of welfare services. In line with expectations, once they are reserved for those who need them these services cannot count on the political muscle of those others who (at least thus far) 'need them not', and so become a natural target for economies sought by politicians in order to lower taxes, and thus to curry the favours of those more fortunate others. People in need, on the other hand, are notorious for lacking any political muscle of their own.

Quite recently the newly elected socialist government of France, making the meeting of the budgetary criteria for admission to the single currency its priority, entered the long-avoided road of means testing by introducing an income ceiling for the heretofore universal family allowances. On this occasion, summing up the experience of all the other countries who started earlier on the same route, Serge Halimi observed:

One starts from denying to the middle classes equal access to certain collective provisions. Then these provisions appear more and more associated with the disprivileged – who alone benefit from them. Sums devoted to the provisions shrink unstoppably, according to the rule that, in an American expression, 'programmes for the poor are poor programmes'. Sooner or later, discoveries are made of 'fraud, deception and abuse': a single mother, ususally a black one, who uses her food coupons to buy vodka (a constant refrain in Reaganite discourse), the irresponsible poor, who bear children encouraged by the welfare provisions etc. The last stage; the popularity of welfare

protection having evaporated, the middle classes, no more interested in its continuation, agree to its abolition.[14]

To confine the benefits of the welfare state to the politically marginalized section of the potential electorate is a faultless recipe for reducing the quality of benefits to a level which, in the eyes of the slightly less impoverished sections of the population, will make even the most dubious of provisions offered by private insurers look sheer luxury by comparison. (It would be interesting, though, to measure the extent to which the deterioration of state-managed insurance also lowered the quality of private insurance provisions, and so lowered the general level of expectations.) The poor (and increasingly poor) quality of welfare benefits is the best argument against the expenditure they require: their value is getting so low that to the majority of the electorate any money spent for their purpose seems wasted.

Another effect of protracted means testing is the stigma attached to the recipients of welfare. The message hammered home, even if not spelled out in so many words, is that needing assistance is a sign of failure to live up to the standards which most other people seem to manage quite well to meet. Applying for benefit is therefore an admission of failure. A shameful, self-excluding, self-marginalizing decision, in view of the fact that most people never seem to reach into the public purse (whatever they get in the form of tax relief, professional privileges and perks, or overt and oblique business subsidies, is in the public vocabulary to their credit, not their debit). Applying for benefit is a most unattractive prospect, which makes all alternatives, whatever their quality, look more reasonable and desirable.

The second reason is the advent of the consumer society and the entrenchment of consumerist culture. Consumerism puts the highest premium on choice: choosing, that purely formal modality, is a value in its own right, perhaps the sole value of consumerist culture which does not call for, nor allow, justification. Choice is the consumer society's meta-value, the value with which to evaluate and rank all other values. And no wonder, since the 'choosiness' of the consumer is but a reflection of competitiveness, the lifeblood of the market. To survive, and even more to thrive, the consumer market must first shape the consumer in its own image: the choice is what competition offers, and discrimination is what makes the offer attractive.

The myth of a discriminating consumer and the myth of the market as the purveyor of free choice and the guardian of freely asserted preferences nourish and cultivate each other. Without the first, the second would be hardly imaginable. The right type of consumer is a person who cherishes the right to choose more than the object of choice, and celebrates visits to the market place as the public manifestation of connoisseurship. The wide assortment of goods on display, and the possibility of selecting one object rather than another, lifts even an unrefined dilettante to the rank of a connoisseur, while being a skilful, cultivated chooser is, in a consumer

society – a society stratified according to the ability to choose – a most coveted accolade. The conviction of being a cultivated practitioner of choice is richly gratifying.[15]

The no-choice situation – taking what one is given solely because nothing else is on offer; having no voice in the selection – is, accordingly, the anti-value of the consumer society. Being deprived of choice is in itself degrading and humiliating, whatever its effects on the well-being of the deprived; it is also a deeply dissatisfying, joyless and annoying condition. Goods acquire their lustre and attractiveness in the course of being chosen; take the choice away, and their allure vanishes without trace. An object 'freely chosen' has the power to bestow that distinction on its chooser which objects 'just allotted' obviously do not possess. The fully fledged consumer will therefore put choice, with all the risks and the unfamiliar, often frightening traps involved, above the relative security carried by rationing and allotment.[16] The ideal type of consumer will tolerate a great deal of relative inferiority of the object of consumption just because it has been 'freely chosen' and not assigned.

For this reason the institution of the welfare state is starkly out of tune with the climate of a consumer society, whatever the quality of its provisions are. If the marketing of products cannot operate without promoting (through lip service at least) the cult of *difference* and choice, the idea of the welfare state makes little sense without appealing to the idea of the *sameness* of the human condition, human needs and human rights. Consumerism and the welfare state are therefore at cross purposes. The odds are against the welfare state; the pressure of consumer mentality is overwhelming. Even if the state-offered services were of much better quality than they are, they would still be burdened with the fundamental flaw of being exempt from allegedly free consumer choice – a flaw that discredits them beyond redemption in the eyes of converted and devoted, 'born again' consumers.

Success that brought the demise

All this having been said, the question remains: how come so many denizens of modern society turned into sophisticated consumers? How come that a significant majority now prefer to make their own consumer choices rather than the less risky reliance on the guaranteed provision of all basic necessities? How come that a significant majority are now content with being left to their own resources, counting on nothing but their own wit and ingenuity? Perhaps the following example will offer some insight into the reasons.

For the last decade or so, a wave of protest against so-called 'affirmative action' (the positive discrimination in employment, promotion and college admission in favour of black and Hispanic candidates coming from admittedly deprived social strata and standing therefore little chance in an open competition against the socially better situated and 'cultured' whites)

swept America, aided and abetted by the conservative appointees of the Reagan–Bush era to the Supreme and Federal Courts. The protest was something to be expected, as many white parents were nonplussed and angry at nominally inferior students taking up the university places which their own sons and daughters missed despite achieving better test scores. What did come as a surprise, however, was a considerable and growing number of Afro-Americans among the protesters. In fact, the first Democrat who won a place in the State legislature on the 'abolition platform', demanding an end to 'affirmative action', was Ward Connerly, a wealthy black Californian businessman. Decried and vilified by many black and Hispanic activists, Connerly nevertheless enjoyed significant overt or tacit support among the expanding ranks of the increasingly affluent Afro-American middle class. The argument which strikes a particularly sensitive chord among the latter is one of dignity of self-assertion. The presence of 'affirmative action' belittles and devalues the success of those numerous blacks who 'did it' and 'have arrived'. It would certainly be more gratifying if no one had reason to think that their achievement was undeserved – a gift rather than the product of conscious effort, personal talent, diligent work and the right choice of lifestyle.

Supporters of Connerly are, in effect, saying, 'we do not need crutches', 'we can move very well on our own legs'. But from where did this sudden self-confidence come? The answer slipped from Connerly's tongue: 'everybody can make it, because the playing field is a lot closer to level now'.[17] But the playing field has been levelled thanks to 'affirmative action', and this is that action's undeniable success and historic accomplishment. One in three black families has now an annual income at or above the American average (currently $35,000); it was less than one in four a mere 25 years ago. More than one in five black families now boasts an income above $50,000 – in America, the index of affluence. There are thousands and thousands of black lawyers, doctors, company managers – people who are heard and who can make themselves be heard. Would all this have happened without 'affirmative action'? According to research recently completed by the New York University Law School, of 3,435 blacks who became law students and so got a chance of joining one of America's most lucrative professions, only 687 would have achieved entry to the school just on the strength of their test results.

One can say that, in less than a quarter of a century, 'affirmative action' has achieved an objective similar to that which moved the founding fathers of the welfare state: it has 'worked itself out of a job'. But if that has indeed happened, it certainly did not happen in the way the visionaries imagined. Thanks to the positive discrimination, a new, self-confident, black middle class has been born. Its members do not want to be reminded that they are where they are not because they exercised their own wit and industry, like other Americans do or are supposed to be doing, but because they have been helped there by loading the chances. It is an integral part of their bid for dignity to proclaim loud and clear that if they have 'done it' then

everyone else can too, and if some cannot, it must be because they are not trying hard enough. This would imply, after all, that they who did it, did it thanks to trying as they should have.

For this to sound credible, their poorer and less resourceful fellows-in-fate must be looked upon with suspicion and disdain; above all, one needs to demand the dismantling of 'privileges', that vexing reminder of one's own 'impaired' (because assisted) progress. Those who have reached the top no longer need the state-provided ladder and are eager to send it to the scrap yard. Those who climbed it first are the first to declare it useless and to complain of the iniquitous, degrading shadow it casts on the users.

This is not, however, the meaning which 'working itself out of a job' had for the inventors of the welfare state or 'affirmative action'. What they had in mind was getting rid of that deprivation which made collective care or positive discrimination necessary in the first place: to compensate for the inequality of chances and thus make chances equal. What did in fact happen is something quite different: people whom the community helped to rise above their initially inferior position not only lost the need for assistance, but turned into its keenest detractors. In a sense, 'affirmative action' bred its own gravediggers. After all, the black affluent professionals, who rose to the ranks of the upper-middle class straight from the ghetto, have more reason than their new white companions to feel righteous about censuring the 'nanny state' and more chance to sound, while doing so, sincere and believable: they have arrived, they have done it, they have proved that it can be done, so let others do the same. But can those others do the same now that the 'degrading' adjustment of scores in relation to skin colour is no longer available? At the University of Texas Law School, there were 5.9 per cent of black freshers last year. This year, with positive discrimination declared illegal, the proportion will be 0.7 per cent. Who will carry the indignation of Ward Connerly into the next generation?

The cases of 'affirmative action' and the welfare state are not of course identical (the idea of the welfare state in its original form militated against any discrimination, while the discrimination it promoted in its later stages was anything but 'positive') but the socio-psychological mechanism of 'working itself out of a job' operates in both cases in quite similar a fashion. Galbraith's 'contented majority' is in no small measure a *product* of the welfare state, and the sediment of its success.

The welfare state came nowhere near the fulfilment of its founding fathers' dreams of exterminating once for all poverty, humiliation and despondency; yet it did produce a large enough generation of well educated, healthy, self-assured, self-reliant, self-confident people, jealous of their freshly acquired independence, to cut the ground from beneath the popular support for the idea that it is the duty of those who have succeeded to assist those who continue to fail. It is to the ears of this generation, empowered by the welfare state, the 'self-made' men and women who would not be self-made if not for the material assistance or reassuring impact of a ready-to-help community, that the arguments about the

disempowering impact of collective insurance and social wages are most telling. It is far from clear, though, whether the truth of such arguments will outlive the generation most inclined to accept them as true.

There are good reasons to suppose, as Martin Woollacott recently put it, that what the authors of the present turn-around like to present as the solution to the real or imputed contradictions of the welfare state boils down in fact to:

> merely taking advantage of what, historically, is just a moment – that moment when the social capital created by the welfare state has not been yet wholly dissipated and the new social costs caused by the decline of the welfare state have not yet been huge. The social costs of both the welfare state and the non-welfare state are large, but the social costs of a state in transition between the two can be ignorantly or mendaciously represented as small. Small they may be, but only for a time.[18]

The work ethic and the new poor

The early nineteenth-century preachers of the work ethic knew full well what they were talking about. At that time labour was the sole source of wealth; to produce more, and to involve more labour in the process of production, meant much the same thing. There were growing ranks of entrepreneurs eager to produce more, and there were growing ranks of paupers reluctant to work and produce on the entrepreneurs' terms. The work ethic could, conceivably, induce the two to meet. The idea of work as the road leading simultaneously towards a wealthy nation and out of individual poverty rang true.

In the late twentieth century, the work ethic comes once more to the forefront of public debate; it looms large in both the diagnoses of current ills and the prescriptions for their cure. It is most prominent in the welfare-to-work programmes, initiated in the USA but, since their inception (though regardless of their dubious results), enviously eyed by a growing number of politicians in other affluent countries (including Britain). As Handler and Hasenfeld point out about WIN (the cryptonim for the American welfare-to-work programme):

> . . . from its inception and throughout its convoluted history, the rhetorics justifying WIN bore little relationship to its actual impact. All the available evidence indicates that the programme has had dismal results . . . Work policies and programmes have persisted in various forms, despite the overwhelming historical evidence that they have generally failed to reduce the welfare rolls in any appreciable way or to improve the economic self-sufficiency of the poor. The reasons for their survival cannot, therefore, reside in their salutary effects on the poor and welfare, but rather in their apparent utility to the nonpoor.[1]

The reluctance, genuine or putative, of the present-day welfare poor to

join in the productive effort in no way arrests the growth of productivity. The present-day corporations do not need more workers to increase their profits, and if they *do* need more workers they can easily find them elsewhere and on better terms than those attainable locally, even if this leads to the further impoverishment of the local poor. After all, according to the latest *Human Development Report* from the UN, 1.3 billion of the world population live currently on a dollar a day or less; by these standards, even the 100 million people living below the poverty line in the affluent West, the homeland of the work ethic, have a long way to go.

But in the world of big corporations progress means today first and foremost 'downsizing', while technological progress means replacement of living labour with electronic software. Just how duplicitous the condemnation of welfare recipients for their unwillingness to work – and the corollary assumption that they would earn their living easily if only they shook off their stupor and their habits of dependency – now sounds, is demonstrated by the fashion in which the Stock Exchange, that unwittingly sincere spokesperson for corporate interests, reacts to fluctuation in employment. It is not merely a question of the absence of any sign of Stock Exchange anxiety, let alone a panic reaction, when the rise of overall unemployment in a given country is accelerating; the Stock Exchange does react, and reacts enthusiastically, to the news that employment is *not* likely to rise. The information that from June to July 1996 the number of new vacancies in the USA fell and the percentage of people officially out of work thereby rose, was reported under the title, 'Employment data cheer Wall Street' (the Dow Jones gained 70 points in one day).[2] The value of shares in the giant conglomerate AT&T rose dramatically on the day its managers announced the cutting of 40,000 jobs[3] – an experience repeated virtually daily on all stock exchanges around the world.

Settlers vs. Nomads

Robert Reich[4] suggested that four categories of employees can be found presently in the labour market. There are, first, 'symbol manipulators' – inventors, advertisers, promoters and merchandisers of ideas. Others, mostly educators of all fields and levels, are active in the reproduction of employable labour (that is, labour as commodity – fit to be bought and consumed). The third category comprises people hired for 'personal services' (rendered mostly to other people in their capacity of consumers) – a large contingent of sellers of products and prompters/breeders of the desire to buy them. Finally, the fourth category: 'routine labourers', attached to traditional assembly lines and their 'new and improved' versions in the form of automated electronic appliances – like, for instance, check-out points in supermarkets.

People of that last category apparently face least difficulty when it comes to selling their labour. Their prospective buyers are not particularly

fastidious. Since neither rare and special skills difficult to master nor particular acumen in dealing with customers in face-to-face interactions are required for the kind of jobs 'routine labourers' are expected to perform, they can move relatively easily from one employment to another throughout the whole spectrum of paid-for low-skill work. But for the same reason they are also eminently disposable: their jobs are chronically unstable. They may be replaced at any moment with no loss to their employers, they could be fired on the spot when business slows down, since there are many like them ready to take up jobs once business picks up again – and so they have no 'nuisance power', no bargaining assets, no chance of winning in a struggle for better employment terms and conditions, were they able and willing to fight.

The desire for struggle, and particularly a desire shared with others 'like them' and so likely to lead to a concerted action, is, however, hard to come by. All circumstances seem to conspire against it. Such jobs as may be had are frail, can vanish at any moment and surely would not last for long; today's mates would surely move on to other, often far-away places; people one meets today won't be here tomorrow or the day after . . . Investing in workers' solidarity and in collective resistance, with all the long-term, risk-fraught efforts they require, promises little gain but exorbitant and difficult to calculate costs. If such conditions last for a long time with no alternatives in sight, the worldviews and attitudes of employees adjust accordingly. 'Make as much as you can of today, think not of tomorrow' and 'each man for himself, nothing is to be earned by standing together' become – imperceptibly but intractably – the unquestioned precepts of prudent and effective life-strategy.

All that considered, the term 'routine labourers' seems to be partly misleading. The kind of work activities in which the employees of the fourth category are engaged may be as monotonous, uncreative and dull, and demand as few skills, as the old style routine jobs of a Ford-style factory – but what sets them apart when it comes to the attitudes and conduct they prompt is their admittedly chameleon-like, shifting, temporary, short-term, episodic and often ephemeral nature. Their jobs are routine – but not their employment. 'Routine' suggests monotonous repetition of the same – and so it conveys faithfully the kind of other-directed action in which they are engaged day in day out as long as they remain hired to do it. But the routine nature of what they do makes hiring itself – their access to jobs – everything but routine.

Even the most routine, uninspired and uninspiring, dull and often demeaning work favours the growth of stable, solidly rooted and durable human bonds only if (and because!) it is expected to last for a long time to come – in practice, infinitely. The feeling that 'we are all in the same boat' and in all likelihood will remain in that boat whatever happens – weathering storms together and together enjoying smooth sailing – propels and fosters the search for the most satisfying or the least oppressive mode of cohabitation. Why bother, though, if one is pretty certain that with each

successive clock-in one is likely to find oneself in a different company? With such certainty, all lasting associations, firm commitments and unbreakable friendships look suspiciously like recipes for frustration and broken hearts. If you come to like the company for which you work and inscribe into it your own plans for the future, you are bound to be hurt at the next round of 'outsourcing' or 'rationalization', or even well before that. All in all, such fateful transformations summarily code-named 'flexibility of the labour market' cast a dark shadow on the future chances of solidarity and long-term, let alone whole hearted and unconditional, commitment and loyalty to 'common causes'.

As Richard Sennett found out on his second visit to a New York bakery, twenty odd years after the first,[5] 'the morale and motivation of workers dropped sharply in the various squeeze plays of downsizing. Surviving workers waited for the next blow of the axe rather than exulting in competitive victory over those who were fired'. Whether (already) damned or (temporarily) saved, they were nursing their grudges and succumbed to their fears much in the same manner – and with good reasons:

> In all forms of work, from sculpting to serving meals, people identify with tasks which challenge them, tasks which are difficult. But in this flexible workplace, with its polyglot workers coming and going irregularly, radically different orders coming in each day, the machinery is the only real standard of order, and so has to be easy to anyone, no matter who, to operate. Difficulty is counterproductive in a flexible regime. By a terrible paradox, when we diminish difficulty and resistance, we create the very conditions for uncritical and indifferent activity on the part of the users.[6]

As long as they stay employed, the occasional, exchangeable, and eminently disposable 'routine labourers' are bodily inside the workplace, but their spirits seldom follow the bodies. Workplace is still a source of living, but not of life-meaning – and certainly not a greenhouse of human bonds sufficiently solid and trustworthy enough to support and sustain ethical convictions and standards of moral practices. Inside the walls of 'flexible' plants, offices, workhouses and shops, the precepts of 'work ethics' sound hollow. Thorstein Veblen's 'workmanship instinct', if it survived the advent of flexibility at all, needs to seek its fulfillment elsewhere. And consumer markets are all too ready and willing to supply alternative venues. Pride once sought in the professional prowess may be now derived (at the right price) from shopping excellence – from finding the best 'selling outlet' in the maze of a shopping mall and the best outfit on the trolley or the best gadget on the shelves.

People called by Reich the 'routine labourers' (read: occasional and volatile, disposable and easily replaceable, tenuously related to their jobs and workplaces) are in no position to demand, let alone to obtain, closer and more intimate ties with the company that employs them. Relationship between employees and their bosses is no more symmetrical, dependence is

no longer reciprocal. The era of 'Fordist factories' – of huge, bulky and heavy industrial plants with a mass of locally recruited labourers, where the wealth and profits of the bosses depended on the consent and morale of their employees as much as the livelihood of the employees depended on benevolence of their bosses – that era is over. Dependence is no longer mutual – it is one-sided. Whereas the job-seekers remain as before 'tied to the ground', unfree to move and so dependent on mostly local workplaces for their living – capitals may now move with no constraint, paying little attention to distances and the state boundaries erected on their way. Voices routinely answering routine questions of callers from Shoreditch or Wakefield may come from Bombay or Calcutta . . .

Capital owners seeking workers are no longer bound to rely on local labour markets and so they see no reason why they should select their camping sites by any other criteria than maximization of profit and the profusion of undemanding, docile and trouble-free labour. People fit and eager to assume the roles of 'routine labourers', to accept any job on offer and for any, even the most miserable wages, can be found everywhere. There is no need to bear lightly the inconvenience (and high costs) of rising self-confidence (and so rising demands) of the local labourers, emboldened by the sheer duration of their employment and empowered by the solidarity that was given enough (too much) time to gestate, grow strong and harden. When confronted with nomadic capital, settled labour has little chance to slow down, let alone to arrest, the capital when it prefers to move elsewhere – and so it has an even lesser chance to bid for its rights and fight for its ambitions.

But what have become of the other, non-routine categories of the 'gainfully employed'?

At the other end of the employment spectrum and close to the top of the power pyramid circulate those to whom space matters little and distance is not a bother; people of many places but of no one place in particular. They are as light, sprightly and volatile as the increasingly global and extra-territorial trade and finances that assisted at their birth and sustains their nomadic existence. As Jacques Attali[7] described them – 'they do not own factories, lands, nor occupy administrative positions. Their wealth comes from a portable asset: their knowledge of the laws of the labyrinth'. They 'love to create, play and be on the move'. They live in a society 'of volatile values, carefree about the future, egoistic and hedonistic'. They 'take the novelty as good tidings, precariousness as value, instability as imperative, hybridity as richness'. In varying degrees, they all master and practice the art of 'liquid life': acceptance of disorientation, immunity to vertigo and adaptation to the state of dizziness, tolerance to the absence of itinerary and of direction and to indefinite duration of travel. Addressing presumably such people, the anonymous columnist of the *Observer*[8] hiding under the penname 'Barefoot Doctor' counsels to do everything one does with grace. Taking a hint from Lao Tse, the oriental prophet of detachment and tranquility, he describes the life stance most likely to achieve that effect:

Flowing like water ... you swiftly move along, never fighting the current, stopping long enough to become stagnant or clinging to the riverbank or rocks – the possessions, situations or people that pass through your life – not even trying to hold on to your opinions or world view, but simply sticking lightly yet intelligently to whatever presents itself as you pass by and then graciously letting it go without grasping...

With an opponent that follows such pattern, the 'routine labourer's' battle is lost before it started. Not necessarily because of the adversary's formidable power and skills – but due to their '*je ne regrette rien*' life attitude, their elusiveness, stout refusal to engage and to take commitment, their mastery of the Houdini-like art of escape from the tightest cages and of breaking the most sophisticated locks.

To be sure, the locks meant allegedly to arrest or at least to slow down the globetrotting of the new global elite are not particularly elaborate and certainly not unbreakable; the cages in which the governments meant to enclose the capital-bearers have not been equipped with many locks either. According to the 1995 report of the World Labour Organization published in Geneva,

Globalization has reduced economic autonomy of states: mobility of capitals trimmed their influence on the rates of interest and exchange, flexibility of multinational companies eroded the chances of controlling the volume of geographical distribution of investments, and the global mobility of technical and specialist labour made progressive taxation of incomes and wealth, and so the maintenance of public services, more difficult.

From whatever side you look at it, the spectre of fragility and precariousness haunts all kinds of jobs. Categories of employment differ solely by the resources they offer or deny the employed to resist, to respond to the new volatily of the employers and employments with a similar buoyancy and 'vaporousness' of their services and shifting engagements. No category is insured against loss of jobs. And no one is protected against what until recently was called 'long-term unemployment', but what more often, and rightly, tends to be described as 'redundancy'. If the condition of 'unemployment', even a long-term unemployment, suggested a transient stage in a working life, 'redundancy' is more honest about the nature of contemporary job losses. It suggests a finality and irreversibility of the disaster. It is redolent of a one-way road to the dumping site...

From 'unemployment' to 'redundancy'

The term 'unemployment', until recently used commonly to denote people with no paid work, expressed the tacit assumption of the 'normality'

of employment. The prefix 'un' signaled an anomaly – an odd, irregular and temporary phenomenon that called, as all anomalies do, for a remedial action and that was likely to be rectified once the call was heard and the action taken. Even at the time of economic slow-down or depression the vision of 'full employment' stood steadfastly at the horizon: once we extricate ourselves from the present doldrums, as we surely will, there will be jobs aplenty and a wage-packet for everyone.

Somehow, however, hardly any recovery from successive bouts of depression managed to restore the volume of employment to the pre-depression levels. However encouraging the current GNP and GDP statistics were – jobs continued to vanish and the numbers of people seeking jobs in vain or even abandoning all hope and so stopping to try continued to grow. Gradually and surreptitiously at first, but relentlessly nevertheless, the idea of the economic 'way forward' veered and warped towards doing as much (and more) than before with less hired labour than before and less management that hiring labour requires. With each successive turn of economic cycle the promise which the concept of 'unemployment' contained was ever more blatantly betrayed, and hopes it aroused appeared ever less realistic. Relentlessly, enough experience accumulated to prompt a genuine 'paradigm shift': the replacement of the term 'unemployment' with a new word – *redundancy*.

Unlike the old term, the new word holds no promise, however oblique or allusive. There is no hint of 'abnormality', of deviation from the rule, a transient nature of the current misery – and no suggestion of the absence of jobs being but a temporary irritant that will be in due course done away with. Unlike the 'unemployed', who are temporarily out of a job but are presumed to be 'employable' and are expected to return to the ranks of the producers once the conditions return to normal and 'are right' again – the 'redundant' are superfluous, supernumerary, un-needed. Either they were born into a society that is 'full' (that is, does not need more people in order to produce things and services needed for its continuous existence), or have become unnecessary due to the later economic and technological progress (that is the new ability to satisfy growing demand for goods and services with lesser effort and the involvement of less staff). People declared 'redundant' are written on the debit, not the credit side of economic balance, as they cannot, neither now nor in foreseeable future, add to the wealth of society – while adding to its costs ('public expenditures'). They are a 'drain on resources' and a 'problem' with no obvious solution; economic growth and rising prosperity of the 'economically active' part of the population is unlikely to create demand for their labour and recall them to active service. For all practical intents and purposes, the economy would be better off were they not present; short of that, they should stay excluded from economic activity.

Just how nebulous, naive or duplicitous, the idea of 'return to work' becomes, testifies to the profound change taking place in the very under-standing of 'prosperity' – and of 'good' and 'bad' tendency in economic

life. In an authoritative in-depth analysis of the present state of large European corporations (under the title 'European companies gain from the pain' and symptomatic subtitle 'Cost-cutting has led to profits, if not to jobs'; see *International Herald Tribune*, 17 November 1997), Tom Buerkle rejoices in the 'positive developments' in the European economy:

> The sharply improved picture indicated that Europe Inc. is beginning to reap the rewards of painful restructuring efforts of recent years. Following the methods adopted by U.S. companies in the 1980s, many European firms have been shedding labour, closing or selling off what they consider nonessential businesses and streamlining management in a drive for greater profitability.

Profits indeed grow fast – the cause for the shareholders' rejoicing and the learned analysts' enthusiastic approval – despite the ostensibly less important 'side effects' of the economic success. 'This newly robust corporate health is unlikely to reduce unemployment soon', Buerkle admits. Indeed, just in the last six years the manufacturing workforce shrank by 17.9 per cent in Britain, by 17.6 per cent in Germany and 13.4 per cent in France. In the US, where the 'positive developments' started around a decade earlier, the manufacturing labour shrank by 'only' 6.1 per cent. But solely because the flesh had been cut earlier almost to the bone.

Little wonder that according to the surveys of concerns, worries and fears of contemporary Europeans, joblessness – already suffered or threatened – occupies the uncontested topmost position. According to one such survey (by MORI) 85 per cent of Finns, 78 per cent of French and Swedes, 73 per cent of Germans and 72 per cent of Spaniards see unemployment as the most important problem of their countries. Let us recall that the criteria set for entry to European monetary union were set with the securing of a 'healthy economy' in mind, and that a falling rate of unemployment does not figure among these criteria. As a matter of fact, the desperate attempts to reach what passes today for the standard of 'economic health' are widely seen as the major obstacle against doing anything really effective to raise employment levels through job creation.

The apotheosis of work as simultaneously the highest human duty, the condition of moral decency, the guarantee of law and order and the cure for the plague of poverty, chimed in once with the labour-intensive industry which clamoured for more working hands in order to increase its product. The present-day streamlined, downsized, capital- and knowledge-intensive industry casts labour as a constraint on the rise of productivity. In direct defiance of the once canonical Smith/Ricardo/Marx labour theories of value, excess of labour is viewed as anathema, and any search for more rationalization (i.e. more profit on the capital invested) focuses first on further possibilities to cut down the number of employees. 'Economic growth' and the rise of employment are, for all practical intents, at cross-purposes; technological progress is measured by the replacement and elimination of labour. Under such circumstances the commandments

and blandishments of the work ethic sound increasingly hollow. They do not reflect any more the 'needs of industry' and can hardly be portrayed as the key to the 'wealth of the nation'. Their persistence, or rather their recent resuscitation in political discourse, can be explained only by some new functions which the work ethic is expected to perform in the post-industrial, consumer society of our times.

As Ferge and Miller suggest,[9] the recent renaissance of work-ethic propaganda serves the 'separation of the deserving and non-deserving poor, putting the blame on the last, and justifying thereby society's indifference to them', and hence 'the acceptance of poverty as an inevitable plague due to personal defects, and an ensuing insensibility towards the poor and the deprived'. In other words, while no longer supplying the means to reduce poverty, the work ethic may yet help to reconcile society to the eternal presence of the poor, and allow society to live, more or less quietly and at peace with itself, in their presence.

The discovery of the 'underclass'

The term 'working class' belongs to the imagery of a society in which the tasks and functions of the better-off and the worse-off are divided – different but *complementary*. 'Working class' evokes an image of a class of people who have a role to play in the life of a society, who make a useful contribution to that society as a whole and expect to be rewarded accordingly.

The term 'lower class' belongs to the imagery of social mobility – of a society in which people are on the move and each position is but momentary and in principle amenable to change. 'Lower class' evokes an image of a class of people who stand or are cast at the bottom of a ladder which they may yet climb, and so exit from their present inferiority.

The term 'underclass' belongs to the imagery of a society which is not all-embracing and comprehensive, which is smaller than the sum of its parts. 'Underclass' evokes an image of a class of people who are beyond classes and outside hierarchy, with neither chance nor need of re-admission; people without role, making no useful contribution to the lives of the rest, and in principle beyond redemption.

This is the inventory of people crowded together in the generic image of the underclass, described by Herbert J. Gans:[10]

> This behavioural definition denominates poor people who drop out of school, do not work, and, if they are young women, have babies without benefit of marriage and go on welfare. The behavioural underclass also includes the homeless, beggars, and panhandlers, poor addicts to alcohol and drugs,[11] and street criminals. Because the term is flexible, poor people who live in 'the projects', illegal immigrants, and teenage gang members are often also assigned to the underclass.

Indeed, the very flexibility of the behavioural definition is what lends itself to the term becoming a label that can be used to stigmatize poor people, whatever their actual behaviour.

An utterly heterogeneous and extremely variegated collection indeed. What can make putting them all together look sensible? What do single mothers have in common with alcoholics, or illegal immigrants with school dropouts?

One trait that does mark them all is that others see no good reason for their existence and may imagine themselves to be much better off if they were not around. People get cast in the underclass because they are seen as totally useless – something the rest of us could do nicely without. They are, indeed, blots on an otherwise pretty landscape, ugly yet greedy weeds, which add nothing to the harmonious beauty of the garden but suck out a lot of plant feed. Everyone would gain if they vanished.

And since they are all useless, the dangers they carry dominate the perception of them. The dangers are as varied as their carriers. They range from outright violence, murder and robbery lurking in a dark street, through nuisance and embarassment caused by the conscience-disturbing sight of human misery, to the 'drag on common resources'.[12] And where a danger is suspected, fear is quick to follow. 'Underclass' relates to people who are visible and prominent mostly for being feared; who *are* feared.

Uselessness and danger belong to the ample family of W.B. Gallie's 'essentially contested concepts'; when used as the criteria of designation they therefore display the 'flexibility' which makes the resulting classifications so exquisitely fit to accommodate all the most sinister demons haunting a society tormented by doubts about the durability of any usefulness, as well as by dispersed, un-anchored yet ambient fears. The mental map of the world drawn with their help provides an infinitely vast playground for successive 'moral panics'. The obtained divisions can be stretched with little effort to absorb and domesticate new threats, while at the same time allowing dissipated terrors to focus on a target which is reassuring just for being concrete.

This is, arguably, one – tremendously important – use which the uselessness of the underclass offers to a society in which no trade or profession can be any longer certain of its own long-term usefulness; and an important service, which the dangerousness of the underclass offers to a society convulsed by anxieties too numerous for it to be able to say with any degree of confidence what there is to be afraid of, and what is to be done to assuage the fear.

It was not perhaps merely by accident that the discovery of the underclass occurred at the time when the Cold War was grinding to a halt, fast losing much of its terror-generating power; and that the underclass debate came into full swing and settled in the centre of public attention once the 'Evil Empire' imploded and collapsed. The danger no longer threatens from outside; nor does it reside in the 'outside internalized' –

foreign powers' internal footholds and bridgeheads, the fifth column implanted by the enemy from outside. The political threat of a foreign-fomented and trained revolution is no longer real and is difficult to make credible. Having nowhere else to strike roots, danger must reside now *inside* society and grow out of *local* soil. One is tempted to say that were there no underclass, it would have to be invented. As a matter of fact, it *has been* duly invented.

This does not mean, of course, that there are no beggars, drug-users and unwed mothers – the kind of 'miserable' or 'repugnant' people regularly pointed to whenever the existence of an underclass is questioned. It does mean, though, that their presence in society does not in the slightest suffice to prove the existence of the underclass. Plunging them all into one category is a *classificatory decision*, not the verdict of facts; condensing them into one entity, charging them all, collectively, with uselessness and with harbouring awesome dangers to the rest of society, is an exercise in *value-choice* and *evaluation*, not a description. Above all, while the idea of the underclass rests on the presumption that society (the totality which holds inside everything that makes it viable) may be smaller than the sum of its parts, the underclass *denoted* by the idea is *bigger* than the sum of its parts: the act of inclusion adds a new quality which no part on its own would possess. In reality, 'single mother' and an 'underclass woman' are *not* the same creature. It takes a great deal of effort (though little thought) to make the first into the second.

The work ethic goes underclass

The word 'underclass' was first used by Gunnar Myrdal in 1963, to signal the dangers of de-industrialization, which – as he feared – was likely to make growing chunks of the population permanently unemployed and unemployable; not because of deficiencies or moral faults in the people who found themselves out of work, but purely and simply because of the lack of employment for all those who needed it and desired it. This was not the result of the work ethic failing to inspire, but of society's failure to guarantee life according to the work ethic's precepts. Members of the underclass, in Myrdal's sense, were victims of exclusion. Their new status was not the outcome of opting-out, as the exclusion was the product of economic logic, over which those earmarked for exclusion had no control and no influence.

The concept of the underclass burst into public attention much later, on 29 August 1977, via a cover story in *Time* magazine. And it did so carrying a quite different meaning: that of 'a large group of people who are more intractable, more socially alien and more hostile than almost anyone had imagined. They are the unreachables: the American underclass.' A long list followed this definition. It included juvenile delinquents, school dropouts, drug addicts, welfare mothers, looters, arsonists, violent criminals,

unmarried mothers, pimps, pushers, panhandlers; all the names of decent people's overt fears and all the covert burdens of decent people's consciences.

'Intractable'. 'Alien'. 'Hostile'. And, as a result of all this, unreachable. No point in stretching out a helping hand – it would simply hang in the void. These people were beyond cure; and they were beyond cure because they had *chosen* a life of disease.

Unreachable meant also beyond the reach of the work ethic. Admonitions, blandishments, appeals to conscience would not pierce through the wall of voluntary alienation from everything which was dear to ordinary people. This was not just a question of refusal to work or of a preference for an idle and parasitic life, but of an open hostility to everything the work ethic stood for.

When Ken Auletta undertook in 1981–2 a series of exploratory excursions into the 'underclass' world, reported in the *New Yorker* and later collected in a widely read and highly influential book, he was prompted, by his own admission, by the anxiety felt by most of his fellow-citizens:

> I wondered: who are those people behind the bulging crime, welfare, and drug statistics – and the all-too-visible rise in antisocial behaviour – that afflicts most American cities? . . . I quickly learned that among students of poverty there is little disagreement that a fairly distinct black and white underclass does exist; that this underclass generally feels excluded from society, rejects commonly accepted values, suffers from *behavioural*, as well as *income* deficiencies. They don't just tend to be poor; to most Americans their behaviour seems aberrant.[13]

Note the vocabulary, the syntax, the rhetoric of the discourse within which the image of the underclass is generated and sustained. Auletta's text is perhaps the best site to study it, because unlike most of his less scrupulous successors Auletta does not engage in simple 'underclass bashing'; on the contrary, he leans over backwards to retain and manifest his objectivity, and pities as much as condemns the negative heroes of his story.[14]

Note that 'bulging crime' and 'bulging welfare', as well as welfare and drug statistics, are mentioned in one breath and set at the same level. Thus no argument, let alone proof, is needed to explain why they have found themselves in each other's neighbourhood and why they have all been classed as instances of the same 'antisocial' behaviour. One need not take the risky step of pointing out explicitly that drug-pushing and being on welfare are similarly antisocial, are afflictions of the same order; the implicit suggestion to this effect (which would surely raise a few eyebrows if made explicit) has been achieved by a purely syntactic stratagem.

Note as well that the underclass *rejects* common values, but it only *feels* excluded. The underclass is the active and acting, action–generating, initiative-taking side in a two-sided relationship that has 'most Americans' as the other protagonist; it is the behaviour of the underclass, and of the underclass alone, that comes under critical scrutiny and is declared aberrant.

On the other hand it is 'most Americans' who, of right, sit in judgment, but it is the actions of the underclass that are judged. If not for its antisocial deeds, the underclass would not be brought to court. Most importantly, however, there would then be no need for the court's session, since there would be no case to ponder, no crime to punish or negligence to repair.

The rhetoric is followed by practices, from which it gets retrospective confirmation and draws the arguments it might have been short of when first used. The more ample and widespread such practices, the more self-evident sound the suggestions which triggered them and the less chance there is of the rhetorical subterfuge ever being spotted, let alone objected to. Most of Auletta's empirical material was drawn from the Wildcat Skills Training Centre, an institution established with the noble intention of re-habilitating and restoring to society the acknowledged members of the underclass. Who was eligible for admission? Four qualifications gave an equal right to be trained at the Centre. A candidate had to be a fairly recent prison convict or an ex-addict still undergoing treatment, a female on welfare, without children under the age of 6, or a youth between 17 and 20 who had dropped out of school. Whoever set the rules of admission must have decided beforehand that these four 'types', so distinct to an untrained eye, suffered from the same kind of problem, or rather *presented* the same kind of problem and therefore needed the same kind of treatment. What started as the rule-setters' decision, however, must have turned into the Wildcat Centre students' reality: for a considerable time they were put in each other's company, subjected to the same regime, and instructed daily as to the commonality of their fate. And being inside the Wildcat Centre supplied for the duration all the social definition they needed and could reasonably work for. Once more word had become flesh.[15]

Auletta is at pains to remind his readers time and again that 'under-classness' is not a matter of poverty, or, at least, that it cannot be explained solely by poverty. He points out that of 25 million to 29 million Americans officially below the poverty line, only an 'estimated 9 million do not assimilate'[16] and 'operate outside the generally accepted boundaries of society', set apart as they are 'by their "deviant" or antisocial behaviour'.[17] The implicit suggestion is that the elimination of poverty, were it at all conceivable, would not put an end to the underclass phenomenon. If one may be poor and yet 'operate within accepted boundaries', then factors other than poverty must be responsible for descending into the underclass. These factors were seen to be psychological and behavioural afflictions, made perhaps more frequent under conditions of poverty, but not deter-mined by it.

According to this suggestion, descent into the underclass is a matter of choice – deliberate or by default. It is a choice even if people fall into the underclass simply because they fail or neglect to do what is needed to extricate themselves from poverty. Not doing what is needed, in a country of free choosers, is easily, without a second thought, interpreted as choosing something else instead – in this case 'unsocial behaviour'. Falling

into the underclass is an exercise in freedom. In a society of free consumers curbing one's freedom is impermissible; but so is, many would say, *not* curtailing the freedom of people who use their freedom to abridge other people's freedoms, by accosting, pestering, threatening, fun-spoiling, burdening consciences and otherwise making other people's lives nasty.

Separating the 'problem of the underclass' from the 'issue of poverty' is like hitting several birds with one stone. Its most obvious effect is – in a society famous for its love of litigation – to deny the people assigned to the underclass the right to 'claim damages' by presenting themselves as victims of societal malfunction. In whatever litigation may follow their case, the burden of proof will be shifted fairly and squarely onto the 'underclassers'. It is they who must take the first step and prove their goodwill and determination to be good. Whatever is to be done must be done in the first place by the underclassers themselves (though of course there is no shortage of professional and self-appointed counsellors to advise them as to what it is exactly that they must do). If nothing happens and the spectre of the underclass refuses to go away, the explanation is simple; it is also clear who is to blame. If the rest of society has something to reproach itself for it is only for its insufficient determination to curtail the underclassers iniquitous choices. More police, more prisons, ever more severe and frightening punishments, seem then the most obvious means to repair the mistake.

Perhaps more seminal yet is another effect: the abnormality of the underclass phenomenon 'normalizes' the issue of poverty. It is the underclass which is placed outside the accepted boundaries of society, but the underclass constitutes, as we remember, only a fraction of the 'officially poor'. It is precisely because the underclass is such a big and urgent problem that the bulk of people living in poverty are not a great issue that needs to be tackled urgently. Against the background of the uniformly ugly and repulsive landscape of the underclass, the 'merely poor' shine as temporarily unlucky but essentially decent people who – unlike the underclassers – will make all the right choices and eventually find their way back into the accepted boundaries of society. Just as falling into the underclass and staying there is a matter of choice, so the rehabilitation from the state of poverty is also a matter of choice – the right choice this time. The tacit suggestion conveyed by the idea that the descent of a poor person into the underclass is the outcome of choice, is that another choice may accomplish the opposite and lift the poor from their social degradation.

A central and largely uncontested – since unwritten – rule of a consumer society is that being free to choose requires competence: skill and deter-mination to use the power of choice. Freedom to choose does not mean that all choices are right – there are good and bad choices, better and worse choices. The kind of choice made is the evidence of competence or its lack. The underclass is the aggregate product of wrong individual choices; proof of the 'choice incompetence' of its members.

In his highly influential tract on the roots of present-day poverty,[18] Lawrence C. Mead singles out that incompetence as the paramount cause

of the persistence of poverty amid affluence, and of the sordid failure of all successive state-run policies meant to eliminate it. The poor purely and simply lack the competence to appreciate the advantages of working life; they make wrong choices, putting 'nowork' above work. It is because of that incompetence, says Mead, that the invocation of the work ethic falls on deaf ears and fails to influence the choices of the poor:

> The issue hinges on whether the needy can be responsible for themselves and, above all, on whether they have the competence to manage their lives . . .[19] Whatever outward causes one cites, a mystery in the heart of nowork remains – the *passivity* of the seriously poor in seizing the opportunities that apparently exist for them . . . To explain nowork, I see no avoiding some appeal to psychology or culture. Mostly, seriously poor adults appear to avoid work, not because of their economic situation, but because of what they believe . . .[20] In the absence of prohibitive barriers to employment, the question of the personality of the poor emerges as the key to understanding and overcoming poverty. Psychology is the last frontier in the search for the causes of low work effort . . . Why do the poor not seize [the opportunities] as assiduously as the culture assumes they will? *Who exactly are they?*[21] The core of the culture of poverty seems to be inability to control one's life – what psychologists call inefficacy.[22]

The opportunities are there; are not all of us the walking proof of that? But opportunities must be also seen as such, and embraced, and that takes competence: some wits, some will and some effort. The poor obviously lack all three. This impairment of the poor is, all things considered, good, reassuring news. We are responsible, offering the poor opportunities. The poor are irresponsible, refusing to take them. Just like the medics who reluctantly throw in the towel when their patients consistently refuse to cooperate with the prescribed treatment, we all may as well give up our efforts to provide job opportunities in the face of the stubborn reluctance of the poor to work. There are limits to what we can do. The teachings of the work ethic are available to anyone who will listen, and opportunities to work wait to be seized – the rest is up to the poor themselves. They have no right to demand anything else from us.

If poverty continues to exist and grow amidst growing affluence, the work ethic must have been ineffective. But if we believe that it stays ineffective only because its commandments are not properly listened to and obeyed, then this failure to listen and obey can only be explained by either moral defectiveness or criminal intent on the part of those who fall out.

Let me repeat: in the beginning, the work ethic was a highly effective means of filling up factories hungry for more labour. With labour turning fast into an obstacle to higher productivity, the work ethic still has a role to play, but this time as an effective means to wash clean all the hands and consciences inside the accepted boundaries of society of the guilt of abandoning a large number of their fellow citizens to permanent

redundancy. Purity of hands and consciences is reached by the twin measure of the moral condemnation of the poor and the moral absolution of the rest.

To be poor is criminal

Mead's pamphlet against the poor who 'have chosen' not to work for their living ends with an emphatic invocation: 'Social policy must resist passive poverty justly and firmly – much as the West contained communism – until sanity breaks in and the opposed system collapses of its own weight.'[23] The metaphor is faultlessly chosen. One of the foremost services that the underclass renders to the present-day affluent society is the sucking-in of the fears and anxieties no longer drained by a potent enemy outside. The underclass is the enemy inside the walls, destined to replace the external enemy as a drug crucial to collective sanity; a safety valve for collective tensions born of individual insecurity.

The underclass is particularly well fit to play this role. Mead says repeatedly that what prods 'normal', decent Americans to form a united front against the welfare spongers, criminals and school dropouts, is what they perceive as the dire inconsistency of those they unite against: the underclassers offend all the cherished values of the majority while clinging to them and desiring the same joys of consumer life as other people boast to have *earned*. In other words, what Americans hold against the underclass in their midst is that its dreams and the model of life it desires are so uncannily similar to their own. And yet the similarity can hardly be seen as a matter of inconsistency. As Peter Townsend pointed out, it is the logic of a consumer society to mould its poor as unfulfilled consumers: 'consumer lifestyles are becoming increasingly inaccessible to those on the low incomes defined historically in terms of a fixed purchasing value of sub-sistence or basic needs'.[24] However, it is precisely that inaccessibility of consumer lifestyles that the consumer society trains its members to experience as the most painful of deprivations.

Every type of social order produces some visions of the dangers which threaten its identity. But each society spawns visions made to its own measure – to the measure of the kind of social order it struggles to achieve. On the whole, these visions tend to be mirror images of the society which spawns them, while images of threat tend to be self-portraits of the society with minus signs. Or, to put this in psychoanalytical terms, threats are projections of a society's own inner ambivalence about its ways and means, about the fashion in which it lives and perpetuates its living. A society unsure about the survival of its mode of being develops the mentality of a besieged fortress. The enemies who lay siege to its walls are its own, very own, 'inner demons': the suppressed, ambient fears which permeate its daily life, its 'normality', yet which, in order to make the daily reality endurable, must be squashed and squeezed out of the lived-through

quotidianity and moulded into an alien body: into a tangible enemy whom one can fight, and fight again, and even hope to conquer.

In line with this universal rule, the danger which haunted the classic, order-building and order-obsessed modern state was that of the revolution. The enemies were the revolutionaries or, rather, the hot-headed, hare-brained, all-too-radical reformists, the subversive forces trying to replace the extant state-managed order with another state-managed order, with a counter-order reversing each and any principle by which the present order lived or aimed to live.

The self-image of social order has changed since those times and so the image of the threat – the image of order with a minus sign – has acquired a new shape. Whatever has been registered in recent years as rising criminality (a process, let us note, which happened to run parallel to the falling membership of the Communist or other radical parties of 'alternative order'), is not a product of malfunction or neglect, but the consumer society's own product, logically (if not legally) legitimate. What is more, it is also its inescapable product. The higher the consumer demand is (that is, the more effective the market seduction is), the more the consumer society is safe and prosperous. Yet, simultaneously, the wider and deeper the gap grows between those who desire and can satisfy their desires (those who have been seduced and proceed to act in the way the state of being seduced prompts them to act), and those who have been seduced and yet are unable to act in the way the seduced are expected to act. Market seduction is, simultaneously, the great equalizer and the great divider. To be effective, the enticement to consume, and to consume more, must be transmitted in all directions and addressed indiscriminately to everybody who will listen. But more people can listen than can respond in the fashion which the seductive message was meant to elicit. Those who cannot act on the desires so induced are treated daily to the dazzling spectacle of those who can. Lavish consumption, they are told, is the sign of success, a highway leading straight to public applause and fame. They also learn that possessing and consuming certain objects and practising certain lifestyles is the necessary condition of happiness; perhaps even of human dignity.

If consumption is the measure of a successful life, of happiness and even of human decency, then the lid has been taken off human desires; no amount of acquisitions and exciting sensations is likely ever to bring satisfaction in the way 'keeping up to the standards' once promised: there are no standards to keep up to. The finishing line moves forward together with the runner, the goals keep forever a step or two ahead as one tries to reach them. Records keep being broken, and there seems to be no end to what a human may desire. Dazzled and baffled, people learn that in the newly privatized, and thus 'liberated' companies which they remember as austere public institutions constantly famished for cash, the present managers draw salaries measured in millions, while those sacked from their managerial chairs are indemnified, again in millions of pounds, for their botched and sloppy work. From all places, through all communication

channels, the message comes loud and clear: there are no standards except that of grabbing more, and no rules, except the imperative of 'playing one's cards right'.

However, no card game hands are even. If winning is the sole object of the game, those who got a poor hand are tempted to try whatever other resources they can muster. From the point of view of the casino owners, some resources – those that they themselves allocate or circulate – are legal tender; all other resources, though, those beyond their control, are prohibited. The line dividing the fair from the unfair does not look the same, however, from the side of the players, particularly from the side of the would-be, aspiring players, and most particularly from the side of the incapacitated aspiring players, who do not have access to the legal tender. They may resort to the resources they *do* have, whether recognized as legal or declared illegal, or opt out of the game altogether. That latter move, however, has been made, by market seduction, all but impossible to contemplate.

The disarming, disempowering and suppressing of unfulfilled players is therefore an indispensable supplement to integration-through-seduction in a market-led society of consumers. The impotent, indolent players are to be kept outside the game. They are the waste-product of the game, a waste product which the game cannot stop spitting out without grinding to a halt and calling in the receivers. The game would not benefit from halting the production of waste for another reason: those who stay in the game need to be shown the horrifying sight of the (sole and only, as they are told) alternative, in order to make them able and willing to endure the hardships and the tensions that their lives lived in the game gestate.

Given the nature of the game now played, the misery of those left out of it, once treated as a collectively caused blight which needed to be dealt with by collective means, can be only redefined as an individual crime. The 'dangerous classes' are thus redefined as classes of criminals. And so the prisons fully and truly deputize now for the fading welfare institutions, and in all probability will have to do this to a growing extent as welfare provisions continue to taper.

The growing incidence of behaviour classified as criminal is not an obstacle on the road to a fully fledged and all-embracing consumerist society. On the contrary, it is its natural accompaniment and prerequisite. This is so, admittedly, for a number of reasons, but the main reason among them is perhaps the fact that those left out of the game – the unfulfilled consumers whose resources do not measure up to their desires, and who have therefore little or no chance of winning while playing the game by its official rules – are the living incarnation of the 'inner demons' specific to consumer life. Their ghettoization and criminalization, the severity of the sufferings administered to them and the overall cruelty of the fate visited upon them, are – metaphorically speaking – the ways of exorcizing such inner demons and burning them out in effigy. The criminalized margins serve as *soi-disant* tools of sanitation: the sewers into which the inevitable,

but poisonous, effluvia of consumerist seduction are disposed, so that the people who manage to stay in the game of consumerism need not worry about the state of their own health. If this is, however, the prime stimulus of the present exuberance of what the great Norwegian criminologist, Nils Christie, called 'the prison industry',[25] then the hope that the process can be slowed down, let alone halted or reversed in a thoroughly deregulated and privatized society animated and run by the consumer market, is – to say the least – small.

Nowhere is the connection exposed more fully than in the United States, where the unqualified rule of the consumer market reached, in the years of Reagan–Bush free-for-all, further than in any other country. The years of deregulation and dismantling of welfare provisions were also the years of rising criminality, of a growing police force and prison population. They were the years in which an ever more gory and spec-tacularly cruel lot needed to be reserved for those declared criminal, in order to match the fast-growing fears and anxieties, nervousness and uncertainty, anger and fury of the silent or not-so-silent majority of ostensibly successful consumers. The more powerful the 'inner demons' became, the more insatiable the desire of the majority grew to see the crime punished and justice done. The liberal Bill Clinton won the pre-sidential election promising to multiply the ranks of the police and build new and more secure prisons. Some observers (among them Peter Line-baugh of the University of Toledo, Ohio, the author of *The London Hanged*) believe that Clinton owed his election to the widely publicized execution of a retarded man, Ricky Ray Rector, whom he allowed to go to the electric chair when he was the Governor of Arkansas. Two years later Clinton's opponents in the radical right sections of the Republican Party swept the board in the congressional elections having convinced the electorate that Clinton had not done enough to fight criminality and that they would do more. The second election of Clinton was won in a campaign in which both candidates tried to out-shout and overtake each other in their promises of a strong police force and no mercy for all those who 'offend society's values while clinging to them' – who make a bid for the consumerist life without proper credentials and without contributing to the perpetuation of consumer society.

In 1972, just as the welfare era reached its summit and just before its fall began, the Supreme Court of the United States, mirroring the public mood of the time, ruled the death penalty to be arbitrary and capricious, and as such unfit to serve the cause of justice. Several other rulings later, the Court in 1988 permitted the execution of 16-year-olds, in 1989 the execution of the mentally retarded and, finally, in 1992 in the infamous case of Herrera vs. Collins it ruled that the accused may be innocent, but still could be executed if trials were properly conducted and constitutionally correct. The recent Crime Bill passed by the Senate and the House of Representatives extends the number of offences punishable by death to 57 or even, according to certain interpretations, 70. With high

publicity and a lot of fanfare, a federal state-of-the-art execution chamber, with a death row planned to hold 120 convicts, was built at the US penitentiary in Terre Haute, Indiana. At the beginning of 1994, altogether 2,802 people were awaiting execution in American prisons. Of these, 1,102 were Afro-American, while 33 were sentenced to death when juveniles. The overwhelming majority of death-row inmates comes, expectedly, from that huge and growing warehouse where the failures and the rejects of consumer society are stored. As Linebaugh suggests, the spectacle of execution is 'cynically used by politicians to terrorize a growing underclass'. In demanding the terrorization of the underclass, the silent American majority attempts to terrorize away its own inner terrors.

According to Herbert Gans, 'the feelings harboured by the more fortunate classes about the poor [are a] mixture of fear, anger and disapproval, but fear may be the most important element in the mixture'.[26] Indeed, the emotionally loaded mixture of sentiments may be motivationally and politically effective only in so far as the fear is intense and truly terrifying. The widely advertised defiance of the work ethic by the poor and their reluctance to share in the hard work of the decent majority, is enough to cause widespread anger and disapproval. When, however, the image of the idle poor is overlaid with the alarming news of rising criminality and violence against the lives and property of the decent majority, disapproval is topped up by fear; non-obedience to the work ethic becomes a *fearful* act, in addition to being morally odious and repulsive.

Poverty turns then from the subject matter of social policy into a problem for penology and criminal law. The poor are no longer the rejects of consumer society, defeated in the all-out competitive wars; they are the outright enemies of society. There is but a tenuous and easily crossed line dividing the recipients of welfare from drug-pushers, robbers and murderers. People on welfare are the natural catchment area for criminal gangs, and keeping people on welfare means enlarging the pool from which the criminals are recruited.

Expulsion from the universe of moral obligations

Linking poverty with criminality has another effect: it helps to banish the poor from the universe of moral obligations.

The substance of morality is the impulse of responsibility for the integrity and well-being of other people who are weak, unfortunate and suffering; criminalization of poverty tends to extinguish and argue away that impulse. As actual or potential criminals, the poor cease to be an ethical problem – they are exempt from our moral responsibility. There is no more a moral question of defending the poor against the cruelty of their fate; instead, there is the ethical question of defending the right and proper lives of decent people against the assaults likely to be plotted in mean streets, ghettos and no-go areas.

As has been said before, since in the present-day society the non-working poor are no more the 'reserve army of labour', there is no *economic* sense in keeping them in good shape just in case they are called back to active service as producers. This does not by itself mean, though, that there is no *moral* sense in providing them with conditions of dignified human existence. Their well-being may not be relevant to the struggle for productivity and profitability, but it is still crucially relevant to the moral sentiments and concerns owed to human beings as well as the self-esteem of the human community. Gans begins his book with a quotation from Thomas Paine:

> When it shall be said in any country in the world, my poor are happy; neither ignorance nor distress is to be found among them; my jails are empty of prisoners, my streets of beggars; the aged are not in want, the taxes are not oppressive ... when these things can be said, then may that country boast of its constitution and its government.

In the early stages of modern history the work ethic had the distinct advantage of linking economic interests to the ethical concerns of the kind spelled out by Thomas Paine. Bringing the poor to the factory to work might have served the interests of the producers and merchandisers of goods (and these interests might even have supplied most vigour to the propaganda of the work ethic) but it also appealed to the moral sensitivity of the public, worried, disturbed and ashamed by the sight of human misery suffered by the unemployed. Given the seemingly insatiable thirst of emerging mass industry for an ever-growing supply of labour, moral concerns could seek a legitimate and realistic outlet in spreading the gospel of the work ethic. There was, one might say, a historically occasioned encounter between the interests of capital and the moral sentiments of society at large.

This being no longer the case, the ostensibly unchanged message of the work ethic has entered a new kind of relationship with public morality. It is no longer an outlet for moral sentiments; instead, it has become a powerful instrument of the late twentieth century version of 'adiaphorization' – the process whereby the ethical opprobrium is taken away from morally repugnant acts.

To 'adiaphorize' an action is to declare it morally neutral or, rather, make it subject to assessment by other than moral criteria while being exempt from moral evaluation. The call to abide by the commandments of the work ethic serves now as a test of eligibility for moral empathy. Most of those to whom the appeal is addressed are expected (bound) to fail this test, and once they fail they can be without compunction assumed to have put themselves, by their own choice, outside the realm of moral obligation. Society can now relinquish all further responsibility for their predicament without feeling guilty about abandoning its ethical duty. No mean achievement, given the pervasiveness of moral impulse and the spontaneous, common sensitivity to human misery, pain, suffering and humiliation.

The stifling of moral impulse can never be complete, and so the exile from the universe of moral obligations cannot be absolute. However successfully consciences may be silenced by persistent bombardment with the news of moral depravity and criminal inclinations of the non-working poor, the indissoluble residues of moral impulse must be given, time and again, an outlet. Such an outlet is provided by periodical 'carnivals of charity' – massive but as a rule short-lived explosions of pent-up moral feelings triggered by lurid sights of particularly hideous sufferings and particularly devastating misery. As all carnivals, however, are meant to obliquely reinforce, not to undermine, the rules of quotidianity, the spectacles of mass charity render day-to-day equanimity and moral indifference more bearable; in the end, they fortify the beliefs which justify the ethical exile of the poor.

As Ryszard Kapuściński, one of the most formidable chronographers of contemporary living, has recently explained, that effect is achieved by three interconnected expedients consistently applied by the media who preside over these 'charity fairs'.[27]

First, the news of a famine or another wave of uprooting and enforced homelessness comes as a rule coupled with the reminder that the same distant lands where the people 'as seen on TV' die of famine and disease are the birthplace of 'Asian tigers'. It does not matter that all the 'tigers' together embrace no more than 1 per cent of the population of Asia alone. They are assumed to demonstrate what needs to be proved – that the sorry plight of the hungry and the homeless is their *sui generis* choice. Alternatives are available, but not taken as a result of lack of industry or resolve. The underlying message is that the poor themselves bear responsibility for their fate. They could, as the 'tigers' did, choose a life of work and thrift instead.

Second, such news is so scripted and edited as to reduce the problem of poverty and deprivation to the question of hunger alone. This stratagem has two effects: the real scale of poverty is played down (800 million people are permanently undernourished, but something like 4 billion, two thirds of the world population, live in poverty), and the task ahead is limited to finding food for the hungry. But, as Kapuściński points out, such a presentation of the problem of poverty (as exemplified by a recent issue of *The Economist* analysing world poverty under the heading 'How to feed the world') 'terribly degrades, virtually denies full humanity to people whom we want, allegedly, to help'. The equation 'poverty = hunger' conceals many other complex aspects of poverty: 'horrible living and housing conditions, illness, illiteracy, aggression, falling apart families, weakening of social bonds, lack of future and non-productiveness'. These are afflictions which cannot be cured with high-protein biscuits and powdered milk. Kapuściński remembers wandering through African townships and villages and meeting children 'who begged me not of bread, water, chocolate or toys, but a ballpen, since they went to school and had nothing to write their lessons with'.

Let us add that all associations between the horrid pictures of famine as presented by the media and the plight of the poor accused of violating the principles of the work ethic are carefully avoided. People are shown along with their hunger, but however much viewers strain their eyes they cannot see a single worktool, plot of arable land or head of cattle in the picture. It is as if there is no connection between the emptiness of the work ethic's promises in a world which needs no more labour, and the plight of these people, offered as an outlet for pent-up moral impulses. The work ethic emerges from this exercise unscathed, ready to be used again as a whip to chase the poor nearer home away from the shelter they seek (in vain) in the welfare state.

Third, spectacles of disasters, as presented by the media, support and reinforce the ordinary, daily moral withdrawal in another way. Apart from unloading the accumulated supplies of moral sentiments, their long-term effect is that:

> ... the developed part of the world surrounds itself with a sanitary belt of uncommitment, erects a global Berlin Wall; all the information coming from 'out there' is pictures of war, murders, drugs, looting, contagious diseases, refugees and hunger; that is, of something threatening us.

Only rarely, and in a half-voice, with no connection with the scenes of civil wars and massacres, do we hear of the murderous weapons used, and even less often are we reminded of what we know but prefer not to be told about: that all those weapons used to make far-away homelands into killing fields have been supplied by our arms factories, jealous of their order books and proud of their competitiveness – that lifeblood of our own cherished prosperity. A synthetic image of self-inflicted brutality sediments itself into public consciousness; an image of 'mean streets' and 'no-go areas' writ large, a magnified rendition of a gangland, an alien, sub-human world beyond ethics and beyond salvation. Attempts to save that world from the worst consequences of its own brutality may only bring momentary effects and in the long run are bound to fail; all the lifelines thrown will be surely re-twisted into more nooses.

And then the well-tried, trusty tool of adiaphorization comes into its own: the sober, rational calculation of costs and effects. Money spent on these kinds of people is money wasted. And wasting money is one thing which, as everybody will readily agree, we cannot afford. Neither the victims of famine as ethical subjects, nor our own stance towards them is a moral issue. Morality is for carnivals only – those spectacular, instantaneous, yet short-lived, explosive condensations of pity and compassion. When it comes to our (the affluents') collective responsibility for the continuing misery of the world's poor, economic calculation takes over, and the rules of free trade, competitiveness and productivity replace ethical precepts. Where economy speaks, ethics had better keep silent.

Unless, of course, it is the *work* ethic, the sole variant that economic rules

tolerate. The work ethic is not an adversary of economy bent on profit-ability and competitiveness, but its necessary and welcome supplement. For the affluent part of the world and the affluent sections of well-off societies, the work ethic is a one-sided affair. It spells out the duties of those who struggle with the task of survival; it says nothing about the duties of those who rose above mere survival and went on to more elevated, loftier concerns. In particular, it denies the dependency of the first upon the second, and so releases the second from responsibility for the first.

Today, the work ethic is instrumental in bringing the idea of 'dependency' into disrepute. Dependency is, increasingly, a dirty word. The welfare state is accused of cultivating dependency, of raising it to the level of self-perpetuating culture, and this is a crowning argument for dismantling it. Moral responsibility is the first victim of this holy war against dependency, as dependency of the 'Other' is but a mirror image of one's own responsibility, the starting point of any moral relationship and the founding assumption of all moral action. While denigrating dependency of the poor as sin, the work ethic in its present rendition brings most relief to the moral scruples of the affluent.

Work and redundancy in the globalized world

The modern way of life consists in the continuous, unstoppable re-shaping of the world. The urge to make things different, presumably better than they have been thus far and currently are, closely followed by practices that add yet more force to the urge which prompt them, is commonly called 'modernization'. Modernization should not be interpreted as a *road to* modernity: as a sequence of actions that result in 'becoming modern' and once their job has been done, their mission accomplished, may grind to a halt. Modernization *is* modernity. Once it stops, modernity vanishes. Modernization – a compulsive, obsessive and addictive 'reinventing' of the world and of the fashion of its human habitation – is *synonymous* with the 'modern way of life'. Permanent and continuous modernization is the constitutive feature of modernity; that mode of being that sets it apart from other ('traditionalist') modes of human existence which are, by and large, bent primarily on the continuous reproduction of society preferably in the same unmodified form.

For a good part of modern history, however, modernization was seen, contrary to its inner self-propelling tendency, as a time-limited process or task – as an undertaking 'with a finishing line'. The purpose was to cleanse the inherited state of affairs of its numerous imperfections, incongruencies and inanities, so that it might reach a form which wouldn't call for any further correction and certainly not for reconditioning or overhaul. For instance, once the satisfaction of the sum total of human needs would have been made possible by the development of society's productive powers, economy would settle in a 'steady state' and stay there; further 'economic growth', were it still pursued, would be then as disruptive and dis-equilibrating as the scarcity of needs-satisfying goods and the poverty it caused. The value of modernization was seen therefore as instrumental, derived fully from the *prospect* of a rational society – its ultimate destination.

The logic of capital–led modernization defied, however, the expectations. For the first part of its history capitalism derived its momentum from conquering and colonizing 'virgin lands' (separating the producers from their means of production and business activities from household economy – bringing thereby the 'pre-modern' aspects of life into the orbit of market economy and transforming them into the grazing ground for capital); once that job had been completed and few, if any, 'virgin lands' were left for the capitalist conversion, further survival of modern capitalist society became dependent on the modernization of the already modernized aspects of life (a process encapsulated recently in the currently fashionable concept of 'asset stripping'). This fateful shift brought into light the hitherto less noticeable, even if perpetual, feature of modern creativity: its intimate connection with destruction.

Now, as before, nothing is nor can be created *ab nihilo*, 'from scratch' – though given the assumed 'virginity' of previously invaded and colonized lands the colonizers could be excused for thinking (wrongly) that it could. The illusion can no longer be maintained when the ailments to be cured are in large part 'iatrogenic', that is the side-effects of past therapies, and when the objects of re-organization are mostly the products of yesterday's re-organizing efforts, the outcomes of yesterday's destructive bustle that came home to roost. It is clear to anyone, except those who do not wish to know, that *all* creation is a case of creative destruction. All creation must leave some polluting, often toxic debris behind – a waste of the 'rationalization' which cannot but involve the separation of useful (however the 'usefulness' is defined and measured) from 'useless' (redundant) parts of the rationalized object, and then the disposal of the latter.

Richard Sennett suggests that one of the paramount precepts of business strategy in recent years is the 'discontinuous reinvention of institutions', hiding its destructive practices under the proud name of 'reengineering'.[1] 'The most salient fact about reengineering', says Sennett, 'is the downsizing of jobs.' In the words of Michael Hammer and James Champy whom he quotes, reengineering 'means doing more with less'. In the USA, for instance, the estimated number of the prime victims (indeed, the waste) of reengineering, the 'downsized' workers, reached at least 13 million but perhaps as many as 39 million in the course of no more than 15 years (1980–95). The very term 'reengineering' is nowadays synonymous with greater efficiency – it 'conjures up a tighter operation achieved by making a decisive break with the past'. Whatever the truth of the matter, enthusiasm for 'reengineering' is easy to understand: 'downsizing' augurs an immediate cut in expenses, and 'the short-term returns to stockholders provide a strong incentive to the powers of chaos disguised by that seemingly assuring word'. In the result, 'perfectly viable businesses are gutted and abandoned, capable employees are set adrift rather than rewarded, simply because the organization must prove to the market that it is capable of change'.

The human side of 'downsizing' is simply more redundancy. In human

terms, those made redundant constitute the principal 'waste' of 'reengi-neering'. To survive, companies must prove to their stockholder that investment pays, and for this purpose they must show that – like before, in the times of the 'virgin lands' of profusion – they are capable of aggression and conquest: of 'creative destruction'. One way of achieving such an effect under present circumstances are (sometimes friendly, but better yet hostile) mergers, followed by 'asset stripping', 'downsizing', 'outsourcing' and massive ('voluntary' or not) redundancies.

Colonialism, or exporting surplus labour

Reflecting what had by then become the virtually common opinion of the country, one of the speakers of the Trade Union Congress convened in 1883 (a Mr Toyne from Saltburn)[2] noted with grave concern

> a tendency in the rural districts to monopolize the land; to convert small farms into large ones. The small farmsteads were being knocked down, and the land absorbed into large estates. The present land system was driving men off the land into the mines and factories to compete against the artisan in the labour market. The working men of the country wanted relief from this immediately.

Complaint was by no means new – only the suspected culprits and prospective defendants differed in the diagnoses monotonously repeated throughout the turbulent history of the creative destruction recorded in the rubric of 'economic progress'. In Toyne's case, the overcrowding of the labour market was blamed on the ruin and the downfall of smallholders prompted by the advance of a new agricultural technology. A few decades before it was the disintegration of artisan guilds triggered by industrial machinery that was pointed to as the prime cause of misery. A few decades later the turn would come of the mines and factories in which the victims of agricultural progress once sought salvation. And yet in all such cases the way to release the pressure on the life conditions of labourers and to improve their living standards was sought in the thinning up of the crowds besieging the gates of the establishments that offered employment. Such remedy for low and falling wages seemed obvious and caused no con-troversy; after all, there was no shortage of places onto which the surplus of job seekers could be expeditiously unloaded. As Joseph Arch, the legendary leader of the Agricultural Workers' Union, testified in 1881 before Her Majesty's Commissioners of Agriculture:[3]

> Q. How do you set about ensuring the labourers' getting higher wages?

> A. We have reduced the number of labourers in the market very considerably.

Q. How have you reduced the number of labourers in the market?

A. We have emigrated about 700,000 souls, men, women and children, within the last eight or nine years.

Q. How have these 700,000 souls been emigrated; out of which funds?

A. I went over to Canada, and I made arrangements with the Canadian Government to give them so much and we found so much from the funds of the trade.

Another reason to export to faraway lands the locally produced 'social problems' through a massive deportation of the affected part of the population was the fear of the 'redundant' crowded inside the cities reaching the 'critical mass' prone to self-combustion. Sporadic yet repetitive outbursts of urban unrest spurred the powers that be into action. After June 1848 the 'rough districts' of Paris were cleansed wholesale of rebellious *miserables* and the 'great unwashed', transported *en masse* overseas – to Algeria. After the Paris Commune the exercise was repeated, though this time New Caledonia, a place further away from the troublespots, was selected as destination.[4]

From the very beginning, the modern era was the time of great migration. So far uncounted and perhaps uncountable masses of population traversed the globe, leaving their native countries, which offered no livelihood, for foreign lands that promised a better fortune. The popular and favoured trajectories changed over time, depending on the drifts of the current hot spots of modernization, but on the whole the migrants wandered from 'more developed' (more intensely modernizing) parts of the planet to the 'undeveloped' (not yet thrown out of their customary socio-economic balance under the impact of modernization) areas.

Such itineraries were, so to speak, over-determined. On the one hand, the presence of a surplus population, unable to find gainful employment or maintain its previously earned or inherited social status in the country of origin, was a phenomenon confined by and large to the terrains of advanced modernizing processes. On the other, though thanks to the same factor of rapid modernization, the countries in which the surplus population was produced enjoyed (even if temporarily) a technological and military superiority over the territories yet untouched by modernizing processes; superiority formidable enough to allow them to view and to treat such areas as 'void' (or to *make* them void in case the 'natives' resisted being pushed, or wielded a nuisance power which the settlers found too irksome for comfort): that is, as ready, and clamouring, for massive settlement. By the obviously incomplete estimates, about 30–50 million natives of 'pre-modern' lands, about 80 per cent of their total population, perished in the time between the first arrival and settlement of European soldiers and tradesmen and until the beginning of the twentieth century, when their numbers reached the lowest point.[5] Many were murdered,

many others succumbed to imported diseases, and the rest died out having lost the ways that for centuries kept their ancestors alive. As Charles Darwin summed up the saga of the Europe-led process of 'civilizing the savages', 'where the European has trod, death seems to pursue the aboriginal.'[6]

Ironically, the extermination of aborigines for the sake of clearing new sites for the European surplus population (priming them for the role of dumping grounds on which the human waste of the economic progress at home could be safely deposed) was carried in the name of the selfsame progress that recycled the surplus of Europeans into 'economic migrants'. And so, for instance, Theodore Roosevelt represented the extermination of American Indians as a selfless service to the cause of civilization: 'The settler and pioneer have at bottom had justice on their side: this great continent could not have been kept as nothing but a game preserve for squalid savages.'[7] Whereas according to General Roca, the commander of the infamous episode in Argentinian history, euphemistically dubbed the 'Conquest of the Desert' but consisting in the 'ethnic cleansing' of the pampas of its Indian population, explained to his fellow countrymen that their self-respect obliged them 'to put down as soon as possible, by reason or by force, this handful of savages who destroy our wealth and prevent us from definitely occupying, in the name of law, progress and our own security, the richest and most fertile lands of the Republic.'[8]

The rise and wane of global solutions to locally produced problems

Today, our planet is full.

This, let it be clear, is not a statement in physical or even human geography. In terms of physical space and the spread of human cohabitation, the planet is anything but full. On the contrary, the size total of the lands sparsely populated or depopulated, viewed as uninhabitable and incapable of supporting human life, seems to be expanding rather than shrinking. As *technological* progress offers (at a rising cost, to be sure) new means of survival in habitats previously deemed unfit for human settlement, it also erodes many habitats' ability to sustain the populations previously accommodated and fed, whereas *economic* progress renders ever new modes of making a living unviable and impracticable, thereby adding to the size of the wastelands laying fallow and abandoned.

'The planet is full' is a statement *in sociology and political science*. It refers not to the state of the Earth, but to the ways and means of its inhabitants. It signals the disappearance of 'no man's lands', of territories fit to be defined and/or treated as void of human habitation as well as devoid of sovereign administration and therefore open to (clamouring for!) colonization and settlement. Such territories, now largely absent, played for a greater part of modern history the crucial role of dumping grounds for human waste turned out in ever rising volumes in the parts of the globe affected by the processes of 'modernization'.

Production of 'human waste', or more correctly wasted humans (the 'excessive', 'superfluous', 'supernumerary', 'redundant' population – that is a population that either could not or was not wished to be admitted or allowed to stay in) is an inescapable and intractable outcome of modernization, and an inseparable accompaniment of modernity. It is an unavoidable side effect of *order building* (each order casts some parts of the extant population as 'out of place', 'unfit' or 'undesirable') and of *economic progress* (which cannot proceed without degrading and devaluing the previously effective modes of 'making a living' and therefore cannot but deprive their practitioners of livelihood).

For a greater part of modern history, however, huge parts of the globe ('backward', 'underdeveloped' parts) when measured by the ambitions of the already modern (read: obsessively modernizing) sector of the planet, stayed wholly or partly unaffected by modernizing pressures, thus escaping the 'overpopulation' effect. Confronted with the modernizing niches of the globe, such ('pre-modern', 'under-developed') parts tended to be viewed and treated as lands able to absorb the excess of the 'developed' countries' population – as natural destinations for the export of 'redundant humans' and as natural and obvious dumping sites for the human waste of modernization. Removal and disposal of human waste produced in the 'modernized' and still 'modernizing' parts of the globe was the deepest meaning of colonization and imperialist conquests. Both processes were made possible, and in fact inevitable, by the power differential continuously reproduced by the stark inequality of the development levels, resulting in turn from the confinement of the modern form of life to a relatively small and so 'privileged' section of the planet. That inequality allowed the modern part of the globe to seek, and find, *global* solutions to *locally* produced 'overpopulation' problems.

This situation could last as long as modernity (that is, the unstoppable, compulsive, obsessive and addictive modernization) remained such a *privileged* condition. Once modernity turned, as it was intended, bound and hard struggling to turn, into the universal condition of humankind, the effects of its planetary dominion have come home to roost. As the triumphant progress of modernization has reached the furthest lands of the planet and practically the totality of human production and consumption has become money-and-market mediated, and as the processes of commodification, commercialization and monetarization of human livelihoods have penetrated almost every nook and cranny of the globe – global solutions to locally produced problems, or global outlets for local excesses, stopped being available. All localities (also, most notably, the highly modernized ones) have now to bear the consequences of modernity's global triumph. They are now faced with the need to seek (in vain, as they learn daily and the hard way) *local* solutions to *globally* produced problems.

To cut the long story short: the new fullness of the planet means, essentially, *an acute crisis of human waste disposal industry*. While the production of human waste goes on unabated and rises to new heights, the

planet is fast running short of refuse dumps and the tools of waste recycling at the time when human waste production goes on unabated and, if anything, gains in efficiency.

As if to make the already troublesome state of affairs even more complex and threatening, a new powerful source of 'wasted humans' has been added to the original two. Globalization has become the third (alongside the order-building and economic as well as technological progress), and currently the most prolific and least controlled, 'production line' of human waste or wasted humans. It also puts a new gloss on the old problem and imbues it with an altogether new significance and an unprecedented urgency.

The global spread of modern forms of life let loose and set in motion enormous and constantly swelling quantities of human beings bereaved of their heretofore adequate ways and means of survival in both the biological and social/cultural sense of that notion. For the resulting population pressures, the old familiar colonialist pressures but exerted in the opposite direction, there are no readily available outlets – neither for 'recycling' nor for safe 'disposal'. Hence the alarms about the overpopulation of the globe (not enough employment, not enough provisions for all); hence also the new centrality of the 'immigrants' and 'asylum seekers' problems in the contemporary political agenda and the rising role played by vague and diffuse 'security fears' in the emergent global strategies and the logic of power struggles.

The thus far elemental, unregulated and politically uncontrolled run of globalization processes has resulted in the establishment of a new variety of 'frontier-land' conditions in the planetary 'space of flows', to which a great part of power capacity once lodged in the sovereign modern states has been transferred. The brittle and incurably precarious equilibrium in such 'politics free zones' rests notoriously on a 'mutually assured vulnerability'. Hence the alarms about deteriorating security which magnify the already plentiful supplies of 'security fears', while simultaneously shifting public concerns and the outlets for individual anxiety away from the economic and social roots of trouble and towards concerns for personal (bodily) safety. In its turn, the thriving 'security industry' rapidly becomes one of the principal branches of waste-production and the paramount factor of the waste-disposal problem.

New global dimensions of work and poverty problems

The dearth of political visions and the absence of political agencies capable of pursuing them effectively look more sinister yet, and dangerous, when the planetary reach of our interdependence with all its aspects (notably: division of labour, distribution of wealth and poverty, social stratification) is considered; and when the odds militating against filling that gap are taken into account.

Misery suffered by distant people in distant places may be a direct or oblique outcome of something that has been done or has been neglected here at home, but being distant it does not evoke an ethical response and does not prompt a willingness to act as intense as those triggered by the sights of human distress nearby. The abyss separating the rich from those whose labour they bought or made idle may widen and deepen unabated (the top 20 per cent of the world population already earn 114 times more than the poorest fifth). If the places are at a great distance from each other, the connection between the well-being of one and the misery of another may well stay invisible and escape attention. Mutual dependence may be global – ethical obligations stay, stubbornly, local.

Left unattended, though, global misery would sooner or later rebound on the domestic scene and on the well-being hoped to be preserved inside the closely guarded walls, whatever happens outside them. As Richard Rorty warns – 'globalization is producing a world economy in which an attempt by any one country to prevent the immiseration of its workers may result only in depriving them of employment.'[9] Don't ask for whom the bells toll – they ring for you as much as much as for all the rest of humanity. It is not only for the sake of the poor of distant lands that Rorty's voice is raised:

> We should raise our children to find it intolerable that we who sit behind desks and punch keyboards are paid ten times as much as people who get their hands dirty cleaning our toilets, and a hundred times as much as those who fabricate our keyboards in the Third World. We should ensure that they worry about the fact that the countries who industrialized first have a hundred times the wealth of those which have not yet industrialized.[10]

This is not what the official version of the present human condition, the version promoted worldwide at no-expense-too-high, insinuates. It speaks of a 'global village', where (to quote Naomi Klein's sarcastic summary) 'tribespeople in remotest rain forests tap away on laptop computers'.[11] As Naomi Klein found out, however, far from levelling the global playing field with jobs and technology for all, 'some multinationals . . . are in the process of mining the planet's poorest back country for unimaginable profits. This is the village where Bill Gates lives, amassing a fortune of $55 billion while a third of his workforce is classified as temporary workers'. Klein remembers admiring a 17-year-old girl at the outskirts of Manila for doing such a high-tech work like assembling computers. 'We make computers,' the girl replied to Klein's praise, 'but we don't know how to operate computers.' Computers are just one specimen of a big class of goods announced to augur new worldwide equality, which in practice keep their consumers happy while doing nothing to lift their producers out of their misery. 'The travels of Nike sneakers have been traced back to the abusive sweatshops of Vietnam, Barbie's little outfits back to the child labourers of Sumatra, Starbuck's lattes to the sun-scorched coffee fields of

Guatemala, and Shell's oil to the polluted and impoverished villages of the Niger Delta.'

The new 'fullness of the planet' – the global reach of modernization and so the planetary spread of modern mode of life – has two direct consequences that were briefly signalled before but which deserve more attention.

The first consequence is the blockage of outlets which in the past allowed regular and timely draining and cleansing of the relatively few modern enclaves of the planet of their surplus waste (that is, the excess of waste over the capacity of recycling outfits). Once the modern mode of life ceased being a privilege of selected lands, the primary outlet for human waste disposal, that is the 'empty' or 'no man's' territories (more precisely, the territories that thanks to the global power differential could be seen and treated as void and/or masterless), have vanished. As for the 'redundant humans' now turned out in parts of the planet that have recently jumped or fallen under the juggernaut of modernity, such outlets never existed; in the so-called 'pre-modern' societies, innocent of the problem of 'waste', human or inhuman alike, need for them did not arise. Whether because of blocking or due to the non-provision of external outlets, societies of both kinds turn increasingly the sharp edge of their exclusionary practices against themselves.

If the excess of population (that is the 'redundant' part; the part that cannot be re-assimilated into normal life patterns and be re-processed back into the category of 'useful' members of society) can be routinely removed and transported beyond the boundaries of the enclosure inside which an economic balance and social equilibrium are sought, the residue of 'redundant' who escaped transportation and remain inside the enclosure need to be earmarked for 'rehabilitation' and 'recycling'. They are 'out of useful employment', but only temporarily. Their 'staying out' is an abnormality that commands cure, admits and musters a cure; they clearly need to be helped 'back in' as soon as possible. They are, as we have seen before, the 'reserve army of labour' and must be put and held in such a shape as would allow them to return to active service at the first opportunity.

All that changes, however, once the channels for draining human surplus are blocked. As the whole of the 'redundant' population stays inside and rubs shoulders with the 'useful' and 'legitimate' rest, the line separating a transient incapacitation from the peremptory and final consignment to waste tends to be blurred and no longer legible. Rather than remaining as before a problem of a separate section of the population, assignment to 'waste' becomes everybody's potential prospect – one of the two extremes between which everybody's present and future social standing oscillates. To deal with the 'problem of waste' in this new form, the habitual tools and stratagems of intervention do not suffice; nor are they particularly adequate. The desperate search for adequate and feasible responses to the new shape of the old problem is likely to be delayed nevertheless by keen,

though abortive, efforts to deploy once more the policies designed in the past to deal with the problem in its old shape. To be on the safe side, the emergency measures aimed at the 'waste inside' will be preferred, and perhaps even given priority over all other modes of intervention in the issues of redundancy as such, temporary or not.

All such and similar setbacks and reverses of fortune tend do be magnified and made yet more acute in such parts of the globe as have been only recently confronted with the previously unknown phenomenon of 'surplus population' and the problem of its disposal. 'Recently' means in this case belatedly – at a time when the planet has already become full, when no 'empty lands' are left to serve as waste-disposal sites, and when all asymmetry of boundaries is turned firmly against the newcomers to the family of moderns. Surrounding lands would not invite their surplus nor would they, like they were in the past, be forced to let it in and accommodate it. Such latecomers to modernity are left to seek a *local* solution to a globally caused problem – though with meagre chance of success.

Their surrender to global pressures and laying open of their own territory to the unfettered circulation of capital and commodities has made unviable the family and communal businesses, which were once able and willing to absorb and employ all newly born humans assuring their survival. Only now the newcomers to the family of moderns experience the separation of business from households which the pioneers of modernity went through hundreds of years ago with all the attendant social upheavals and human misery but also with no longer available luxury of global solutions to locally produced problems: the luxury offered by the abundance of 'empty' and 'no-man's lands' which could be easily used to deposit the 'redundant' population.

Tribal wars and massacres, proliferation of 'guerilla armies' (often little more than barely disguised bandit gangs) busy decimating each other's ranks yet absorbing and annihilating the 'population surplus' (mostly the youth that are unemployable at home and prospectless) in the process, is one of such 'local solutions to global problems' which the 'latecomers to modernity' are forced to deploy (or, rather, found themselves deploying). Hundreds of thousands of people are chased away from their homes, murdered or forced to run for their life outside the borders of their country.

Perhaps the sole fast developing and thriving industry in the lands of the late-comers to be called 'developing countries' is thus far the mass production of refugees.

Social problems recast as problems of law and order

Loïc Wacquant notes a paradox:[12]

> The same people who fought yesterday with visible success for 'less state' to set free the capital and its uses of labour force, arduously

demand today 'more state' to contain and hide the deleterious social consequences of deregulation of employment conditions and deterioration of social protection for the inferior regions of social space.

If looked at closely, the shift noted by Wacquant would appear, of course, everything but a paradox. The apparent change of heart follows strictly the logic of the passage from the recycling to disposal of human waste. The passage was radical enough to need a keen and energetic assistance of state power, and the state obliged.

First, by dismantling the collective insurance against the individual (assumed temporary) expulsion or fall from the productive treadmill. That kind of insurance made an obvious sense to both wings of the political spectrum as long as the expulsion or the fall (and thus the assignment to productive waste) was deemed to be a temporary mishap and a start to a brief stage of recycling ('rehabilitating', returning to active service in industrial force), but it quickly lost its 'beyond left and right' support once the prospects of recycling started to look remote and uncertain, and once the facilities of regular recycling appeared to be increasingly incapable of accommodating all those who have fallen or who have never risen in the first place.

Second, by designing and building new secure waste-disposal sites. This is an undertaking certain to command ever growing popular support now that the hopes of successful recycling fade, the traditional method of human waste-disposal (through exportation of surplus labour) ceases to be available, and the suspicion of human universal disposability spreads wider and deepens together with the horror that the sight of 'wasted humans' evokes.

Social state is gradually, yet relentlessly and consistently turned into a 'garrison state', as Henry A. Giroux[13] calls it. He describes it as a state that increasingly protects the interests of global, trans-national corporations 'while stepping up the level of repression and militarization on the domestic front'. Social problems tend to be nowadays increasingly criminalized. In Giroux's summary,

> Repression increases and replaces compassion. Real issues such as a tight housing market and massive unemployment in the cities – as causes of homelessness, youth loitering and drug epidemics – are overlooked in favour of policies associated with discipline, containment and control.

The immediate proximity of large and growing agglomerations of 'wasted humans', likely to become durable or permanent, calls for stricter segregationist policies and extraordinary security measures, lest the 'health of society', the 'normal functioning' of the social system, is endangered. The notorious 'tension-management' and 'pattern-maintenance' tasks which, according to Talcott Parsons, all systems need to perform to survive, boil presently down almost entirely to the 'defusing' and 'neutralization' of 'human waste' through its territorial separation from the

rest of society and its exemption from the legal framework in which the life pursuits of the rest of society are conducted'. Since 'human waste' can no longer be removed to distant waste-disposal sites and placed firmly out of bounds of 'normal life', it needs to be sealed off in tightly closed containers.

The penal system supplies such containers. In David Garland's succinct and precise summary of the transformations associated with the advent of the 'garrison state', prisons which in the era of recycling 'functioned as the deep end of the correctional sector' are today 'conceived much more explicitly as a mechanism of exclusion and control'. It is the walls as such, and not what happens inside the walls, that 'are now seen as the institution's most important and valuable element'.[14] At best, the intention to 'rehabilitate', to 'reform', to 're-educate' and to return the stray sheep to the flock is paid but an occasional lip service – and when it does, it is countered with an angry baying-for-blood chorus with the leading tabloids in the role of conductors and leading politicians singing all the solo parts. Explicitly, the main and perhaps the sole purpose of prisons is not just any human waste-disposal – but a definitive, final and irreversible disposal. Once rejected, forever rejected. For a former prisoner on parole or on probation, return to society is now almost impossible and return to prison almost certain. Instead of easing and guiding the road 'back to the community' for prisoners who served their term of punishment, the function of probation officers is keeping the community safe from the perpetual danger temporarily let loose. 'The interests of convicted offenders, insofar as they are considered at all, are viewed as fundamentally opposed to those of the public.'[15]

Indeed, offenders tend to be viewed as 'intrinsically evil and wicked', they 'are not like us'. All similarities are purely accidental:

> There can be no mutual intelligibility, no bridge of understanding, no real communication between 'us' and 'them' ... Whether the offender's character is the result of bad genes or of being reared in an anti-social culture, the outcome is the same – a person who is beyond the pale, beyond reform, outside the civil community ... Those who do not or cannot fit in must be excommunicated and forcibly expelled.[16]

In a nutshell: prisons, like so many other social institutions, have moved from the task of recycling to that of waste-disposal. They have been re-allocated to the frontline of the battle waged to resolve the crisis in which the waste-disposal industry has fallen in the result of the global triumph of modernity and the new fullness of the planet. All waste is potentially poisonous – or at least, being defined as waste, is deemed to be contaminating, potentially explosive while routinely disturbing the proper order of things. If recycling is no longer profitable and its chances (at any rate in the present-day setting) are no longer realistic, the right way to deal with waste is to speed up its 'bio-degradation' and decomposition while isolating it as securely as possible from the ordinary human habitat:

Work, social welfare, and family support used to be the means whereby ex-prisoners were reintegrated into mainstream society. With the decline of these resources, imprisonment has become a longer-term assignment from which individuals have little prospect of returning to an unsupervised freedom ... The prison is used today as a kind of reservation, a quarantine zone in which purportedly dangerous individuals are segregated in the name of public safety.[17]

Building more prisons, making more offences punishable by imprisonment, the policy of 'zero tolerance' and harsher and longer sentences are best understood as so many efforts to reposition the failing and faltering waste-disposal industry on a new foundation – more in keeping with the novel conditions of the globalized world.

Prisons, we may say, are the pattern followed by other means deployed in the process of shifting the poor and unemployed (more correctly: unemployable), and the funds set aside to neutralize their potentially explosive impact on society as a whole, from the rubric of 'social problems' into that of law and order. All such means, like sprawling urban ghettoes and 'nowherevilles' of refugee and asylum-seeker camps, involve spatial segregation services by security guards who now replace *en masse* the social workers and welfare wardens.

From the social state to the 'state of security'

The 'social state', that crowning achievement of the long history of European democracy and until recently its dominant form, is today in retreat.

The social state based its legitimacy and rested its demands of loyalty and the obedience of its citizens on the promise to defend them and insure against redundancy, exclusion and rejection as well as against random blows of fate – against the consignment to 'human waste' caused by individual inadequacies or misfortunes; in short, on the promise to insert certainty and security into the lives in which chaos and contingency would otherwise rule. If hapless individuals stumbled and fell, there would be someone around ready to hold their hands and help them onto their feet again.

Erratic conditions of employment buffeted by the market competition were then, as they continue to be, the major source of uncertainty about the future and of insecurity of social standing and self-esteem that haunted the citizens. It was primarily against that uncertainty that the *social* state undertook to protect its subjects – by making jobs more secure and the future more assured. For the already discussed reasons this is, however, no longer the case. The contemporary state cannot deliver on the social state's promise and its politicians are no longer keen to repeat the promise. Instead, their policies portend a yet more precarious and risk-ridden life, calling for a lot of brinkmanship while making long term planning, not to

mention 'whole life' projects, all but impossible; they lecture the electors to be 'more flexible' (that is, to brace themselves for yet more insecurity to come) and to seek individually their own solutions to the socially produced troubles.

A most urgent imperative and one which every government presiding over the dismantling and demise of the social state faces is therefore the task of finding or inventing a new 'legitimation formula' on which the self-assertion of state authority and the demand of discipline may rest instead. Becoming a 'collateral casualty' of economic progress, now administered by free-floating global economic forces, is not an eventuality which the state governments can credibly vouch to stave off. But beefing up the fears about personal safety threatened by similarly free-floating terrorist con-spirators and then promising more security guards, a denser net of X-ray machines and wider scope of close circuit television, more frequent checks and more pre-emptive strikes and precautionary arrests to protect that safety, look like a feasible and expedient alternative.

Unlike the all-too-tangible and daily experienced insecurity manu-factured by the markets that need no help from political powers except being left alone by them, the mentality of a 'besieged fortress', of individual bodies and private possessions under threat, must be actively cultivated. Threats must be painted in the most sinister of colours, so that *non-materialization of threats* rather than the advent of the foreboded apocalypse could be presented to the frightened public as an *extraordinary* event, and above all as the result of exceptional skills, vigilance, care and good will of state organs. And this is indeed done, and to a spectacular effect. Almost daily, and at least once a week, CIA and FBI warn the Americans of the imminent attempts on their safety, casting and holding them in a state of constant security alert and putting individual safety firmly into the focus of most varied and diffuse tensions – while the American president keeps reminding his electors that 'it would take one vial, one canister, one crate slipped into this country to bring a day of horror like none we have ever known'. That strategy is eagerly watched and sometimes emulated by numerous other governments overseeing the burial of the social state. A new popular demand for a strong state power capable of resuscitating the fading hopes of protection against redundancy, disposability and confine-ment to waste, is built on the foundation of *personal* vulnerability and *personal* safety, instead of *social* precariousness and *social* protection.

There is little wonder that many a government facing the same task looks toward the United States with sympathetic anticipation, finding in its policies a useful example to follow. Underneath the ostensible and openly aired differences of opinion on the ways to proceed there seem to be a genuine 'union of minds' between the governments, not at all reducible to the momentary coincidence of transient interests; an unwritten, tacit agreement of state-power holders on a common legitimation policy. That this may be the case is shown by the rapid rise to the peak of fame by the new hard-line French interior minister or the zeal with which the British

prime minister, watched with rising interest by other European prime ministers, embraces and imports all American novelties related to the production of a 'state of emergency' – like locking the 'aliens' (euphemistically called 'asylum seekers') in camps, giving the 'security considerations' unquestioned priority over human rights, writing off or suspending many a human right that has stayed in force since the time of *Magna Charta* and *Habeas Corpus*, the 'zero tolerance' policy towards the alleged 'budding criminals', and regularly repeated warnings that *some*where, *some*time, *some* terrorists will most surely strike. We are all potential candidates to the role of 'collateral casualties' of a war we did not declare and to which we did not give our consent. When measured against that threat, hammered home as much more immediate and dramatic, the orthodox fears of social redundancy are hoped to be dwarfed and possibly even put to sleep.

'Collateral damage' was a term specifically invented to denote human waste specific to the new planetary frontier-land conditions created by the impetuous and unrestrained globalization drive that thus far effectively resists all attempts at taming and regulation. Fears related to that variety of modern waste-production seem to overshadow the more traditional waste-related apprehensions and anxieties. Little wonder that they are most eagerly employed in the construction (and so also in the attempts of deconstruction) of new planet-wide power hierarchies.

PART III

Prospects for the new poor

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There are many ways of being human, but each society makes a choice of the way it prefers or tolerates. If we call a certain assembly of people a 'society', implying that these people 'belong together' and make a 'totality', it is because of this choice. (Though seldom a 'deliberate' choice in the sense of surveying a number of possibilities and then picking the most appealing among them; once made by default rather than by design, the choice cannot easily be abandoned.)[1] It is this choice, or the lasting sediments of it, that makes one assembly of people look different from another; the difference to which we refer when we speak of different societies. Whether a given assembly is or is not a 'society', where its boundaries run, and who does and does not belong to the society which that assembly constitutes, all depends on the force with which the choice is made and promoted, the strength of the grip in which it holds the individuals and the compliance with which it is obeyed. The choice boils down to two impositions (or, rather, one imposition with two effects): order and a norm.

The great novelist and philosopher of our times, Milan Kundera, described in *La Valse au Adieux* (Galimard, 1976)[2] 'the longing for order' evident in all known societies as:

> a desire to turn the human world into an inorganic one, where everything would function perfectly and work on schedule, subordinated to a suprapersonal system. The longing for order is at the same time a longing for death, because life is an incessant disruption of order. Or to put it the other way around: the desire for order is a virtuous pretext, an excuse for violent misanthropy.

As a matter of fact, the desire for order does not necessarily stem from misanthropy. Yet it cannot but prompt it, since it offers an excuse for

whatever actions could be dictated by such a sentiment. In the last account, any order is a desperate attempt to impose uniformity, regularity and predictability on the human world, and humans are inclined to be diversified, erratic and unpredictable. Since humans are, as Cornelius Castoriadis put it, 'one type of being that creates something else, that is a source of alterity, and that thereby itself alters itself',[3] there is but a meagre chance that the human world anywhere (except for the graveyards) will ever cease to be diversified, erratic and unpredictable. Being human means constant choice and reversibility of all choice, and arresting further choice, rendering the choice already made irreversible, takes some considerable effort. The longing for order is conceivable only thanks to that 'choosing quality' of being; any model of order is itself a choice, but it is a choice that wants to supersede all other choices and put an end to all further choosing. Such an end is not on the cards, though – misanthropy follows, whether intended and welcome or not. The true object of suspicion, revulsion and hatred, of the sentiments or attitudes which combine into misanthropy, is the stubborn, inveterate and incurable eccentricity of human beings, that inexhaustible source of disorder.

The other imposition is that of the norm. The norm is the projection of the model of order upon human conduct. The norm tells what it means to behave in an orderly fashion in a well-ordered society; it translates, so to speak, the concept of order into the language of human choices. If any order is a choice, so is the norm; but the choice of a certain kind of order limits the choice of tolerable behavioural patterns. It privileges certain kinds of conduct as normal, while casting all other kinds as abnormal. 'Abnormal' stands for any departure from the favoured pattern; it can extend into 'deviation', an extreme form of abnormality. Deviation will trigger therapeutic or penal intervention if the conduct in question does not just disagree with the preferred pattern, but transcends the boundary of tolerable choices. The distinction between mere abnormality and the much more sinister deviation is never clearly drawn and as a rule is hotly contested, as is the question of the limits to tolerance, being the attitude which defines the difference between them.

A conscious concern with order and norm – the very fact that such things are an issue and are discussed in a society – signals, as a rule, that not everything is as it should be and that things cannot be left in their present state. The very concepts of order and norm (concepts which, once they are coined, allow one to see the problem of order and norm, to classify elements of the world as relevant to the issue of order and norm) are born of that sense of imperfection of the current state of affairs and the urge to do something about it. Both concepts are therefore 'positive' and 'constructive': they prod and press towards lifting reality to certain standards not yet fully reached. Speaking of order and norm is in itself a powerful tool of their imposition.

But the 'should' which they imply cuts into the 'is', leaving out large chunks of human reality. Neither of the two ideas would make any sense

were they all-inclusive, able to accommodate all people and all the things people do. The whole point about order and norm is exactly the opposite: the emphatic declaration that not everything that exists at present can be included in a postulated, properly functioning assembly and not every choice can be accommodated. The concepts of order and norm are sharp knives pressed against society as it *is*; they signal first and foremost the intent of separation, amputation, excision, expurgation and exclusion. They promote the 'proper' by focusing attention on the 'improper'; they single out, circumscribe and stigmatize those parts of reality which are denied the right to exist, and are destined for isolation, exile or extinction.

Installing and promoting order means performing the job of exclusion directly, by enforcing a special regime upon those meant to be excluded, excluding them by subordinating them to that special regime. Norm, on the other hand (any norm, the norms of the work ethic being just a specimen from a large class) acts indirectly, making the exclusion look more like self-marginalization.

In the first case, those who end up excluded and banished are people who 'breach the order'. In the second, it is those who are 'not up to the norm'. In both cases, though, the excluded themselves are charged with the guilt of their exclusion; the perspectives of order and norm alike apportion the blame in advance, decide the issue of $\pi\alpha\sigma\chi\epsilon\iota\eta$ (suffering) versus $\pi o\iota\epsilon\iota\eta$ (doing) *a priori* against the excluded. It is the actions of the excluded marked for exclusion – *wrong* actions – that bring the plight of exclusion upon them. In the process of exclusion, the excluded themselves are the agency, the active side. Being excluded is thus represented as an outcome of social suicide, not social execution. It is the fault of the excluded that they did nothing, or not enough, to escape exclusion; perhaps they even invited their fate, making the exclusion into a foregone conclusion. Excluding them is not just an exercise in house-cleaning, but an ethical act, the apportioning of right deserts, an act of justice; those who decide and execute the exclusion can feel righteous, as becomes the defenders of law and order and the guardians of the values and standards of decency.

What these perspectives leave out of sight and prevent from being considered is the possibility that, far from bearing responsibility for their own sorry fate, the excluded might be at the receiving end of forces they have been given no chance of resisting, let alone controlling. It is possible that some among the excluded have 'breached the order' because of what they are or have been made. They are excluded because of traits they possess but did not choose to have, not because of what they have done but because 'people like them' do not fit into someone else's sense of order. Others among the excluded may not be 'up to the norm' not because of a lack of will, but due to the lack of resources without which living up to the norm is simply not possible – resources other people have, but they do not; resources which are in short supply and therefore cannot be had by all in sufficient measure.

Therefore it has been demonstrated that the excluded or about to be excluded are unfit to be free agents. Allowing them to be so will be their undoing. Horrid things will follow if they are let loose. They bring all sorts of disasters upon themselves. But since being excluded is not a state one is likely to enjoy, the consequences of their assumed freedom are as awful for the excluded themselves as they are for those who are orderly and within the norm. Depriving the excluded of their freedom to act (which they are bound to misuse or waste), is a move undoubtedly required for the protection of law and order, and can also be argued to be in the best interests of the excluded. Policing, controlling and supervising the conduct of the excluded is perceived as an act of charity, an ethical duty. These two aspects intertwine and merge into the urge to 'do something' about the substandard part of the population, an impulse which draws its strength from the concern with the installation and preservation of order yet invokes the support of the moral sentiments of pity and compassion. Whatever its animating force, however, that impulse rebounds as a rule in the efforts to 'heteronomize', to disempower, those who do not know how to use their powers properly; to subordinate them, by hook or by crook, to the 'supra-personal system' which they evade or defy.

Since time immemorial, the two aspects of the defence of order and of compassion have combined and blended in the social construction of the figure of the poor. The poor are such people as are not fed, shod and clad as the standards of their time and place define as right and proper; but they are above all people who do not live 'up to the norm', that norm being the ability to meet such standards.

The poor without role

Every society known so far had its poor. And no wonder, since, let me repeat, the imposition of any model of order is a divisive act and disqualifies certain parts of social reality as unfitting or dysfunctional, while the promotion of any particular mode of being to the status of norm demotes a variety of alternative ways to the category of below par and abnormal. The poor are the very epitome and the prototype of the 'unfitting' and 'abnormal'.

Each known society took towards its poor a characteristically ambivalent attitude, an uneasy mixture of fear and revulsion on the one hand and pity and compassion on the other. Both ingredients were equally indispensable. The first allowed for harsh treatment of the poor of the kind which the defence of order required; the second underlined the pitiful lot of those who fell below the standards, a lot that made all the hardships of norm-following by the norm-abiding part of the population pale into insignificance. In such an oblique, roundabout way, the poor could be found, after all and despite everything, a useful role to play in the reproduction of social order and the effort to protect obedience to the norm.

Depending on its specific model of order and norm, however, each society constructed its poor in its own image, offering different explanations of their presence, finding a different use for the poor and deploying different strategies of tackling the problem of poverty.

Pre-modern Europe came closer than its modern successor to finding an important function for its poor. The poor, like everybody else and everything else in pre-modern Christian Europe, were Children of God – an indispensable link in the 'divine chain of beings'; a part of God's creation and, like the rest of the world before its modern desacralization or 'disenchantment', saturated with meaning and purpose. The poor suffered, and their suffering was the repentance for original sin and a warrant of redemption. It was, though, up to the more fortunate to bring succour and relief to the sufferers and so to practise charity and gain in the process their own share of salvation. The presence of the poor was therefore God's gift to everybody else: an occasion to practise self-sacrifice, to live a virtuous life, to repent sins and to earn heavenly bliss. One can almost say that a society which sought the meaning of earthly life in life after death would need to invent another vehicle of personal salvation, were the poor not already at hand.

This was most certainly the case in the 'disenchanted' world, in which nothing that *was* had the *right to be* just because of the accident of being there, and in which everything that *was* had to show a legitimate and reasonable proof of its right to be. Most importantly, in contrast to pre-modern Europe, the brave new world of modernity was one that set its own rules and took nothing for granted, subjecting everything extant to the incisive scrutiny of reason, recognizing no limits to its own authority, and above all rejecting the 'power of the dead over the living', the authority of tradition, inherited lore or custom. The projects of order and the norm replaced the vision of a divine chain of beings. Unlike the vision replaced, order and norm were human products, designs yet to be implemented by human action – things yet to be made or built, not things found and placidly complied with. If inherited reality did not match the projected order, all the worse for reality.

And so the presence of the poor became a problem (a 'problem' is something which causes discomfort and prompts the urge to resolve it, to remedy or remove it). The poor were a threat and an obstacle to order; they also defied the norm.

The poor were double jeopardy: since their proverty was no more the verdict of providence, there was no reason why they should humbly and gratefully accept their lot, but every reason for them to complain and to rebel against the more fortunate, now blamed for their deprivation. On the other hand, the old Christian ethics of charity appeared now an intolerable burden, a drain on the nation's wealth. The duty to share one's good fortune with those who failed to curry fortune's favours was once a sensible investment in life after death, but it 'did not stand to reason', certainly not to the reasons of business of life here and now, on earth.

Soon a third threat was added to the other two: the poor who meekly accepted their plight as divine verdict and made no effort to extricate themselves from their misery proved immune to the blandishments of factory work and refused to sell their labour once the meagre needs they grew to habitualize and perceive as 'natural' had been satisfied. The early decades of industrial society were plagued by a constant shortage of labour. The poor, satisfied with their lot, or resigned to it, were thus the nightmare of industrial entrepreneurs: they were immune and irresponsive to the inducements of regular wages and saw no reason why they should go on suffering the long hours of drudgery once they had enough bread to see them through the day. A vicious circle indeed: the poor objecting to their misery spelled rebellion or revolution; the poor reconciled to their miserable lot curbed and hampered the progress of industrial enterprise.[4] Forcing the poor into perpetual factory labour seemed a miraculous way to square the circle.

And so the poor of the industrial era were redefined as the reserve army of labour. Employment, steady employment, employment leaving no room for mischief, had become a norm while poverty had been identified with unemployment – a breach of the norm, an abnormal state. Under the circumstances, the obvious prescription for curing poverty and nipping in the bud the twin threats to prosperity was to induce the poor, or force them if need be, to accept the lot of factory labour. The most obvious means to achieve this was, of course, depriving the poor of any other source of livelihood: accept the conditions on offer, however repulsive they might be and however deeply you might resent them, or forfeit all right to a helping hand. Strictly speaking, in such a 'no alternative' situation, the preaching of ethical duty would be superfluous; it was not on the moral impulses of the poor that the intention to bring them all onto the factory floor needed to rely. And yet the work ethic was viewed almost universally as a useful, perhaps indispensable medicine for the triple ailment of poverty, insufficient supply of labour and the threat of revolution. It was meant and hoped to be a sort of icing hiding from view the unappetising quality of the cake on offer. Promoting drudgery to the noble rank of moral duty would perhaps sweeten the tempers of those exposed to it while at the same time catering to the moral consciences of those who exposed them. Opting for the work ethic was made, of course, that much easier – indeed, obvious and natural – by the fact that the middle classes of the time were already converted to it and viewed their own life in its light.

Enlightened opinion of the time was divided, but on the point of the work ethic there was full agreement between those who saw the poor as a wild and obstinate beast to be tamed, and those who were guided in their thinking by ethics, conscience or compassion. And so on the one hand John Locke devised a comprehensive programme to weed out the 'debauchery' and 'sloth' to which the poor were naturally predisposed, by confining the children of the poor in pauper schools which would drill them into regular work, and their parents in workhouses where severe

discipline, bare sustenance, forced labour and corporal punishment were the rule. On the other hand Josiah Child, who bewailed the 'sad, wretched, diseased, impotent, and useless' fate of the poor, similarly considered the task of 'setting the poor to work' as 'man's duty to God and Nature'.

In a roundabout way, the conception of work as 'man's duty to God' put an ethical stamp on keeping the poor in the state of poverty. Widely shared was the opinion that since the poor tended to settle for little and would not strain themselves for the sake of more, wages must be kept to a bare minimum of subsistence, so that even when employed the poor would still need to live from hand to mouth and keep perpetually busy in order to stay alive. In the words of Arthur Young, 'every one but an idiot knows, that the lower classes must be kept poor, or they will never be industrious'. The learned economists of the time hastened to calculate that when wages are low, 'the poor labour more, and really live better' than if they receive high wages, when they indulge in idleness and riot.

Jeremy Bentham, the great reformer who encapsulated modern wisdom better than any other thinker of his time (his project was praised almost unanimously by contemporary learned opinion as 'eminently rational and enlightened'), went a step further and concluded that financial inducements of any kind are not reliable means to get the desired effects; bare coercion would be much more effective than any appeal to the obviously fickle or absent intelligence of the poor. He proposed to build 500 houses, each to keep 2000 of the 'burdensome poor' under the constant surveillance and absolute, undivided authority of a governor. 'The refuse, the dross of mankind', adults and children without visible means of support, beggars, unwed mothers, unruly apprentices and the like should be, according to the scheme, apprehended and forced into such privately owned and run houses of compulsory labour, where 'the dross of this kind will be converted into sterling'. To his few liberally minded critics Bentham replied angrily: 'Objection – liberty infringed. Answer – liberty of doing mischief.' He believed that the poor, just by staying poor, had given all the proof needed that they were no more capable of liberty than unruly children. They could not govern themselves; they had to be governed.

Much water has flowed under all sorts of bridges since people like Locke, Young or Bentham, with all the daring ardour of the explorers of new and unfamiliar lands, proclaimed what was to entrench itself gradually as the universally accepted modern philosophy of the poor. Few people today would risk stating the principles of that philosophy with a similarly arrogant candour, and if they did, their assertions would certainly cause an outcry. And yet much of that philosophy informs once more much of the public policy regarding the people incapable, for one reason or another, of making ends meet and earning their living without 'unearned' assistance. One hears today a powerful echo of that philosophy in every successive campaign against 'spongers', 'cheaters' or 'dole dopes', and in every oft-repeated warning that people asking for better wages risk 'pricing themselves out of a job'. The impact of that philosophy is most strongly felt

in the stubborn insistence, in spite of the massive evidence to the contrary, that breaking the norm of universal work-for-living is now, as before, the prime cause of poverty and that the cure for poverty must be sought in leading the unemployed back to the labour market. In the folklore of public policy, only as a commodity may labour claim the right of access to equally commodified means of survival.

And so the appearance is created that the poor of today have retained the function assigned to them in the early years of the new, modern and industrial, era – that of the reserve army of labour. The assignment of this function casts doubt and suspicion on the probity of those 'not in active service', and points clearly to the way to 'bring them back into line' and so restore the order of things which the avoidance of active service has broken. The snag, however, is that the philosophy which once tried to grasp and articulate the emerging realities of industrial age has by now outlived its purpose and lost touch with the new reality emerging at the other end of that age. Once an agent of the order-making effort, that philosophy turned slowly yet relentlessly into a smokescreen, obscuring whatever is new and unprecedented in the present plight of the poor. The work ethic, which casts the poor in the role of the reserve army of labour began its life as a revelation; it leads its posthumous life as a cover-up.

Grooming the poor of today into the labourers of tomorrow used to make sense economically and politically. It lubricated the wheels of the industry-based economy and served well the task of 'social integration' – that is, of order-maintenance and normative regulation. Neither of the two senses holds any more in our 'late modern' or 'post-modern', yet above all consumer, society. The present day economy does not need a massive labour force, having learned how to increase not just profits, but the volume of products while cutting down on labour and its costs. At the same time, obedience to the norm and 'social discipline' in general are by and large secured through the allurements and seductions of the commodity market, rather than through the state-managed coercion and the drill administered by the network of panoptical institutions. Economically and politically, the late modern or post-modern society of consumers can thrive without dragging the bulk of its members through the millstones of industrial labour. For all practical intents and purposes, the poor have ceased to be the reserve army of labour, and invocations of the work ethic sound increasingly nebulous and out of touch with the realities of the day.

Contemporary society engages its members primarily as consumers; only secondarily, and partly, does it engage them as producers. To meet the social norm, to be a fully-fledged member of society, one needs to respond promptly and efficiently to the temptations of the consumer market; one needs to contribute to the 'supply-clearing demand' and in case of economic trouble be part of the 'consumer-led recovery'. All this the poor, lacking decent income, credit cards and the prospect of a better time, are not fit to do. Accordingly, the norm which is broken by the poor of today, the norm the breaking of which makes them 'abnormal', is the norm of

consumer competence or aptitude, not that of employment. First and foremost, the poor of today are 'non-consumers', not 'unemployed'; they are defined in the first place through being flawed consumers, since the most crucial of the social duties which they do not fulfil is that of being active and effective buyers of the goods and services the market offers. In the book-balancing of a consumer society, the poor are unequivocally a liability, and by no stretch of imagination can they be recorded on the side of present or future assets.

And so for the first time in recorded history the poor are now purely and simply a worry and a nuisance. They have no merits which could relieve, let alone counterbalance, their vices. They have nothing to offer in exchange for the taxpayer's outlays. They are a bad investment, unlikely ever to be repaid, let alone bring profit: a black hole sucking in whatever comes near and spitting back nothing, except, perhaps, trouble. Decent and normal members of society – the consumers – want nothing from them and expect nothing. The poor are totally useless. No one – no one who truly counts, speaks up and is heard – needs them. For them, zero toler-ance. Society would be much better off if the poor just burnt their tents and left. The world would be that much more pleasant without them. The poor are not needed, and so they are unwanted. And because they are unwanted, they can be, without much regret or compunction, forsaken.

No role, no moral duty

In a world populated by consumers there is no room for a welfare state; that venerable legacy of industrial society looks suddenly much like a 'nanny state', pampering the slothful, coddling the wicked, abetting the corrupt.

Some say that the welfare state was a hard-won achievement of the poor and lowly; if it was indeed the struggle of the poor and disprivileged that forced the hands of Bismarck, Lloyd George or Beveridge, that struggle could achieve its effect only because the poor had a lot of 'bargaining power' – they had an important function to perform, they had something vital and indispensable to offer to the society of producers. Apart from anything else, the welfare state was the means of recommodifying labour, making it sellable and purchasable in the first place and then again when temporarily slack demand for labour picked up once more. The state took that task on its shoulders, since the capitalists were unwilling or unable to carry the costs of that recommodification on theirs – singly, severally or jointly. Considering the double (economic and political) task that industrial employment performed, the welfare state, in meaning to make the idle work again, was under the circumstances a sound, profitable investment. But no longer. Making everybody a producer is neither feasible nor seems to be imperative. What used to be a sensible investment now looks more and more like a wrong-headed idea, an unjustifiable waste of taxpayers' money.

Not surprisingly, the welfare state is in retreat virtually everywhere. The few countries where its provisions are yet intact or its dismantling is slow or half-hearted are alternately reproached or ridiculed for their imprudence and obsoleteness by the chorus of current economic authorities, and warned by the economic sages and world banking institutions, as, for example, Norway repeatedly is, against the impending 'overheating of their economy' and other freshly invented horrors. The post-communist countries of East and Central Europe are told in no uncertain terms that the taking apart of inherited social protections is the condition *sine qua non* of any foreign assistance and, indeed, of acceptance into the 'family of free nations'. The sole choice brandished in front of governments by current economic wisdom is the quasi-choice between fast rising unemployment, as in Europe, and an even faster fall in the income of the lower classes, as in the USA.

The United States are taking the lead in this new welfare-free world. In the last 20 years, the total income of the 20 per cent poorest American families fell by 21 per cent, while the total income of the 20 per cent richest rose by 22 per cent.[5] Redistribution of income from the poorest to the richest goes on with unstoppably accelerating speed. Recent draconian cuts in welfare entitlements supported eagerly by three quarters of the elected members of Congress ('the end to welfare state as we know it', in the words of Bill Clinton) are bound to increase the number of American children growing up in poverty, between now and the year 2006, by two to five million, as well as multiply the numbers of the aged, sick and disabled deprived of any social assistance. In Loïc Wacquant's assessment, the purpose of American social policy is no longer to push back poverty, but to deflate the numbers of the poor (officially so recognized and thus eligible for help): 'The nuance is significant; just like once upon a time a good Indian was a dead Indian, so today the "good poor" is an invisible poor, who cares for himself and does not ask for anything. Briefly, someone who behaves as if he did not exist.'[6]

It may be supposed that if they tried to defend whatever has remained of the protective shield forged by welfare legislation, the poor would soon find out that they have no bargaining power to make themselves audible, still less to impress their adversaries. Least of all would they find power to shake the 'ordinary citizens' out of their serene equanimity, exhorted as they are by the chorus of politicians to vote with neither mind nor heart but their wallets.

There is little chance of this supposition ever being put to the test, however. The poor do not seem to mind their plight, and if they do, there is little practical evidence of their anger or of determination to act on that anger. They suffer no doubt just like the poor of all ages suffered, but unlike their fathers and grandfathers they either fail or do not try to reforge their suffering into a matter of public concern. As Xavier Emmanuelli[7] explained recently this astounding placidity of the poor:

Obviously, the 'classic' poverty, inherited from the past, transmitted from one generation to another, persisted in spite of the powerful economic growth in the industrialised country . . . But to that a new phenomenon is added, peculiar to our time of rapid change and unprecedented in its volume.

This is the accumulation, the linking of the reverses of fortune, which hurl individuals or whole families into destitution and often into the street: loss of employment, loss of income, bereavement, divorce, separation, loss of lodgings. From that chain exclusion results – isolation from the network of social interactions and exchanges, absence of reference points, inability to project one's lot into the future.

In the era of massive 'deregulation' and of the governments retreating or evicted from their normative function, order building goes on (and at an accelerated pace), but the overall visions of order and norm promoted by the political powers presiding over the society as a whole are missing. Each unit of society, large or small, struggles or at least is prompted to struggle to arrange its own small sector or aspect of the complex network of social interdependency into the shape it prefers – and the 'human waste' that results from such dispersed endeavours of 'reengineering' or 'self-reinvention' is expelled into a social void in which it is no one's responsibility and ward. In that new 'no–man's land' the excluded/redundant are cast outside the reach of law and any of the numerous criss-crossing realms of ethical duty. On their own, they are helpless on the top of being hapless. As Pierre Bourdieu pointed out, in order to come to grips with the challenged of the future one needs first to have a grip on the present – but such a grip the new poor demonstrably lack:[8]

Casualization profoundly affects the person who suffers it: by making the whole future uncertain, it prevents all rational anticipation and, in particular, the basic belief and hope in the future that one needs in order ro rebel, especially collectively, against present conditions, even the most intolerable.

This is why people called these days 'the excluded' do not come forward with demands or projects, do not come to value their rights, do not exercise their responsibilities as humans and as citizens. As they ceased to exist in the eyes of others, so they gradually cease to exist in their own eyes.

These days the sufferings of the poor do not add up to a common cause. Each flawed consumer licks his or her wounds in solitude, at best in the company of their as yet unbroken family and mostly similarly resourceless friends. Flawed consumers are lonely and feel abandoned, and when they are left lonely for a long time they tend to become loners; they do not see how society can help, they do not hope to be helped, they do not believe that their lot can be changed by anything but football pools or a lottery win.

Unneeded, unwanted, forsaken – where is their place? The briefest of answers is: out of sight. First, they need to be removed from the streets and other public places used by us, the insiders of the brave new consumer world. Better still, if they happen to be fresh arrivals and have their papers in less than perfect order, they can be deported, and so evicted altogether from the realm of all obligation. If an excuse for deportation cannot be found, they may still be incarcerated in faraway prisons or prison camps, best of all in the Arizona desert, on ships anchored far from sailing routes, or in high-tech, fully automated jails where they see no one and no one, even the prison guards, is likely to meet them face to face very often.

To make the physical isolation foolproof, one can reinforce it with mental separation, resulting in the poor's banishment from the universe of moral empathy. While banishing the poor from the streets, one can also banish them from the community of humans, from the world of ethical duty. This is done by rewriting the story from the language of deprivation to that of depravity. The poor supply the 'usual suspects' rounded up to the accompaniment of public hue and cry whenever a fault in the habitual order is detected. The poor are portrayed as lax, sinful and devoid of moral standards. The media cheerfully cooperate with the police in presenting to the sensation-greedy public lurid pictures of the crime-, drug- and sexual promiscuity-infested 'criminal elements' who find their shelter in the darkness of mean streets. And so the point is made that the question of poverty is, first and foremost, perhaps solely, the question of law and order, and one should respond to it in the way one responds to other kinds of lawbreaking.

Exempt from human community, exempt from public mind. We know what may follow when this happens. The temptation is strong to get rid altogether of a phenomenon reduced to sheer nuisance and unredeemed, not even mitigated, by any ethical consideration that is due to the suffering Other; to wipe out a blot on the landscape, to efface a dirty spot on the otherwise pure canvas of an orderly world and normal society. Alain Finkielkraut reminds us in his recent book, of what might happen when the ethical considerations are effectively silenced, empathy extinguished and moral barriers taken away:

> Nazi violence was committed not for the liking of it, but out of duty, not out of sadism but out of virtue, not through pleasure but through a method, not by unleashing of savage impulses and abandonment of scruples, but in the name of superior values, with professional competence and with the task to be performed constantly in view.[9]

And that violence was committed, let me add, amidst a deafening silence from people who thought themselves to be decent and ethical creatures yet saw no reason why the victims of violence, who long ago ceased to be counted among the members of the human family, should be targets of their moral compassion. To paraphrase Gregory Bateson, once the loss of moral community is combined with the advanced technology of

tackling whatever is seen as a vexing problem, 'your chance of survival will be that of a snowball in hell'.[10] Rational solutions to vexing troubles, when coupled with moral indifference, make indeed an explosive mixture. Many human beings may perish in the explosion, yet the most prominent among the victims is the humanity of those who escaped the perdition.

We are not quite there – not yet. But the writing is on the wall. Let us not dismiss it as one more prophecy of doom, normally forgotten long before tested, lest we need to follow once more the present fashion of retrospective, and belated, apology for not noticing it when it was still what it is today: merely writing on the wall. Luckily for mankind, history is strewn with portentous prophecies which failed to become flesh. But many, and the most heinous, crimes occurred in that history due to a lack of warning or thanks to the complacent incredulity with which any warnings were treated when heard. Now, as always in the past, the choice is ours.

Ethic of work or ethic of life?

And there is a choice; though one may expect that with realities notorious for their tendency to hide their human origins and assume the air of self-evident necessities, many people will dismiss any alternative to the present day drift as 'unrealistic' and even 'against the nature of things', whatever they may mean by that. Imagining the possibility of another way of living together is not a strong point of our world of privatized utopias known for its inclination to count losses when already made and for substitution of crisis management for political vision. Even less is this world of ours capable of gathering the will and resolve needed to make any alternative to 'more of the same' realistic. The dismissive label 'unrealistic', used and abused so widely in current political skirmishes, denotes primarily the *absence* of will and resolve.

As Cornelius Catoriadis pointed out recently, the crisis of the Western world 'consists precisely in the fact that it *stopped putting itself in question*'.[11] But 'putting itself in question' was the innermost secret of that Western world's astonishing, unprecedented quest for self-improvement and equally amazing success in the pursuit of that ever more ambitiously set objective. 'Putting itself in question' was possible – indeed inevitable – since the discovery that the foundations of all our arrangements are arbitrary and bound to stay as such. Being arbitrary, they may as well be replaced with other arrangements, if only the case for such a replacement could be convincingly made. This condition does not seem to be met any more, though. We tend to forget that 'to treat a person as a thing or as a purely mechanical system is not less but *more* imaginary than claiming to see him as an owl'. And once this is forgotten, we stop asking the sort of questions which used to make modern society the most restless and innovative of all. For example: 'everything is actually subordinated to effectiveness –

but effective for whom, in view of what, and in order to do what? Economic growth is realized; but this is the growth of what, for whom, at what costs, and to arrive at what?'

With such questions not asked, there are no obstacles to the elevating of our own imaginary, incessant, on-going, tolerating, no limits rationalization (which rebounds in the replacement of a human person 'by an ensemble of partial features selected arbitrarily in terms of the arbitrary system of ends') to the rank of objective necessity and to make all doubts the exclusive domain of 'unserious people like poets and novelists'.[12]

A cogent and powerful case for a radical solution to the present crisis was presented recently by Claus Offe.[13] The hub of that solution is 'the idea that *individual income entitlement can be decoupled from actual income-earning capacity*'. It can, though admittedly on condition of no lesser a feat than a change of perspective from one centred on wage labour, as dictated by the work ethic, to the assumption of basic entitlement and basic guarantee, dictated by the status and dignity of being human. Decoupling is given concrete form by the principle of financing social security through taxation, through doing away with means-testing and assessment of willingness to work, by the gradual replacement of the principle of equivalence by that of need, and finally through the principle of the individual as the basis for entitlement. By transforming the social security system according to these principles, it is possible to carry over welfare state values of freedom, equality and social justice into the phase of development which capitalist welfare states have now entered, a phase in which the goal of full employment has receded beyond the horizon of what is realistic and desirable.

Offe's proposals do sound nebulous, as could only be expected in the light of what had been said before about our growing inability to put our world in question. They could not sound otherwise at a time when every single political force that counts on the electoral market seems to run in an exactly opposite direction, and views the symptoms of disease as signs of recovery and the causes of disease as remedies. There seems to be no significant and organized political force on either the left or the right of the political spectrum which would not be inclined to dismiss Offe's and similar ideas on account of political expedience and electoral gains, though if pressed in public, 'responsible politicians' would probably dismiss the project of basic guarantee on the ground of its actuarial unaffordability or political and economic 'irrealism', glossing over the dubious realism of the presently fashionable crisis-management expedients.

And yet, as Offe rightly points out, his proposals are in the last account conservative. They suggest not a revolution, but the preservation of ethical values and social arrangements constitutive of Western civilization under conditions in which the inherited institutions no longer guarantee their implementation. And because the proposals have such conservative purpose, the burden of proof falls to [their] opponents. Either they wish to put an end to the post-war social–ethical consensus, or they must show that

their demands can be met in the long term by means *other* than that of a basic income – something which seems highly doubtful.

It seems that Offe undervalues the opponents' resistance capacity by playing down the quite real possibility, supplied by the consumer society, of their choosing, against all imaginable odds, to 'put an end to ethical and social consensus'. Offe presents as a rhetorical question what is in fact quite a genuine practical dilemma. But whatever the chances are of the right choice being made, the choice is nevertheless as Offe describes it. The social and ethical consequences of barring its serious consideration by denying its presence are, purely and simply, incalculable.

However radical Offe's postulate may be, it still needs to be supplemented by another: that of the decoupling of work from the labour market. Melissa Benn recently observed that 'when male politicians talk about work, they almost inevitably mean paid work'.[14] This is not exactly true, since 'paid work' is on the mind of male and female politicians alike when they speak of work. Politics remains by and large male business, even if women are the players. What is true is that the identification of work with paid work has been historically the achievement of men who, as Max Weber indicated long ago, set their business away from the household, in which they left their women to perform all other necessary life activities, now no longer seen as work and so 'economically invisible'.

It is in this form that the idea of work entered politics, where it became the object of struggle on the similarly male-only playground – the battlefield of trade union rights and labour legislation. In this way, 'work' came to be confined to the kind of activity which can be entered into business books; that is, the kind of work which can be sold and bought, has an exchange value recognized in the market and so can command monetary remuneration. Outside the realm of work was thereby left virtually everything which was cast as the exclusive domain of women – but not only that. Whenever one spoke of work, one did not have in mind household chores or the bringing up of children, both blatantly female provinces; but also, more generally, one did not mean the myriads of social skills deployed, and the endless hours spent, in the day-to-day running of what A.H. Halsey and Michael Young call the 'moral economy'. The work ethic chimed in with concentrated and unchallenged discrimination: staying outside the labour market, doing unsold or unsellable labour, meant in the language of the work ethic being unemployed, and that meant non-work. Ironically, it is only the high-level politicians who are allowed to declare publicly their satisfaction when, having lost their jobs, they prepare to 'spend more time with their families'.

The consequences of all this are in many respects disastrous. They contribute heavily to the gradual yet relentless falling apart of community and neighbourhood bonds, of that 'social cohesion' whose maintenance is after all a tremendously time-, labour- and skill-consuming activity. They leave profound and by and large adverse traces on the structure and viability of families. They seriously erode the soil in which the whole network

of human relationships and the moral bonds between people are rooted. All in all, they have done and go on doing a lot of damage to the quality of life (hardly ever distinguished from the 'standard of living', an altogether different matter), damage which no market offerings, no growth in consumer capacity and no amount of counsellor advice can compensate or repair.

The emancipation of work from market-centred calculations and the constraints they impose would require the replacement of the work ethic, shaped in the service of the labour market, with an ethics of workmanship. As Thorstein Veblen pointed out a long time ago, 'instinct of workmanship' (unlike the work ethic, a modern invention) is the natural predisposition of the human species. Humans are creative beings, and it is demeaning to suppose that a price tag is what sets apart work from non-work, exertion from loafing; it mutilates human nature to suggest that without that price tag humans would prefer to remain idle and let their skills and imagination rot and rust. The ethics of workmanship would restore to that human instinct the dignity and socially recognized significance which the work ethic, as formed and entrenched in modern capitalist society, denied.

Not for the first time in history we have found ourselves on the crossroads. Crossroads call for decisions about which way to go, but the first, crucial, and not at all obvious decision to be taken is to recognize the crossroads as a crossroads – to accept that more than one way leads from here into the future, and that sometimes pursuing the future – any future – may require sharp turns.

It is tempting to dismiss the idea of decoupling income entitlement from income-earning capacity, and work from the labour market, as another utopia in history, often described contemptuously as the 'graveyard of utopias'. Our age is the time of 'individual utopias', of utopias privatized, and so it comes naturally (as well as being a fashionable thing to do) to deride and ridicule such projects which imply a revision of the options which are collectively put at the disposal of individuals.

And so the ideas given shape by Offe may well be thought undeserving of a second thought by any serious and realistic scholar. And with good reason. As Roger-Pol Droit has recently expressed it, 'reality is full like an egg. To the point of making it virtually impossible to escape its constraints. We believe them to be eternal – until they are effaced by history.'[15] And he goes on pointing out that in Pericles' Greece or Caesar's Rome it would be a tall order to think of a world without slave labour, much like it would be all but impossible to think of a world without monarchy in the times of Bossuet. How can we be sure, therefore, that an economy which is not a slave of markets is an incongruity and that rising inequality cannot be stopped? Droit concludes: 'Instead of arresting the progress of utopia, our times prepare perhaps the ground for its return. The more we repeat that politics has no room for dreams, the more the desire of a radically different world worms in.' Paul Ricoeur would certainly agree: it was he who suggested 10 years ago that in our era blocked by seemingly invisible

systems it is the utopia which becomes our major resource as the weapon against the closure.[16] And quite recently, having completed his survey of Latin American history, Fernando Ainsa suggested that rather than speaking of *u*-topia, a place which is nowhere, it would be more proper to speak of *pan*-topia: the space of everywhere.[17]

The idea of decoupling income entitlement from income-earning capacity is in fact anything but conservative. On the contrary, what follows from our reasoning is that it would take a very sharp turn indeed to implement it. It would involve resignation from quite a few sacrosant (all the more sacrosant for being unreflexive) assumptions about our present mode of life. That, for instance, efficiency is a good thing regardless of what it might serve and what might be its side effects in terms of human suffering. Or that whatever passes for 'economic growth', i.e. what can be presented statistically as 'more today than yesterday, more tomorrow than today', is good by itself, once more regardless of the damage done on the way to the human condition and to nature – that condition shared by all humanity.

To those who would respond that the sharpness of the turn required is in itself a clinching argument against taking it, one can only reply by quoting once more Cornelius Castoriadis. When asked by one of his interviewers, 'What do you want then? To change humanity?', Castoriadis replied: 'No, something much more modest: I want that humanity changes, as it has already two or three times'.[18]

There is some hope at least that humanity might achieve the same feat once more. After all, as Patrick Curry splendidly put it, 'collective voluntary simplicity is becoming the only positive alternative to collective immiseration'.[19]

Notes

Chapter 1

1 J.S. Mill *Principles of Political Economy*, vol. II, 4th edn. London: John W. Parker & Son, p.337.
2 Quoted in S. Pollard (1963) Factory discipline in the industrial revolution, *The Economic History Review*, second series, 16: 254–71.
3 W. Bowden (1925) *Industrial Society in England towards the End of the Eighteenth Century*. London: Macmillan, pp.274–5.
4 J.L. Hammonds and B. Hammonds (1966) *The Town Labourer 1760–1832* (first published in 1917). London: Longman, p.307.
5 W. Lepenies (1986) Historisierung der Natur and Entmoralisierung der Wissenschaften seit dem 18. Jahrhundert, in A. Peisl and A. Mohler (eds) *Natur und Geschichte*, vol. 7. Munich: Schriften der Carl Friedrich von Siemens Stiftung, pp.263–88.
6 B. Inglis (1971) *Poverty and the Industrial Revolution*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, p.75.
7 Revolt of the workers, *Blackwood's Magazine*, vol. 52 (1842): 646–7.
8 The claim of labour, *Edinburgh Review*, vol. 81 (1845): 304–5.
9 P. Gaskell ([1836] 1968) *Artisans and Machinery*. London: Frank Cass p.78.
10 See M. Rose (1985) *Re-working the Work Ethic: Economic Values and Socio-Cultural Politics*. London: B.T. Batsford, p.30.
11 B. Inglis, *op cit.*, p.408.
12 G. Himmelfarb (1984) *The Ideas of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age*. London: Faber & Faber, p.193.
13 See his *Panopticon*, or the *Inspection House*, containing the idea of a new principle of construction available to any sort of establishment, in which persons of any description are to be kept under inspection, in B. Bentham (1843) *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, vol. 4. Edinburgh: William Tait, pp.40–126.
14 J.S. Mill ([1836] 1967) On the definition of political economy; and on the method of investigation proper to it, *Collected Works*, vol. IV. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, p.321.

15 K. McClelland (1987) Time to work, time to live: some aspects of work and the re-formation of class in Britain, 1850–1880, in P. Joyce (ed.) *The Historical Meanings of Work*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.184.
16 R. Sue (1994) *Temps et Ordre Social*. Paris: PUF. Sue calculates that since 1850 the average time spent in work systemically fell; by the time of writing it had reached a mere 14 per cent of waking life.
17 M. Rose, *op cit.*, p.79.

Chapter 2

1 M. Wolf (1997) Mais pourquoi cette haine des marchés?, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June, p.15.
2 M. Weber (1976) *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. T. Parsons. London: George Allen & Unwin, p.181.
3 M.C. Taylor and E. Saarinen (n.d.) *Imagologies: Media Philosophy*. London: Routledge, Telerotics, p.11.
4 R. Petrella (1997) Une machine infernale, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June, p.17.
5 For the distinction between cognitive, aesthetic and moral spacings, see Z. Bauman (1993) *Postmodern Ethics*. Oxford: Blackwell.
6 Xavier Emmanuelli (*Le Monde*, 15 April 1997, p.11) ridiculed another, closely related optical illusion caused by the tendency to project the elitist interpretation onto the lifestyles of those further down the social hierarchy. A life of travelling, mobility and freedom from home constraints being a highly esteemed value among the affluent tourists; youngsters break with their families and flock to big cities in search of 'something different'. They tend to be eulogized (or rather romanticized) for their courage and self-confidence, which are deemed to prepare them for life in a society which praises and rewards individual initiative (recall Norman Tebbit's 'on your bike'). 'Nothing is as false', says Emmanuelli, as the idea that the wanderings of the children of the poor 'are the travels of initiation', which enable the youngsters 'to find themselves'. Nothing has less in common with the 'stage of initiation' than this aimless and prospectless errancy. 'Nothing is more destructive'.
7 P. Kelvin and J.E. Jarrett (1985) *Unemployment: Its Social Psychological Effects*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.67–9.
8 *Ibid.*, pp.67–9.
9 S. Hutchens (1994) *Living a Predicament: Young People Surviving Unemployment*. Aldershot: Avebury, pp.58, 122.
10 J. Seabrook (1988) *The Race for Riches: The Human Cost of Wealth*. Basingstoke: Marshall Pickering, pp.163, 164, 168–9.
11 Quoted after the report by G. Lean and B. Gunnell, UK poverty is worst in the West, *Independent on Sunday*, 15 June 1997.

Chapter 3

1 'Public welfare' is the term suggested by Kirk Mann in his discussion of the distiction made by Richard Titmuss in 1955 between fiscal, occupational and social welfare. Pointing out that setting apart 'social welfare' from the other two 'is slightly misleading, because the other two elements are also obviously social', Mann proposes to replace it with *public welfare*. 'It is public', says Mann,

'in the sense that it is visible and in so far as the public (in general of course) identify this element with the welfare state' (see K. Mann (1992) *The Making of an English Underclass: The Social Divisions of Welfare and Labour*. Buckingham: Open University Press, p.13.) I am using here the concept of 'public welfare' in a sense somewhat different from the one proposed by Mann – as an idea generic to all, more specific, forms of collectively provided individual welfare – whatever form that provision takes and whatever is the institution charged with its administration.

2 I. Gough (1979) *The Political Economy of the Welfare State*. London: Macmillan, p.11.

3 C. Offe (1984) *Contradictions of the Welfare State*. London: Hutchinson, pp.152–3.

4 Sir W. Beveridge (1945) *Why I am a Liberal*, quoted in E.K. Bramsted and K.J. Melhuish (eds) *Western Liberalism: A History in Documents from Locke to Croce*. London: Longman 1978, pp.712 ff.

5 A. Deacon and J. Bradshaw (1983) *Reserved for the Poor: The Means Test in British Social Policy*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell & Martin Robertson, p.1 ff. 42.

6 R.M. Titmuss (1968) *Commitment to Welfare*. London: Allen & Unwin, p.143.

7 A. Deacon and J. Bradshaw, *op cit*., p.65.

8 R. Boyson (ed.) (1971) *Down with the Poor*. London: Churchill Press, p.5.

9 J.F. Handler and J. Hasenfeld (1991) *The Moral Construction of Poverty*. London: Sage, p.16.

10 Z. Ferge and S.M. Miller (eds) (1987) *Dynamics of Deprivation*. Aldershot: Gower, p.297 ff.

11 C. Offe (1996) *Modernity and the State: East, West*. Cambridge: Polity Press, p.172.

12 M. Woollacott (1997) Bosses must learn to behave better again, *Guardian*, 14 June.

13 D. Duclos (1997) La cosmocratoie, nouvelle classe planetaire, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August, pp.14–15.

14 S. Halimi (1997) Allocation, équité, égalité, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, August, p.18.

15 This is, of course, as repeatedly pointed out by students of consumerism, an illusion, but an illusion that protects reality and without which the reality of the consumer market would not be able to function. In fact, the promise and the visibility of choice (even the standard Macdonald beefburger you can eat in several incarnations), appealing to the energetically cultivated love of choice, is deployed to attract prospective consumers to the market place where the range of choice is strictly fixed and constrained. Whatever choice consumers may make, they would never step beyond the choice on offer, and the choice on offer is not itself a matter of consumer choice. It is dictated by unchosen, unelected managers – global companies which come ever closer to mono-polistic rule over consumer markets. As John Vidal ('Empire of burgers', *Guardian*, 20 June 1997) discovered: 'in eight sectors, including cars, aero-space, electronics, steel, armaments and media, the top five corporations now control 50 per cent of the global market'. And he concludes: 'This power is no longer merely financial, but also cultural. It is beginning to dictate the fun-damentals of life. Ten corporations now control nearly every aspect of the world's food chain. Four control 90 per cent of the world's exports of corn, wheat, tobacco, tea, pineapple, jute and forest products.'

16 Let us recall that one of the most effective charges made in the Western propaganda war against communist regimes was the lack of choice in the

shops. Whether the consumers suffered hunger and want, or were provided with the necessities of life, did not matter. What mattered more than anything else was not the availability or even the quality of medical services, but the denial of choice between doctors; not the costs and availability of schools or accommodation, but again the lack of ability to choose between them. The widespread objections against lack of 'consumer choice' seriously undermined the popular support for the otherwise unquestionably superb state-administered services in Scandinavian countries.

17 This and following quotations come from Martin Walker's article 'God Bless (white) America', *Guardian*, 17 May 1997.

18 M. Woollacott (1997) Behind the myth of the self-made man, *Guardian*, 17 May.

Chapter 4

 1 J.F. Handler and Y. Hasenfeld (1991) *The Moral Construction of Poverty*. London: Sage, pp.139, 196–7. According to the authors, in 1971 in the framework of WIN 2.7 million assessments were made, but only 118,000 actually enrolled, and of those only 20 per cent held the job for at least three months. The median wage was $2 per hour (p.141).

 2 *International Herald Tribune*, 3–4 August 1996.

 3 C. Julien (1996) Vers le choc social, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September.

 4 Robert Reich (1991) *The Work of Nations*. New York: Vintage Books.

 5 Richard Sennett (1998) *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York: W.W.Norton & Co., pp.50.

 6 *Ibid.*, p.82.

 7 Jaques Attali (1996) *Chemins de sagesse: Traiié du labyrinthe*. Paris. Fayard, pp.79–80, 109.

 8 See Barefoot Doctor (2003) Grace under pressure, *Observer Magazine*, 30 November, p.95.

 9 Z. Ferge and S.M. Miller (eds) (1987) *Dynamics of Deprivation*. Aldershot: Gower, pp.309–10.

10 H.J. Gans (1995) *The War against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy*. New York: Basic Books, p.2.

11 As Gans points out, 'non-poor alcoholics can drink at home, and sometimes even on the job, but poor ones are often found in the gutter. Moreover, the morally dubious acts of the better-off frequently turn out to be perfectly legal, in accord with the ''golden rule'': people who own the gold make the rules' (*Ibid.*, p.4).

12 It does not matter that federal and local expenditure on all kinds of welfare amounted to less than $40 billion in 1992 – that is but 15 per cent of the post-Cold War annual defence budget and $10 billion less than the annual cost of the mortgage tax deductions, or just one sixth of the total sum budgeted for corporate subsidies and tax breaks for the rich. It does not matter either that 'weapon producers may be as dependent on the Pentagon as poor women are on welfare' (*Ibid.*, pp.82–4).

13 K. Auletta (1982) *The Underclass*. New York: Random House, p.xiii.

14 The language of most current American debate concerning the phenomenon of the underclass is much more in line with the uncompromising, no-stops rhetoric of Edward Banfield: 'The lower-class individual lives from moment to moment . . . Impulse governs his behavior, either because he cannot discipline

himself to sacrifice a present for a future satisfaction or because he has no sense of the future. He is therefore radically improvident; whatever he cannot consume immediately he considers valueless. His taste for "action" takes precedence over anything else' (E. Banfield (1968) *The Unheavenly City: The Nature and Future of our Urban Crisis*. Boston; Little Brown, pp.34–5). Let us note that the Banfield diatribe aimed at the 'underclass' sounds like a very accurate description of the 'ideal consumer' in a society of consumers. In this, as in most other discussions, 'underclass' serves as a dumping ground for the demons haunting the consumer's tormented soul.

15 Auletta's field research brought him too close to the objects of the standardized treatment not to notice how empirically faulty are the generalized labels and wholesale classifications. At the end of his book (K. Auletta, *op cit.*), which presents one long story of a power-assisted *unification* of the underclass, he states: 'The one great lesson I learned from my reporting among the underclass and the poor is that generalizations – bumper stickers – are the enemies of understanding. It is perilous to generalize about the "lower class" ... or about "victims" ... or about poverty being "virtually eliminated" ... or about government being "the problem". From a height of thirty thousand feet, everyone and everything looks like an ant' (p.317). Expectedly, such warnings went unheeded. In its journalistic, political and popular reception Auletta's study served as another reinforcement of the unified image of the underclass.

16 K. Auletta, *op cit.*, p.xvi.

17 *Ibid.*, p.28.

18 L.M. Mead (1992) *The New Politics of Poverty: The Nonworking Poor in America*. New York: Basic Books.

19 *Ibid.*, p.x.

20 *Ibid.*, p.12.

21 *Ibid.*, p.133.

22 *Ibid.*, p.145.

23 *Ibid.*, p.261.

24 P. Townsend (1993) Poverty in Europe, in Z. Ferge and S.M. Miller (eds) *Dynamics of Deprivation*. Aldershot: Gower, p.73.

25 N. Christie (1993) *Crime Control as Industry*. London: Routledge.

26 H.J. Gans, *op cit.*, p. 75.

27 R. Kapuściński (1997) *Lapidarium III*. Warsaw: Czytelnik, pp.146 ff.

Chapter 5

1 Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., pp.47–51.

2 See *Report of the TUC* 1883, p.39.

3 Quoted after J.B. Jeffrey's (1948) *Labour's Formative Years*. London: Lawrence & Wishart.

4 See Jacques Donzelot, Catherine Mével and Anne Wyvekens (2002) De la fabrique sociale aux violences urbaines, *Esprit*, December, pp.13–34.

5 See David Maybury-Lewis (2002) Genocide against indigenous peoples, in Alexander Laban Hinton (ed.) *Annihilating Difference: The Anthropology of Genocide*. California: University of California Press, pp.43–53.

6 Quoted after Herman Merivale (1861) *Lectures on Colonization and Colonies*. London: Green, Longman & Roberts, p.541.

7 Theodore Roosevelt (1889) *The Winning of the West: From the Alleghenies to the Mississipi, 1769–1776*. New York: G.P. Putnam Sons, p.90.
8 According to Alfredo M. Serres Guiraldes (1979) *La Estrategia de General Roca*. Buenos Aires: Pleamar, pp.377–8, quoted by Herman Merivale, *ibid*.
9 Richard Rorty (1998) *Achieving our Country*. Harvard University Press, p.85.
10 Richard Rorty (1999) *Philosophy and Social Hope*. Penguin Books, p.203.
11 Naomi Klein (2001) *No Logo*. Flamingo, pp.XVII–XVIII.
12 'Comment la ''tolérance zéro'' vint à l'Europe', p.40.
13 See Henry A. Giroux (2002) Global capitalism and the return of the garrison state, *Arena Journal* 19: 141–60.
14 *The Culture of Control*, pp.177–8.
15 *Ibid*., p.180.
16 *Ibid*., pp.184–5.
17 *Ibid*., p.178.

Chapter 6

1 The choice has nothing 'necessary' or 'inevitable' about it. Abstractly speaking, it is arbitrary and contingent – it could be made differently (this is, precisely, what allows us to speak of a 'choice'). The choice, though, as Cornelius Castoriadis puts it, expresses itself in the 'imaginary' which holds society in its grip, underlying the way in which members of that society think, and indeed are able to think, of themselves and the world they inhabit. Given the pre-reflexive, 'naturalized', matter-of-fact character of that 'imaginary', members do not perceive the choice as choice, and are not aware of the contingency of the mode of life which sets them apart from other societies. The strength of the grip is a direct reflection of the overwhelming 'obviousness' of the selected mode and thus also of the difficulty to think of one's own and all other societies in any other perspective than that of one's own 'imaginary'. For instance, we are unable, 'when we speak of the feudal domain, to pretend to forget the concept of economy, or to avoid categorizing as economic, phenomena that were not so for people of the period' (C. Castoriadis (1987) *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. K. Blamey, Cambridge, Polity Press, p. 163).
2 Here quoted in Peter Kussi's (1993) translation, *The Farewell Party*, Faber & Faber, p.85.
3 C. Castoriadis (1997) Anthropology, Philosophy, Politics (trans. D.A. Curtis; lecture given in Lausanne in 1989), *Thesis Eleven*, 49: 103–4.
4 G. Himmelfarb (1984) *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age*. London: Faber & Faber, pp.25, 79 ff, 193.
5 According to Lynn Karoly, the economist of the Rand Corporation, quoted in *International Herald Tribune*, 30–1 March 1996.
6 L. Wacquant (1996) Quand le président Clinton 'réforme' la pauvreté, *Le Monde Diplomatique*, September.
7 X. Emmanuelli (1997) La maladie du lien, *Le Monde*, 15 April.
8 Pierre Bourdieu (1995) *Acts of Resistance*, trans. by Richard Nice. Cambridge: Polity Press, p.82.
9 A. Finkielkraut (1996) *L'Humanité perdue: Essai sur le XXe siècle*. Paris: Seuil.
10 G. Bateson (1973) *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*. Palladin Books, pp.436–7.
11 C. Castoriadis (1996) *La montée de l'insignificance*. Paris: Seuil, p.64.

12 C. Castoriadis (1987) *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. K. Blamey. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp.157–60.
13 C. Offe (1996) *Modernity and the State: East, West*. Cambridge: Polity Press, pp.210 ff.
14 M. Benn (1997) Yes, but is there a philosophy to welfare-to-work? *Guardian*, 2 June.
15 R.P. Droit (1997) L'utopie est dans les étages, *Le Monde*, 18 July.
16 See P. Ricoeur (1997) *L'idéologie et l'utopie*. Paris: Seuil.
17 See F. Ainsa (1997) *La Reconstruction de l'utopie*. UNESCO.
18 C. Castoriadis (1990) *Le monde morcelé*. Paris: Seuil, p.100.
19 P. Curry (1997) *Defending Middle-Earth*. Edinburgh: Floris Books, p.51.

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