

## The Poverty of Politics

In order to make sure opportunity is within the reach of every one of our citizens, we've got to have an economy that continues to grow and expand.<sup>1</sup>

Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party—however numerous they may be—is no freedom at all. Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently. Not because of any fanatical concept of 'justice' but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when 'freedom' becomes a special privilege.<sup>2</sup>

### I. Introduction

At first glance, it seems perverse to juxtapose words from a George W. Bush speech and a Rosa Luxemburg treatise on the Russian Revolution. On the one hand, there is an unreflective patrician politician seemingly unable to doubt the policies allegedly dictated to him by his apparently murderous god; on the other is a brilliant economist and passionate revolutionary soberly considering the shortcomings of the most visible and important revolution carried out under the flag she did so much to raise.

At second glance, it seems perverse to juxtapose the two excerpts, since they don't obviously have anything to do with each other. On the one hand, Bush speaks of the need for increased economic opportunity, while on the other, Luxemburg writes of the need for freedom of

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<sup>1</sup> George W. Bush. 'Remarks to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce' (20 April 2005).

<sup>2</sup> Rosa Luxemburg. 'The Russian Revolution', in *Rosa Luxemburg Speaks* (New York, 1970), 389-90.

dissent, regardless of the unpopularity of the position taken.

At third glance, the relationship between the two comes into relief: Bush, for all of his shortcomings, is a president popular enough to be elected to a second term. In his speech to the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, he stresses the need for continued economic growth and opportunity, perennially popular messages in a country as committed to capitalism as is the United States. On the other hand, Luxemburg is grasping for a point about the freedom of dissent, even the freedom to dissent in the most unpopular ways from the strongest of consensuses.

In some form or another, with some set of restrictions or another, most people in the United States assume that it permissible to dissent. Most would support my right to utter and publish the sentence, 'I disagree with Bush'. In this paper, however, I want to attempt to ask a series of questions about the limits of permissible dissent.

Now oftentimes we assume that the limits of dissent are described by a concern for public welfare or orderliness: John Stuart Mill identifies the claims of society upon the individual to consist in (1) not encroaching on another's rights and (2) 'bearing his share [...] of the labours and sacrifices incurred for defending

the society or its members from injury or molestation'<sup>3</sup>. I want to argue for the right to dissent from this second principle, a principle that seems to be even more strongly endorsed than that concerning the right of dissent. The right to dissent from this consensus is the right to laziness.

This is an intentionally contentious formulation. It is contentious because there are so many different ways of doing 'work', recognized to markedly varying degrees. On the one hand, there is the Marxian 'labor of individuation', which I have described as 'the work of self-expression and self-development humans engage in when freed from material necessity'<sup>4</sup>. This is the sort of thing Marx and Engels had in mind when they painted such idyllic images as being able to 'do this today, do that tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, tend cattle in the evening, do theory after dinner, whatever you please, without becoming a hunter, fisherman, herdsman or theorist'<sup>5</sup>. A second conception of labor is one that has arisen in much recent feminist theory, where the under-recognition of the unpaid labor of caring for dependents

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<sup>3</sup> 'On Liberty' (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 83.

<sup>4</sup> 'Seeing the Other Side of the Coin: (Re)Constructing the Normative Flipside to Marx's Sociology', *Socialist Studies* 1 (May 2005), 73.

<sup>5</sup> *Die Deutsche Ideologie* [1845-6], *Marx Engels Werke* III (Berlin: Dietz Verlag, 1962), 33.

and working in the household economy has been identified as inextricably connected to the second-class status of women in society. Finally, there is what most people have in mind when they talk about 'going to work' or 'making a living': the sort of workaday wage labor involved in producing the material bases of society<sup>6</sup>.

Most people take part in each of these three forms of labor, sometimes at the same time. The sorts of practices that interest me here, however, are those which show how much more seriously we take wage labor than care work or the labor of individuation. Indeed, it is not at all uncommon to hear it said of those who do not perform wage labor—regardless of the intensity of their involvement with other sorts of labor—'oh, she doesn't work'. As we all know, those who 'don't work' are lazy.

The right to laziness is a rarely recognized one, at least for those who haven't inherited the funds to buy their leisure. The ascent of neoliberal regimes in the United States and the United Kingdom in the 1990s brought with it welfare reform and a theoretical interest in

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<sup>6</sup> These formulations are, of course, caricatured and over-brief. There are many jobs which offer both pay and the opportunity for self-realization. The service sector with its predominance of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call 'affective labor' (cf. *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 292-3) doesn't produce the material bases of society. Some caring work is paid. Nevertheless, these represent useful examples indicating the possibility of a much broader conception of work.

welfare conditionality, the notion that individuals must behave in certain ways (usually working government jobs, undergoing training or pursuing education) in order to receive welfare benefits<sup>7</sup>. The most influential defenses of conditionality have almost universally suffered from an impoverished notion of 'working', to the detriment of their purported justifications of conditionality itself.

Now, I am not in general a fan of notions of disciplinary boundaries. Nevertheless, I think that there are certain sorts of things that philosophers are particularly good at, things that might be overlooked by taking too much for granted immediately intuitive or popularly accepted conceptions of things like 'work'. I tend to agree with Richard Rorty when he suggests that all philosophers can in general do in political struggles *qua* philosophers is to recast the issues in different vocabularies, or sharpen the terms to make us see more clearly the things about which we are fighting<sup>8</sup>. This is the

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<sup>7</sup> In *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), particularly chapter five, Nancy J. Hirschmann describes ways in which welfare behavioral requirements create a debasement and abridgment of privacy for welfare recipients, both through the sorts of tests used to establish needs as well as through work requirements. What I am trying to suggest is that these sorts of debasements are in part justified in the public consciousness because of an impoverished conception of 'work'.

<sup>8</sup> This notion is one of Rorty's oft-repeated slogans, and finds its way into his work in several places. For one, cf. 'Rationality and Cultural Difference', in *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers, Volume 3* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 199.

order of what I hope to suggest by an allusion to the poverty of politics: if we are going to talk about requirements to work, we need to make sure that we are talking about 'work' in a sense that's worth taking seriously. Debates about conditionality have focused on the reasons people 'don't work' and social barriers to employment like racism, sexism, homophobia and the like. They have talked about welfare traps and public perceptions of poverty, but they have tended not so much to talk about 'work' itself. I want to show how this impoverished conception of work has led to a justification of conditionality whose foundations are faltering.

## **II. Comprehensive views**

### *II.a. Justice as fairness*

Recasting the problem in this light presents some interesting challenges. If a liberal government, following John Rawls, avoids embodying a conception of the good, can it consistently promote what is effectively a work *ethic*? In *Justice as Fairness* Rawls attempts to get around the problem of a government's promoting a conception of the good by relying on the notion of public justification,

endorsable by all reasonable and rational citizens regardless of their conception of the good<sup>9</sup>.

Rawls doesn't want to abridge the ability of individuals to act from various comprehensive views, but he does want to figure out a way in which disputes grounded in different comprehensive views can be settled. That is to say that Rawls hopes to be able to reconcile the fact, on one hand, of reasonable diversity in society and the need, on the other hand, for principles by which to settle disputes and ensure fairness in society<sup>10</sup>. Rawls thinks that he can construct a system which will provide a grounds to which individuals can appeal for redress of unfairness without endorsing a comprehensive religious or philosophical viewpoint.

It is important here to be clear about the difference between advancing values as necessary for a society and advancing comprehensive views. Susan Moller Okin criticizes

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<sup>9</sup> 'Justice as fairness hopes to put aside long-standing religious and philosophical controversies and to avoid relying on any particular comprehensive view. It uses a different idea, that of public justification, and seeks to moderate divisive political conflicts and to specify the conditions of fair social cooperation between citizens. To realize this aim we try to work up, from the fundamental ideas implicit in the political culture, a public basis of justification that all citizens as reasonable and rational can endorse from within their own comprehensive doctrines. If this is achieved, we have an overlapping consensus of reasonable doctrines, and with it, the political conception affirmed in reflective equilibrium. It is this last condition of reasoned reflection that, among other things, distinguished public justification from mere agreement'. (*Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 28-9).

<sup>10</sup> *Justice as Fairness*, 40.

Rawls for shielding private institutions (e.g. the family) from the demands of justice, as well as for bringing only the (traditionally male) heads of families to the deliberations about the principles of justice<sup>11</sup>. On the other hand, William Galston, in *Liberal Purposes*, argues that what he calls a 'liberal culture' is a prerequisite for a liberal state, and that substantive notions of the good have a long and honorable history (as well as a necessary role) in the liberal tradition<sup>12</sup>. If our experiments in liberal government are to continue, he argues, we mustn't shy from continuing to include certain comprehensive conceptions of the good in our social structures. Okin's critique is that Rawls hasn't done enough to distance justice as fairness from comprehensive views (like misogyny). Galston, on the other hand, argues that Rawls *can't* succeed in creating a viable liberal theory that doesn't incorporate a comprehensive view.

The critique I am advancing here is more akin to that of Okin. Where Okin wants to point to the gendered institution of the family as a substantial barrier to achieving a state that is just towards all its members, I

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<sup>11</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1971), 300-1. Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender and the Family* (Basic Books, 1989), 94-6.

<sup>12</sup> *Liberal Purposes: Goods, Virtues and Diversity in the Liberal State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).



want to suggest that the same is true of the institution of work. Okin can point to the fact that Rawls explicitly shields the family from considerations of justice; I can do no such thing for considerations of 'efficiency'. Rawls doesn't explicitly question the conviction that a just society will be an efficient one. Rather, when he considers possible just societies, he stipulates that they must meet his principle of efficiency, according to which a configuration is considered efficient 'whenever it is impossible to change it so as to make some persons (at least one) better off without at the same time making other persons (at least one) worse off'<sup>13</sup>.

Now, to be fair, this principle doesn't commit Rawls to maximizing material well-being. There are many primary goods, of which material wealth is only one. Going a bit further, however, we find Rawls's just savings principle, which unambiguously does assume that the economy will grow<sup>14</sup>. If the economy grows, then each generation is producing more than it is consuming, which is to say that it could perform less wage labor. Rawls explicitly states that the point of accumulating capital is to attain the

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<sup>13</sup> *A Theory of Justice*, 67.

<sup>14</sup> *A Theory of Justice*, 284-93.

necessary opulence for justice<sup>15</sup>. After the material existence of just institutions is assured, we don't have to save except as necessary to maintain just institutions.

The faucet of suspicion begins to drip a bit faster, however, when Rawls explicitly considers the question of leisure in relation to interpersonal comparisons of citizens' social circumstances. If we are to consider the well-being of the least well-off when we consider the justice of particular inequalities, conditionality becomes important. R.A. Musgrave raised the objection to Rawls that those who don't work would presumably still be entitled to having their primary goods index maximised<sup>16</sup>. As a result, the 'least well-off' might well be those who spend all day surfing off Malibu. In various responses and reiterations of the point, Rawls suggests two modifications: first, he admits that his theory assumes 'normal and fully cooperating members of society over a complete life'<sup>17</sup>. The implication is that those who don't work in the approved manner are failing to cooperate fully. As a result, Rawls suggests that a 'standard' working day might be included in the index of primary goods in such a way that those who

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<sup>15</sup> While I won't pursue it here, it is worth noting that Amartya Sen, in *Development as Freedom* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), makes a very strong case that, if there is a threshold level of material well-being that is necessary for justice, it is not necessarily very high.

<sup>16</sup> 'Maximin, Uncertainty, and the Leisure Trade-off', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 88:4 (1974).

<sup>17</sup> *Justice as Fairness*, 179.

don't work would be understood to reap an extra 40 hours per week of leisure<sup>18</sup>. This 'understanding' represents, in essence, a denial of the right of such people to have their index of material goods meaningfully maximised. If leisure, understood as abstention from wage labor, is included amongst the list of primary goods, then there is a direct trade-off between leisure and material sustenance.

The extent of Rawls's commitment to such an inclusion is not entirely clear to me. Leisure was introduced into the list of primary goods to meet a specific objection. If new members can be added to the list to meet specific objections, presumably existing members can also be struck for the same reasons. The more open-ended the list is, the less fatal is my objection. My argument here is not, therefore, conclusive. At best, I can present a preponderance of evidence for the conclusion that there is a presumption in favor of wage labor as a necessary condition for having one's index of primary goods meaningfully maximised. That is to say that the essence of my critique is that wage labor, under Rawls's final formulations of justice as fairness, represents a notion of

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<sup>18</sup> 'The Priority of the Right and Ideas of the Good', *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 17:4 (1988), 257n. Cf. also Rawls's 'Reply to Alexander and Musgrave', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 88:4 (1974) and *Justice as Fairness* 179.

the good which is too comprehensive, by his own lights, to be imposed on individuals in a society.

*II.b. Real freedom for all*

It is entirely conceivable that one might object to this formulation of Rawls's restatement. There is still a very meaningful form of maximin possible in the case of the surfer: any wealth transfers to which the least advantaged would be entitled would also accrue to the surfer. If one argues along with Philippe van Parijs, therefore, that justice as fairness calls for a universal basic income, well, surfers would get it, too. If one argues that the universal basic income should be set as high as possible, then the 'meaningfulness' of the maximin of the surfer will be set as high as possible, too.

This meaningfulness might lead one to suspect that van Parijs would move away from a presumption in favor of wage labor. While it is true that he doesn't require surfers to labor in order to escape destitution, he does it by in essence turning them into heritors who gain their leisure by the sale of their birthrights in natural resources and

what he calls 'job assets'<sup>19</sup>. In working, individuals derive income, enjoyment and so forth over the course of meeting a social need, exploiting natural resources, and so forth. By holding a job, I am preventing others from holding it (thus occupying a social resource) and exploiting capital and/or natural resources. Therefore, I am benefiting exclusively from a social good.

While van Parijs does offer surfers a piece of the pie, he justifies his largesse by the same theoretical framework of capital ownership and material contribution to society. The claim of surfers to benefits is premised upon the recognition by others of ordinary property rights. If we want to feed surfers, this is an advance. If we want to challenge the presumption in favor of wage labor, it is not.

One of the most powerful objections to van Parijs's approach is the fear that the presumption in favor of wage labor has what Andrew Feenberg has termed an 'implementation bias'<sup>20</sup>. Feenberg uses the term to refer to the fact that solutions to some practical problems bring along with them assumptions about many other desires, motivations and ways of life, such that to benefit from the

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<sup>19</sup> *Real Freedom for All: What (If Anything) Can Justify Capitalism?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 89-132.

<sup>20</sup> 'Marcuse or Habermas: Two Critiques of Technology', *Inquiry* 39 (1996).

solution is to accept a host of other desires, motivations and ways of life. His examples are instances where the problem (strictly defined) could be equally well solved by any of a number of solutions, but each solution carries with it 'side effects' which might not be included in the problematic. The offensive against breast feeding in the 1930s and 40s not only reduced the rate of breast feeding. It also produced other, unanticipated problems like infant diarrhea. This, in turn, required the further technologization of infant care<sup>21</sup>.

The point, I take it, is that the problem of the health of babies was considered without a full understanding of the 'biases' inherent in various members of the set of possible actions. The understanding of infant health was insufficiently broad (or, put differently, the consideration of the ramifications of possible actions was insufficiently deep), so the technologization of infant care created many more problems in its wake. I want to suggest that the narrowing of our definition of 'work' to wage labor has the same sort of biases built in. When we

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<sup>21</sup> Consider, for example, the medical offensive against breast feeding in the 1930s and 1940s. In this instance, an aspect of family life was technologized in the mistaken belief that formula was healthier than breast milk. This technical mediation complicated infant care unnecessarily while opening huge markets. The widespread use of formula in countries without pure water supplies spread infant diarrhea which in turn required medical treatment, further intruding technology on infant care. 'Marcuse or Habermas', 61.

see work in terms of wage labor, so we see leisure as reducible to or exchangeable for wage labor, and the enjoyment of the fruits thereof. A particularly vibrant expression of this is provided by Paul Lafargue in his pamphlet, 'The Right to Laziness':

Because producers used to only work five out of seven days, do people believe the lying economists when they say that they lived off of fresh air and water? Come on! They had the leisure to taste the joys of the earth, to make love and to joke; to feast gaily to the honor of the rejoicing god of Loafing.<sup>22</sup>

I don't want to suggest that this argument is conclusive thus far. It isn't. It does, however, make one wonder: people have certain basic material needs, without the provision of which they will die. When we are discussing the provision or restriction of access to the goods to meet those needs, we do so on the basis of some justification or another. If we justify the provision or restriction of access to those goods on the basis of being engaged in wage labor, or on having an exemption from the need to be so engaged on the basis of having an ordinary right to capital, we persist in framing the question of meeting needs from within the framework of wage labor. We are, in essence, continuing to act as if contemporary production continued to bear an unbreakable link to something along the lines of 'natural' or 'biological' need, in spite of the ample evidence from consumer culture

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<sup>22</sup> *Le droit à la paresse* [1883] (Paris: Maspero, 1965), 58.

that this is clearly not the case. The constant conjunction of wage-laboring conceptions of work and consumeristic conceptions of leisure strikes me as cause for worry, worry of the same sort as the worry one gets when one sees in Rawls that the family is shielded from the principles of justice. It might not prove anything, but it makes you think.

### **III. Conditionality**

If our liberal conceptions of politics, which are explicitly trying to avoid endorsing a comprehensive view, seem to have one built in, then it will not come as a surprise that arguments about welfare conditionality seem to do the same thing to a much greater degree.

One of the most influential conservative endorsements of conditionality has been that offered by the political scientist Lawrence Mead. The most unfortunate character of Mead's research into poverty is that it takes as given and largely unchallenged the received social ontology of the U.S. society it studies. Where I am explicitly trying to problematize the notion of work, Mead assumes that work is wage labor without so much as a discussion. When he argues that the poor get satisfaction from their jobs, he is working with surveys rather than with some notion of



satisfaction which might enable him to make sense of the possibility that people in difficult circumstances can become satisfied with all sorts of situations we would want to call sub-optimal<sup>23</sup>. If the working classes in a society have not won the sorts of political battles necessary to raise their expectations, they might be quite satisfied with a 40-hour work week with no vacation time.

When Mead thus presents his 'moderate' thesis that there are no significant social barriers to wage labor for the poor, who are 'dutiful but defeated', we must not forget that Mead doesn't have any tools for investigating the sense of duty, or the sense of defeat, experienced by the poor<sup>24</sup>.

The fact that Mead works with the received concepts of society in his empirical analysis does not mean that he doesn't develop concepts in the course of interpreting his results. Central to Mead's interpretation is his formulation of the notion of 'competence'. He argues that poverty policy in the U.S. has shifted from a New Deal emphasis on opportunity for employment to a contemporary

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<sup>23</sup> The idea that individuals can adjust to adverse circumstances and experience 'satisfaction' in many sorts of situations, thus making interpersonal comparisons of 'satisfaction' largely meaningless strikes me as a very intuitively plausible idea. Nevertheless, it is bolstered by appeal to empirical argument of the sort offered by Sen at *Development as Freedom*, 62-3.

<sup>24</sup> *The New Politics of Poverty: The Nonworking Poor in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1992), 133.

focus on motivation to perform wage labor. The emphasis on opportunity was undergirded, he argues, by the assumption that people have 'all the qualities that allow a person to get ahead in economic terms—not only intelligence, but foresight, energy, discipline, and the ability to sacrifice for the future'—in his terminology, that they are 'competent'<sup>25</sup>. The shift away from opportunity represents a shift away from this 'competence assumption'. The implication is that the contemporary focus on motivation, by abandoning the competence assumption, takes a condescending approach towards poverty.

While this starting point poses many difficulties for Mead's analysis, here I am concerned with the way in which it is a comprehensive view, carrying along with it the implementation biases latent in its unexamined conception of 'work'. It is pointed out by Stuart White that the competence assumption requires that people endorse a materialistic life plan<sup>26</sup>.

White, in pointing out this problem, attempts to find a separate justification for welfare conditionality in his naturalistic formulation of the reciprocity principle.

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<sup>25</sup> *Politics of Poverty*, 19.

<sup>26</sup> '[...] to call someone incompetent because they are not interested in getting on in a materialistic sense is highly tendentious; and it is by no means reasonable to assume that everyone has an interest in, or ought to be, competent in this sense'. 'Review Article: Social Rights and the Social Contract—Political Theory and the New Welfare Politics', *British Journal of Political Science* 30 (2000), 526.

Leaning on the work of U.S. sociologists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis casting the individual agent as *Homo reciprocans*, White tries to bring under one heading conditionality and reciprocity<sup>27</sup>. The reciprocity principle, as formulated by White, is a principle of solidarity expressed in the willingness to assist a fellow citizen 'if he suffers some significant disadvantage that is no fault of his own'<sup>28</sup>. By the same token, White says, we express our 'solidarity' 'by making a reasonable effort to provide [our] fellow citizens with goods and services in return for the goods and services that they provide for [us]'<sup>29</sup>.

The strength of this notion of reciprocity lies in its restriction to a notion of 'reasonable effort'. If there are those—e.g. the disabled or the infirm—who, 'through no fault of their own' are prevented from making a reasonable effort, well, that is okay (presumably this would not apply to someone who, for instance, shot herself in the foot to avoid going to work). White would want to argue that we

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<sup>27</sup> The study White uses is 'Is Egalitarianism Passé? *Homo Reciprocans* and the Future of Egalitarian Politics', *Boston Review*, 23 (December/January 1998/99), 4-10. White summarizes it at 'Social Rights and the Social Contract', 513-4. Put briefly, Bowles and Gintis attempt to show that people are prone not so much to purely altruistic or purely egotistic behavior as they are to reciprocal effort: individuals don't mind acting altruistically on behalf of people whom they see as having attempted to 'do their part', but they are disinclined to help out those seen as capable yet unwilling to pitch in.

<sup>28</sup> 'Social Rights and the Social Contract', 513.

<sup>29</sup> 'Social Rights and the Social Contract', 513.

have no right to withdraw material support in such cases. In this sense, White's application of the principle of reciprocity, along with this mitigating principle of solidarity, represents a moving away from the sort of basis in normality that marks a Rawlsian project as well as the basis in original ownership that exists in real freedom, which is today that it moves away from the presumption of wage labor upon which each are based. While cast in different terms, the principle of reciprocity—even along with this principle of solidarity—seems at bottom to be a notion of a (extremely conditional) right to be cared for.

Indeed, it is the notion of caring and its links to solidarity that leads White to flesh out the idea of a 'relevant and acceptable contribution to society'. He wants to ensure recognition for different forms of participation, and this leads him in the direction of an Anthony Atkinson-sort of participation income<sup>30</sup>. Whereas van Parijs's basic income is premised on an originary ownership of assets, the sort of participation income advanced by White and Atkinson is the participation of 'satisfying a very broad definition of productive participation in the community', where 'participation' might include such things as caring<sup>31</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> As in, e.g., Atkinson's 'The Case for a Participation Income', *The Political Quarterly* 67:1 (1996).

<sup>31</sup> 'Social Rights and the Social Contract', 530.

So far, so good. I wonder, however, if any conceivable broadening of these criteria can really do justice to the two intuitions we are trying to capture here. On the one hand is the thought, expressed by Rawls and the notion of *Homo reciprocans*, that society must somehow ensure that people do their part (or at least that individuals in society have a justified expectation that others will in fact do their part). On the other hand is the desire that society should somehow be able to address poverty without having to endorse a comprehensive view, whether that is the imposition of a conception of the good entailing 'getting along' in material terms or that of solidarity. We want to take seriously the desire that we can achieve a 'rich plurality of activities' or 'undominated diversity'<sup>32</sup>. It seems like nature or the physical world requires that some wage labor-type-work be performed in order to sustain life, so society should be justified in enforcing the same requirement on its citizens.

I don't think that these two impulses are strictly incompatible. While I do think that conditionality is on

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<sup>32</sup> The first phrase is Marx's, but for its adoption by liberal theory cf. Martha Nussbaum's approving use of it in 'The Future of Feminist Liberalism', *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*, eds. Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen K. Feder (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), 194. The second phrase is van Parijs's, and is defined as a distribution of endowments such that it is not the case that 'there are two people such that everyone in the society concerned prefers the whole endowment (both internal and external) of one of them to that of the other', *Real Freedom*, 59.

the wrong track, it is in the right switching yard, and if we could just back it up a little, throw the right lever and pull it forward again, it could be a useful concept. Getting it on the right track involves, I think, substantially expanding the notion of work beyond the sort of 'participation' considered by White and Atkinson.

#### **IV. The right to laziness**

As far as the expansion of that notion goes, I don't have anything new to say. I know that work can be fun, and I know that it can be dreadful. I know that work can be a source of self-identity and self-realization, and I know that it can be a source of alienation. What I am trying to do is to bring together insights developed by others into the way humans do in fact work and the conceptions of the welfare state developed by various political theorists.

The addition of the labor of individuation and care work to our description of work, alluded to at the outset, doesn't in general need to be taken as completing the description. There are doubtless many other aspects to human activity that could fit here. I list these two for a number of reasons: they show the sort of opening up of traditions and perspectives that is so often fruitful in attempting to think about issues with anything approaching

a capaciousness of understanding. By moving beyond the liberal tradition narrowly conceived, by embracing the insights of two powerful veins of its critics, we can make the liberal tradition look much more defensible.

What do I mean by this? Conditionality begins to look quite different when we take it to be a conditionality premised upon this broader sense of 'work'. Care work is possibly a form of work in which all humans with any contact with other humans are involved<sup>33</sup>. The labor of individuation seems to have a similarly wide-reaching instantiation. Opening up our conception of work this way has ramifications for the sorts of persons we think about as being citizens. No longer are we restricted to 'normal and fully cooperating members of society', at least in the sense that Rawls understands 'normal'. When normal is taken to mean not just 'involved in wage labor' but also 'involved in dependency relationships' or 'involved in self-expression and self-development', it gives us a more accurate picture of the sorts of beings who are actually

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<sup>33</sup> *Prima facie*, care work might be conceived of as unidirectional: I care for someone. This results, I think, from a tendency to conceive of care work as simply another form of wage labor, where a worker works at a job or on a product. Marx's description of labor and its effects on human society and human nature, however, makes it clear that production produces humans, and Eva Feder Kittay's discussion of the 'certain form of mutual dependency' which marks care work suggests that it might be plausible to suggest that dependents are also engaged in dependency work. Cf. 'When Caring is Just and Justice is Caring', *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*, 273.

engaged in the sorts of human societies we take ourselves to be describing. If the extension of 'normal' is as large as the extension of phrases like 'some mother's child', it starts to look like the sort of qualifier around which we might be able to build a respectably wide-ranging account of society<sup>34</sup>.

Further, beginning with a more capacious understanding of work, which we might call 'work-in-general', we might end up with a more capacious understanding of needs. Whether this took the form of an open-ended list of capabilities or an open-ended list of primary goods, we would be less prone to overestimate the importance of GNP in our enumerations of needs. With a larger frame of reference, we would begin to be able to answer Herbert Marcuse's challenge to find 'true' needs that don't 'perpetuate toil, aggressiveness, misery, and injustice'<sup>35</sup>.

Incorporating work-in-general would allow us to address poverty without reneging on the hope of a richly diverse society which lies at the heart of Rawls's project. Rather than suggesting, with van Parijs, that all worthwhile activity is reducible to some recognizably capitalist standard, we recognize instead that people can

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<sup>34</sup> The phrase is Kittay's, as in, e.g., *Love's Labor: Essays on Equality, Women, and Dependency* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

<sup>35</sup> *One-Dimensional Man* [1964] (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991), 5.



and do participate in society in ways that we don't (and needn't) value. By removing our approval from the required justification, we achieve a synthesis of the notion of reciprocity and that of liberty. We secure a broader version of the notion of 'being able to do one's own thing' that lies at the heart of liberalism.

#### **V. Objections and final developments**

Towards the end of stating this proposal more clearly, and setting it in dialogue with less radical examinations of conditionality, welfare and work, I conclude by considering several objections one might raise to the proposal as it has been stated so far.

There are several objections that might fit together under the heading of the question, 'if your idea is so great, why hasn't it been considered and implemented just yet?'. At a certain level, this is easily enough answered, insofar as a practice of conditionality combined with the sort of expanded notion of work that I have proposed is flat-out inimical to capitalism. Anyone who has tried to get a class of normally indoctrinated introductory undergraduates to take seriously the property distributions presented in the *Republic* or the *Critique of the Gotha Programme* has heard the objection that uncoupling material

sustenance from some sort of measure of productive labor considered along the axis of wage labor removes an essential element of incentive and reciprocity from the system of labor. This objection does not seem particularly far removed from the sorts of objections one might expect from people like Lawrence C. Becker, who argues that 'everywhere, in every society of record, there is a norm of reciprocity' about goods and evils, that we expect 'returns' of 'good for good received' and 'hostility for hostility'<sup>36</sup>. The notion of reciprocity conceived of as returning good for good (or goods for goods) is extremely intuitively plausible. Further, it seems that a society which, like all those on record, must labor in order to insure its material basis of existence has a clear interest in doing whatever it can to induce its members to contribute to the means of its subsistence.

There are a number of ways that I can respond to this line of criticism. The first is to poke around a bit in the way that reciprocity is actually practiced in a capitalist welfare state. Wage labor itself moves away from reciprocity in a strict sense insofar as it recognizes the possibility of remuneration. Remuneration, it seems, boils down to the notion that there is no requirement to

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<sup>36</sup> *Reciprocity* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1986), 73.

reciprocate *in kind*: I work for you for eight hours, and you give me a certain amount of money, pursuant to our prior existing agreement. To interpret reciprocity too strictly would mean to make this sort of arrangement impossible. This is obviously not what we mean when we talk about reciprocity.

Moving a bit further takes us back to conditionality. Since we know that reciprocity needn't be reciprocity in kind, then we can discuss what sort of reciprocity we are interested in having. The argument of someone like Stuart White is that the state should agree to 'hire' people who have no other means of engaging in wage labor. There are, then, two ways in which this might be done: on the one hand we might hire someone to engage in labor that is fairly similar to the sorts of wage labor people perform in society: we might hire them to plant flowers in interstate medians or to do research into folk traditions in Appalachia. On the other hand, we might hire them to take part in a sort of activity which we expect will lead, albeit indirectly, to the ability to participate in wage labor: we might hire them to undergo job training or to pursue some sort of less vocational education. This is to say that we make welfare benefits conditional upon the pursuit of a course of action which society presumes will

eventually allow the individual to reenter the workforce. If we read these sorts of welfare conditionalities as analogous to being hired for wage labor, then this practice is evidence of the willingness of society to expand the set of activities for which one might receive remuneration—even if only for a limited period for a given individual.

The difference between conditionality and work-in-general is that conditionality seems to be always premised on the idea that the sorts of activities which are eligible for consideration are those which either (1) immediately benefit society, like planting flowers, or (2) are likely to benefit society in indirect fashion, like pursuing vocational training. Work-in-general does not really claim to do either of these. The sorts of peripheral cases of work considered by work-in-general are not necessarily materially productive. Even if a one-cared-for enriches the life of a care worker, it is doubtful that the relationship of caring will make the care worker more productive in a material sense<sup>37</sup>. Much more likely, the care work will

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<sup>37</sup> While originally I had hoped that work-in-general would allow even individuals with severe cognitive disabilities to be considered as 'fully participating' members of society in a way that they cannot be under Rawls's scheme, conversations with Eva Kittay have made me more doubtful. Could, for example, an individual in a coma really be taken to be pursuing anything that might legitimately be considered individuating? This is unclear to me. It seems fairly safe, however, to argue that such an individual might be considered a fully participating member of society to the extent that she is a potential one-cared-for, that her existence is an occasion to participate in care labor. Such a

distract her from her material labor. Society would then be agreeing to forgo material production in order to endorse individuals' freedom to pursue non-productive pursuits of individuation and caring.

I want to suggest that this is in fact necessary. As Rawls argues that a society must simultaneously pursue just institutions and the material wealth to insure their endurance, so I would argue that a society must simultaneously pursue real freedom for all—through acknowledging a conception of work-in-general—and the material wealth to ensure its possibility. A severely impoverished society would plainly not be able to pursue the acknowledgement of work-in-general, for reasons that have little or nothing to do with philosophy. Yet a society of modest wealth should be able to sustain its members in a variety of pursuits, including the labor of individuation and care work.

The van Parijsian objection to this would presumably be directed towards the question of the fairness of this setup to those who do actually provide for the material sustenance of society, those who curtail their caring or

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potential could then be construed as a resource for society, a resource which might justify the participation of society in her sustenance. Importantly, this is a sort of recourse distinct from van Parijs's appeals to rights to natural resources and job assets. This is a resource arising from an individual's existence, a resource that is not expressible or translatable in terms of commodities. It is, therefore, in a sense the term may no longer have, a 'human resource'.

individuating work in order to participate in wage labor<sup>38</sup>. And certainly I don't mean to suggest that we can do completely without some sort of social agreement on the amounts of the various sorts of labor that a society needs. If everyone spent all their time caring for each other in nonmaterial ways, then we would have a society of very well loved, but very cold and hungry people. This problem is not, however, fundamentally different from the sorts of problems encountered in contemporary capitalism, with the exception that work-in-general makes it possible to consider a wider set of activities as socially relevant. Rather than relegating care work and the labor of individuation to the private and therefore supererogatory realm, we place all three forms of labor on equal political footing. In so doing, we are able to circumvent the way in which justice as freedom imposes a system of wage labor on all, and deal with the less tendentious problems of meeting a variety of human needs, whether they be material, interpersonal or intellectual.

It is important to retain the term 'work' for all of the activities encompassed under work-in-general precisely in order to grant them this similarity of status in terms

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<sup>38</sup> At least I take this to be the implications for my position of van Parijs's discussion of the 'Crazy-Lazy' challenge in *Real Freedom for All*, 92-5.

of publicity. Presumably one could talk about 'participation' or 'contribution', but it seems that adopting these terms, and relinquishing ground on the extent to which care work and the labor of individuation can be considered as work involves already ceding ground on the question of the publicity or privateness of the sorts of activities under consideration. Surely it is more politically realistic and more perspicacious with respect to the history of the use of the term to attempt to expand the domain of its denoting than to adopt a new term (participation, contribution) and attempt to make it function in the same cultural space as the old term of 'work'. To fight to expand the intension of the old term is to continue to ask ourselves the same question we ask when we consider what sorts of work we consider acceptable in the context of welfare conditionality. Just as in that context we consider activities—like pursuing education—which are *prima facie* private to be acceptable contributions to society for the receipt of welfare benefits, so here we are attempting to expand the domain of the accepted term rather than to substitute for it a new term. The question is then one of seriously reflecting on the sorts of jobs we want to need, the sorts of pursuits we want to acknowledge, not just for the sake of having more

stuff, but for the (presumably architectonic) sake of having a better society.

Sitting back for a moment and asking about the meanings of the terms we are using is something that philosophy does well. It is a poverty of politics. It seems important to get straight amongst ourselves on these issues before and while we go about the real goal, that of changing society.

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