Work and Freedom in Contemporary Capitalism

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Abstract

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Despite the centrality of employment to contemporary political and economic discourse – a position reinforced by the recent economic crisis – political theory has failed to engage with the organization of work or with the norms guiding it. This dissertation offers a deeper understanding of the political functions and significance of employment by analyzing them in conjunction with freedom. In particular, it reveals the role of freedom in securing our allegiance to paid work, and performs an immanent critique on the basis of freedom.

Chapter 1 analyzes freedom in neoliberal philosophy through the work of Friedrich Hayek. It argues that Hayek's individualistic account of freedom and celebration of entrepreneurialism nourishes a view of paid work as an act of freedom, despite structural coercion to sell our labor power. Chapter 2 analyzes flexibility as a neoliberal instantiation of freedom in relation to employment that offers workers some degree of freedom and thus helps secure our commitment to the wage relation. At the same time, this chapter argues that our attachment to work and the individualized, precarious, and competitive nature of the labor market limit the emancipatory potential of flexibility. Realizing this potential requires a reconfiguration of the meaning of work (or a 'refusal of work') and the introduction of a basic guaranteed income (BI).

While signs of such a 'refusal' are hard to find in contemporary society, chapter 3 reads the riots and public sector strikes in Britain in 2011 as moments of instability in the meaning of work. By resisting the extension of working life in the name of retirement, the strikers struggled with the government over the proper relation between work, life, and freedom. Demands for the BI appear to make an even stronger challenge to the ideology of work, as this scheme would enable a lifetime of freedom from work. Yet as chapter 4 reveals, many arguments for the BI extol its capacity to *boost* employment and would therefore fail to tackle various problems stemming from the preeminence of work. Only a more radical critique of the work society itself can help realize the emancipatory potential of both the basic income and the existing regime of flexibility.

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Stasha McBride. Seven years ago she gave me the nudge I needed to start this journey, and has been at my side ever since. Her countless article recommendations and interest in discussing my ideas – however abstract or half-baked – played a pivotal role in the development of this project. I have benefited enormously from her practical advice, emotional support, and willingness to do more than her share of the housework. Finally, Stasha constantly reminds me that there is more to life than work.

I also dedicate this work to my parents, Shirley and Jason, who encouraged my questions, prioritized my education, and continue to teach me humility.

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It goes without saying that no reading or writing can take place in the absence of others, that intellectual labor is necessarily social in character, and that no one could produce a dissertation alone. But at the University of Washington, I have been blessed to find my place in a community of generous, engaging, and critical mentors and friends, whose contributions to this project I cannot overestimate. Christine Di Stefano, my committee chair since my earliest days at graduate school, not only sparked my academic interest in work and critical theory in one of her unforgettable seminars. She has also acted as one of my chief partners in conversation, giving me the space to roam freely at the same time as helping me refine my thoughts through attentive listening, careful reading, and thoughtful commentary. To Jamie Mayerfeld and Jack Turner I express gratitude for diligently and critically reading several chapter drafts, and for forcing me to clarify and strengthen my arguments in ways I would not have expected. Michael McCann has given me encouragement and confidence to pursue my interests, and I am grateful to Nancy Hartsock, Matt Walton, and Larry Cushnie for reading various parts of the whole. Carolina Johnson has helped distract me from the sparseness of our office by making it an intellectually stimulating and fun environment. Finally, I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers at *Constellations*, various chairs, discussants, panelists, and audience members at the conferences I have attended as this project has unfolded.

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Introduction

Judging by the crescendo of applause and cheering from the audience, US Vice President Joe Biden tapped into deep-seated moral feelings when, at the Democratic National Convention in 2012, he relayed his father's observation that "a job is about a lot more than a paycheck. It's about – it's about your dignity. It's about respect. It's about your place in the community."[1] In the context of the global economic crisis and its aftermath, in which millions found themselves jobless or underemployed, Mr. Biden's statement, as well as its reception by the audience, poignantly demonstrates the leading role of employment in twenty-first century life. Yet, despite the fact that by the twentieth century, paid employment had become a key criterion of full inclusion in North American and European political communities,[2] serious engagements with the mechanisms by which it operates, let alone criticisms of the political, social, and moral force of paid work are scarce, including in political theory.[3] Indeed, this absence of critical attention both illustrates and arguably reinforces a profound naturalization of paid work in contemporary political discourse, and in turn helps obscure the fact that the requirement to work is, as Kathi Weeks puts it, "a social convention and disciplinary apparatus rather than an economic necessity."[4]

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[1] "Transcript: Vice President Biden's Convention Speech," *National Public Radio*, September 6, 2012, accessed March 12, 2013, http://www.npr.org/2012/09/06/160713378/transcript-vice-president-bidens-convention-speech

[2] Ulrich Beck, *The Brave New World of Work* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2000), 13, 140.

[3] See Kathi Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2. Of course, many works that make up the 'cannon' of political thought – by Aristotle, Locke, Arendt, Rawls, and of course Marx – devote more or less attention to work. But Weeks's book stands out from these by asking, in its very first sentence, "Why do we work so long and so hard." As will become clear through the course of this Introduction and the dissertation as a whole, my project is complementary to Weeks's even as I take a different approach and focus.

[4] Ibid, 7-8.

In this introduction, I propose to briefly disentangle three threads that run through popular and scholarly discourses on the meaning and value of work,[5] before introducing the approach this dissertation takes and the argument that it constructs over the course of the following four chapters. The three discourses I shall discuss center on the work ethic, the achievement of independence, and the connection between work and citizenship; as we will see, the three threads intertwine and support one another in lending a positive valence to paid work. In presenting them, I do not mean to suggest that they encapsulate all that can be and is said about the political significance of paid work.[6] Indeed, if this were the case, my own approach would be redundant. Rather, by discussing the work ethic, independence, and citizenship, I want to clear the ground for my own inquiries, which focus on the relations between work and freedom.

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber famously analyzed the reversal in attitudes to work that occurred when the Protestant Reformation helped unseat the 'traditional' culture of work and replaced it with the 'modern' work ethic. Whereas the traditional culture saw work as a necessary evil and something to avoid whenever possible, he shows that the Protestant ethic sanctified work, framed it as a religious duty, and encouraged people to see successes derived from it as a sign of God's grace. Weber notes that the orientation to work promoted by the Protestant ethic long outlived strict religious observance, and that, in fact, it was bound up with a set

[5] Unless otherwise stated, by 'work' I mean paid work. In using this shorthand I do not mean to suggest that certain unpaid activities should not also be considered 'work.' Indeed, it is a central contention of this dissertation that what counts as 'work' should be expanded. Nevertheless, it sometimes appears ungainly or repetitive to use the phrase 'paid work' so I occasionally simply refer to 'work.'

[6] By the political significance of work I mean, on one hand, the organization, regulation, and broader social and political value of work; and on the other, challenges to those structures and norms. Understanding both dimensions means we also need to pay particular attention to claims and beliefs about what kind of community we want to live in and what place work should occupy within it.

of processes that undermined the appeal and hold of religion itself. This in turn brought alarming consequences for human freedom because whereas the "Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so."[7] I return to Weber's argument concerning freedom below to clarify my approach in this dissertation, but for now let us continue in the analysis of the work ethic.

As historian Daniel T. Rogers notes, the impact of the Reformation on the American work ethic surfaces both in the nineteenth century doctrine of usefulness, and in the belief that regular work would consume sexual passions, dispel violence, doubts, and despair, distract from radicalism and reform the convict. But to this list of concerns one must add the dream of success through one's work, and the vision of work as a creative act.[8] Indeed, Zygmunt Bauman suggests that, unlike in Europe where work was seen as an end in itself, in the American context work was considered a means to "get richer, and so more independent; the means to get rid of the repulsive necessity to work for others."[9] Abraham Lincoln, for example, publicly proclaimed that through hard work, a white wage laborer could eventually become an independent citizen who owned his own land.[10]

It is important to note, therefore, that the work ethic has not only included a religious component; it has also framed work as a pathway to social mobility and in recent decades, as a practice of self-actualization.[11] So, while Weber attributes the twentieth century coercion to emulate

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[7] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Routledge, 2002), 123.

[8] Daniel T. Rogers, *The Work Ethic in Industrial America, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 13.

[9] Zygmunt Bauman, *Work, Consumerism, and the New Poor* (Maidenhead, UK: Open University Press, 2005), 20.

[10] Judith Shklar, *American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 82.

[11] Weeks calls these the Protestant, industrial and post-industrial work ethics respectively. Although Weeks identifies three corresponding time periods (the seventeenth and eighteenth

the ceaseless, yet at least optional, strivings of the Puritan to the "tremendous cosmos of the economic order,"[12] there is good reason to believe that our desire for meaning also continues to propel many on a search for vocation as opposed to merely a job.[13] Indeed, with the benefit of hindsight, we might conclude that the so-called postindustrial work ethic's emphasis on creativity responds to Studs Terkel's suggestion in 1972 that we need to redefine the work ethic and reclaim its idea "from the banal men who invoke it."[14]

The sanctification of paid work as a means to personal advancement within the work ethic overlaps with the second set of arguments I mentioned above, namely the idea that paid work can ensure independence. It is worth noting that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the American preoccupation with independence as a core republican value called into question the status of the increasing numbers of those who were *dependent* on wage labor for their livelihoods. If the American citizen was someone who was neither a slave nor an aristocrat,[15] it was necessary to distinguish between wage and slave labor in order for the non-slave workforce to credibly claim citizenship. Thus, although in the 1840s white workers invoked 'white slavery' and 'wage slavery' to protest their loss of freedom and independence at the hands of increasingly overbearing and profit-

centuries, the nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth, and the mid-twentieth century on) she notes that in each period one can in fact find "varying degrees of emphasis" on the afterlife, social mobility and self-actualization. Weeks, *Problem with Work*, footnote 7, 238.

[12] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 123.

[13] For example, as Nora Watson, interviewed by Studs Terkel put it, "I think most of us are looking for a calling, not a job." Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1974), xxiv.

[14] Ibid, xxii.

[15] Shklar, *Citizenship*, 3.

driven masters, it was ultimately 'free labor' that won out as a description of wage labor by the 1860s.[16]

Whereas slaves, paupers, 'colonial natives', and housewives, with all their connotations of dependency, were antithetical to a notion of citizenship premised on independence, the white male breadwinner who supported his family through hard work was eventually held up as the ideal citizen.[17] Despite being excluded from full citizenship, the figure of the housewife represented a 'good' form of dependency during the industrial era, but in contemporary postindustrial society, according to Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, all forms of dependency have become 'suspect.' From the pervasive but usually subtle liberal denunciation of middle class women who refuse a career in favor of fulltime parenting, to the more explicit demonization of the so-called 'underclass' (including single mothers who receive welfare and the often racialized long-term unemployed), it is clear that the worker is now the "universal social subject."[18]

As the preceding discussion has suggested, by the modern industrial period in the United States and Britain, employment had become a key marker of social standing and a core attribute of citizenship. According to Ulrich Beck, in Europe and the United States, the "citizen was conceived as a working citizen" and democracy was seen as "work democracy." Paid work could therefore be likened to "the eye of the needle through which everyone had to be threaded if he or she was to become a full-blown citizen in society."[19] Moreover, as workplaces became subject to greater legal

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[16] David Roediger, *The Wages Of Whiteness: Race And The Making Of The American Working Class* (London: Verso, 2007), 67, 81.

[17] Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon, "A Genealogy of 'Dependency:' Tracing a Keyword of the US Welfare State" in *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections On The "Postsocialist" Condition*, by Nancy Fraser (New York: Routledge, 1997), 126-9.

[18] Ibid, 135.

[19] Beck, *Brave New World of Work*, 13, 140.

regulation, as workers gained rights to collective bargaining, and, as I shall discuss in chapter 4, as welfare rights were largely addressed to workers, much of the content of modern legal citizenship was effectively premised on participation in the labor market.

When speaking of the relationship between paid work and citizenship, it is, of course, necessary to specify precisely what is meant by 'citizenship.' Judith Shklar helpfully identifies four senses of citizenship: citizenship as a legally recognized citizen, citizenship as active participation in public affairs, citizenship in terms of republican participatory democracy, and citizenship as 'social standing.' When Shklar claims that people must do paid work in order to become 'full-blown citizens,' it is in this fourth sense of citizenship as social standing or 'public respect.'[20] That paid work confers 'social standing,' 'public respect,' or 'civic dignity' on those who engage in it is most obvious when we look to those who have been excluded from paid work, for they "feel dishonored, not just … poor. They are also scorned by their fellow citizens." According to Shklar, this is because earning is not simply a means of making money, but alongside voting, one of two key attributes of American citizenship.[21]

While this argument helps understand the psychological burden of unemployment in a nation that so highly values paid work, it is not clear that Americans who despise the jobless do so simply because they lack one of the two attributes of citizenship. In fact, the popular perception of welfare recipients as 'scroungers' and 'freeloaders' reveals a different criticism of their behavior, including their alleged disregard for values of fairness, mutual cooperation, and self-reliance.[22] While

[20] Shklar, *Citizenship*. Although Shklar developed these categories with reference to the United States, I believe that they are equally applicable to the United Kingdom.

[21] Ibid, 3.

[22] It is unclear how much the ongoing economic crisis, especially high jobless figures, may have altered this perception of the unemployed by (re?)legitimating structural explanations of unemployment.

paid work establishes a person's social standing, then, it is also understood to both integrate him or her into society, and to fulfill a civic duty. For example, André Gorz argues that when a person enters into an employment contract it is their labor 'in general' that they sell, which in turn incorporates them into the "system of economic and social exchange." The general character of labor that the person sells then "designates them as being a *generally* social, generally useful individual, as capable as anyone else and entitled to the same rights as they are," in other words, as a citizen.[23]

Paid work also establishes a person's social standing by fulfilling a duty he or she is said to owe to society. As Tommie Shelby points out, "civic duties are the obligations that exist between citizens of a democratic polity and that have binding normative force, at least in part, because of the contingent associational ties between citizens."[24] Arguments for the civic duty of paid work can be grounded on an appeal to various accounts of 'reciprocity,' which claim that citizens must work in exchange for receiving the benefits of social life and living under government.[25] As I argue in chapter 4, this understanding of work as a civic duty features prominently in arguments against the introduction of a basic guaranteed income, since the latter would disconnect benefits from work history or willingness.

Beyond philosophical arguments and popular opinion, one can also find examples of the view of paid work as a civic duty in various international and domestic laws. For example, Article 8, Section 3 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights prohibits "forced or

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[23] André Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, trans. Gillian Handyside and Chris Turner (London: Verso, 1989), 139.

[24] Tommie Shelby, "Justice, Work, and the Ghetto Poor," *Law and Ethics of Human Rights* 6, no. 1 (2012): 80, doi: 10.1515/1938-2545.1068.

[25] Ibid, 82-3.

compulsory labor," but excludes from this prohibition any "work or services which forms part of normal civil obligations."[26] At the national level, the so-called 'Contract with America,' proposed by Republican congressional candidates during the 1994 elections and culminating in the passage of the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (and abolition of Aid to Families with Dependent Children) in 1996, "reinforced the idea that welfare recipients have failed to meet the basic threshold requirement of personal responsibility expected of full citizens of the contractual order."[27] As we shall see in chapters 3 and 4, both the discourse on unemployment and the practice of workfare in the United Kingdom closely mirrors these key ideas.

Children, seniors, and people with disabilities are to some extent exempted from the civic duty of paid work, but not only do members of these groups rarely enjoy comparable social status to many full-time workers. In addition, their exemption is temporary and often conditional on an assessed incapacity to work. Thus although it is no longer considered acceptable in the United States or Britain for children to work full-time, it is expected that they participate in some form of full-time education,[28] in no small part designed, and increasingly justified on economic grounds, as preparation for a subsequent life of paid work.[29] Even though retirees are 'free from' paid work, they are only legitimately so if they have 'paid their dues' by participating in a lifetime of paid work. People who cannot work due to mental or physical incapacity are exempted from the civic duty of

[26] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, adopted December 16, 1966, entered into force March 23, 1976. G.A. Res. 2200A (XXI), UN Doc. A/6316 (1966), 999 UNTS 171, reprinted in 6 ILM 368 (1967), accessed October 14, 2013, http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/ccpr.aspx.

[27] Sanford Schram, *After Welfare: The Culture of Postindustrial Social Policy* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 7.

[28] Hence the acronym NEET, which refers to 16-24 year olds who are "not in education, employment, or training."

[29] 'Learning for learning's sake,' by contrast, is considered the height of opulence and a luxury most public education systems cannot afford to indulge.

paid work, but only after government agencies have made every effort to ensure that they are not 'faking it,' and not without loss of social esteem. Ultimately, these exceptions from the civic duty of paid work prove its rule.

While the three themes of the work ethic, independence, and citizenship therefore undoubtedly shed much light on the political significance of paid work, this dissertation develops an alternative and complementary account of the norms and structures of paid work by analyzing them from the vantage point of freedom. If political theorists have tended to overlook the topic of work in general, it goes without saying that the complex connections between freedom and work remain largely unexplored, despite the centrality of both freedom and work in liberal capitalist societies.[30] At this point, however, one might well ask whether Hannah Arendt, for example, doesn't do precisely this in *The Human Condition*, given that she develops a rich and sophisticated account of labor, work, and action (as freedom) as the three principal activities of the human condition.[31]

Whatever the philosophical merits of Arendt's typology, I contend that by insisting that only through action (and not work or labor) can we practice freedom, she shuts the door to analysis of the relationship between work and freedom in contemporary society.[32] Moreover, whereas Arendt wants to resuscitate an ancient understanding of freedom that she sees as all but forgotten in the modern era, and deploys the labor/work/action and private/public distinctions to critique that society, I develop an account of how freedom structures and legitimizes paid work in our present

[30] Although Weeks takes up the question of freedom as part of her political theory of work, she does not consider how freedom might shore up our commitment to paid work. See note 33 below.

[31] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

[32] My (critical) reading of Arendt thus parallels the one Weeks offers when the latter notes the unhelpful "distance" Arendtian categories place "between both labor and work on the one hand, and the legitimate business of the political on the other hand." Weeks, *Problem with Work,* 15.

social formation.[33] In a word, whereas Arendt offers a *critique* of contemporary society by judging it against concepts that are external to the present social formation, I propose a *critical theory* of it by exploring what work and freedom 'do' in our present, at the same time as identifying obstacles to, and possibilities for the expansion of freedom in relation to work.[34] In the concluding chapter I shall have more to say about how this dissertation contributes to critical theory, including in what sense it should be considered 'critical.'

As we saw above, in Weber's analysis the Protestant work ethic helps to explain a strong commitment to the value of labor; the critical thrust of his project is that we are less free than we may think we are when we continue to allow our lives to be determined by it. In this respect, it is useful to approach *The Protestant Ethic* as a *critical theory* of early twentieth century industrial society, in the sense that the emergence of the Protestant ethic and its subsequent secularization help explain how, as Louis Althusser would later put it, the social formation reproduces the "conditions of

[33] I do not use the term "social formation" as a synonym for "society." Rather, as Samuel Chambers puts it, the concept "indicates a combination of discontinuous and overlapping domains — including the economic, the social, the cultural, and the political — that we often take to be separate or separable." Samuel A. Chambers, "Snapshots of the Social Formation: The Agony and the Ecstasy of Lance Armstrong," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, March 19, 2013, accessed October 4, 2013, http://lareviewofbooks.org/essay/snapshots-of-the-social-formation-the-agony-and-the-ecstasy-of-lance-armstrong/. In Ben Brewster's glossary of Althusser's terms, "social formation" is defined as the "concrete complex whole comprising economic practice, political practice and ideological practice at a certain place and stage of development." In his interpolation, however, Althusser somewhat confusingly adds the phrase "A concept denoting 'society' so-called." It is in Chambers's and Brewster's sense that I shall use the term throughout this dissertation. Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Vintage Book, 1970), 251.

[34] In this respect my project also contrasts with Weeks's. Although I share her conviction that we need to rethink the meaning and place of work in our lives in order to expand our freedom, unlike Weeks, I consider how work is legitimized by freedom both within the dominant neoliberal ideology, and through the contemporary regime of flexibility. In making the distinction between a critique of society and a critical theory of society I draw on Samuel A. Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 124.

production."[35] But while I am sympathetic to Weber's concerns about our lack choice to "work in a calling," this dissertation probes the operation of freedom itself in shaping the norms and structures of paid work as well as oppositional claims and demands in relation to it.

In the spirit of critical theory, therefore, the studies I undertake in the pages that follow embrace both explanatory and normative modes of analysis.[36] In particular, I suggest that maintaining a rigid distinction between freedom and work obscures the fact that, at the level of both ideology and practice, freedom helps sustain our commitment to paid work. Yet as I shall show throughout the dissertation, the ability of measures such as flexibility and the basic guaranteed income to expand our freedom in relation to work proves more limited than many might expect, due in part to the central position we accord paid work in our individual and collective lives.

Indeed, while I am sympathetic to a broadly Marxian account of exploitation,[37] and recognize the various forms of intimidation and abuse that occur in the realm of work, the chapters of this dissertation respond to a set of concerns that stem from the meaning and value of paid work: the undervaluation of many socially necessary activities, often on account of being associated with women, people of color, and immigrants; the social relegation or marginalization of those who do not or cannot work for pay at all, such as elderly or disabled persons, residents of economically

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[35] Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation)," in *Mapping Ideology*, ed. Slavoj Zizek (London: Verso, 1994), 100.

[36] See Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 5-6.

[37] For example, Young adopts an appealing account of the injustice of exploitation as resting on "social processes that bring about a transfer of energies from one group to another produce unequal distributions," and on "social institutions [that] enable a few to accumulate while they constrain many more." Ibid, 53.

disadvantaged areas, and full-time parents and carers;[38] and the pressure that paid work puts on all other dimensions of healthy and fulfilling lives, whether service, play, love, or repose. As I shall argue, attaining greater freedom in relation to work entails a collective rethinking of the place of work in our lives, as well as what counts as work in the first place.[39] In the remainder of this introduction, allow me to offer a preview of the four chapters to come.

Chapter 1 begins with the suggestion by Theodor Adorno that "Labour, which is a prescribed relationship within society, is reinterpreted to signify freedom."[40] This allusive claim serves as a provocation for my argument that freedom in neoliberal thought helps shore up an idealized vision of society centered on paid work. In developing this argument, the chapter offers a critical reading of Hayek as a leading philosopher of neoliberalism. In particular, it argues that Hayek both defangs negative liberty as a foundational liberal concept with which we might critique the structural coercion to take part in the labor market (a possibility I suggest that Berlin's concept of negative liberty perhaps surprisingly keeps open), and celebrates entrepreneurialism as the 'proper' use of that freedom. Drawing on career counseling literature I show that Hayek's commitment to the figure of the entrepreneur resembles contemporary concerns for self-realization through work as

[38] For Young, marginalization not only raises issues of distributive justice, "it also involves the deprivation of cultural, practical, and institutionalized conditions for exercising capacities in a context of recognition and interaction." Ibid, 55. For an empirically rich account of marginality, see chapter 8 of Loïc Wacquant, *Urban Outcasts: A Comparative Sociology of Advanced Marginality* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2008).

[39] While Weeks and I are in broad agreement about the need to rethink the meaning of work, my critical explanation of the role of freedom in sustaining our commitment to paid work, and identification of the value of work as an obstacle to realizing the emancipatory potential within the present social formation, particularly with respect to flexibility, marks my approach as distinct from hers.

[40] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto?" trans. Rodney Livinstone. *New Left Review* 65 (2010): 38, accessed October 30, 2013, http://newleftreview.org/II/65/theodor-adorno-max-horkheimer-towards-a-new-manifesto.

a vocation, and helps nourish the notion that, when we engage in the labor market, we act as free subjects.

Chapter 2 shifts the analysis from the domain of philosophy to that of policies, regulations, and practices, to explore the regime of flexibility as a neoliberal instantiation of freedom in relation to work. With its connotations of freedom and efficiency, flexibility serves as a guiding principle of almost unquestionable value in contemporary political and economic discourse and practice. It is precisely this hegemony that this chapter aims to disrupt. I show that flexibility constructs and naturalizes an individualistic social formation by dismantling collective institutions, particularly unions, and empowering individual employees through a menu of rights and norms. Although flexibility involves working practices that promise greater individual freedom in relation to work, access to them is limited to more privileged members of the workforce.

Moreover, the decollectivizing and individualizing modes of flexibility that I identify compel and reward a spirit of self-entrepreneurialism and adaptability. By developing a portrait of the flexible worker, I argue that flexibility comes at the price of the increasing encroachment by work into the once more bounded sphere of 'private life.' Rather than the flexible worker taking control of work, work has enveloped the life of the flexible worker and created a subject more committed than ever to devoting his or her energies to its demands, which in turn imperils non-monetary activities, such as leisure, care, and community service. In anticipation of the two subsequent chapters, I argue that capitalizing upon the emancipatory potential of flexibility calls for the 'refusal of work' and the introduction of a basic guaranteed income.

Signs of a full-blown refusal of work are few and far between, but this does not mean that the meaning and value of work are stable or uncontested. Indeed, while the post-structural axiom of the "radical contingency of social relations" suggests the inherent *instability* of the meaning of work, this instability may not always be apparent or acknowledged. Chapter 3 brings the contingency – and

potential fragility – of what I call the ideology of work to the fore, however, by exploring the juxtaposition of discourses on work that appeared in Britain following the riots in August 2011 and the public sector strikes in November of the same year. While responses to the riots feature an outpouring of support for the notion that paid work provides the basis of a 'responsible society' (to paraphrase David Cameron), the public sector strikes demonstrate that the demands of work cannot be continuously expanded without meeting significant opposition. Moreover, this instability in the ideology of work can be traced back to contrasting accounts of the relationship between employment and freedom: Whereas responses to the riots articulate work with responsible freedom, public sector workers mobilized in support of a period of life free from paid work. In the final section of the chapter I argue that the strikes express the germ of the autonomist Marxist 'refusal of work,' at the same time as using my analysis of the riots and strikes to bring new insights to the theory of the refusal.

If retirement represents a temporary period of freedom from paid work, the basic guaranteed income would appear to extend that period for the duration of a person's adult life. Yet as I argue in chapter 4, although proposals for a basic guaranteed income *appear* to make a strong challenge to the work society, many arguments for it in fact extol its capacity to *boost* employment. Drawing on poststructural political theory, I argue that such arguments remain attached to what I shall call the fantasy of the work society. To be sure, a basic income motivated by the goal of full employment and introduced within a society still committed to the central value of paid work would offer benefits in terms of distributive justice. But I argue that such a scheme would fail to tackle what I identify as the three main 'problems' with contemporary work: the pervasive mismatch between the social recognition that an occupation confers on a person and the contribution it makes to society; the relegation of those who cannot or will not perform paid work to an inferior social rank, despite the fact that many nonetheless contribute to society through various unpaid activities;

and the pressure that paid work puts on non-paid activities that make up a rich and rewarding life, including care, love, service to the community and play. As a result, the freedom the basic income offers may be less meaningful than it first appears. Only a more radical critique of the work society itself can help realize the emancipatory potential of not only the basic income, but also the existing regime of flexibility.

Chapter 1: Freedom in Neoliberal Philosophy

I. Introduction

I began the last chapter with a brief quotation of Vice President Joe Biden's speech at the Democratic National Convention in 2012. His succinct statement of the enduring significance of work encapsulates three key points: the material necessity of earning a wage in a capitalist economy, the dignity and respect that doing so confers upon those who do it, and the social inclusion that gainful employment facilitates. In that chapter I also argued that the work ethic, the notion that through paid work one 'earns' independence, and the articulation of work with citizenship interweave to give a positive valence to paid work. And of course, while these factors help understand why we consent to paid work, the near impossibility of meeting all of our needs through non-monetized channels means that we also experience structural coercion to sell our labor power.[1]

Given this structural coercion, along with the pressures that many experience to find and keep gainful employment in order to maintain a sense of dignity and respect, it seems that the norms and structures of paid work are far removed from the realm of freedom. Indeed, the widespread tendency to conceptualize work "as disciplined time and leisure as free time" points to an obvious tension between work and freedom, even if this overestimates the degree to which our free time is really 'free' in a strictly voluntarist sense.[2] In this chapter I want to complement existing accounts of the preeminence of work by arguing that, despite these very real tensions between work and freedom, the conception of freedom that appears in the dominant neoliberal ideology helps shore up an idealized vision of society centered on paid work. In particular, I show that a neoliberal conceptualization of freedom and the economy lacks the 'teeth' with which to criticize the material

[1] For example, Weeks invokes structural coercion, individual consent, and the work ethic to explain why we work so long and hard. Weeks, *Problem with Work,* 37.

[2] Chris Rojek, *The Labour of Leisure: The Culture of Free Time* (London: Sage, 2010), 24.

necessity of entering the labor market, at the same time as it positively celebrates an entrepreneurial orientation to work as a practice of freedom.

In making this argument about the legitimating role of freedom in contemporary capitalism, I take two insights as provocations. The first comes from Theodor Adorno, who in 1956 uttered the following tantalizing statement in a recorded conversation with his longtime collaborator, Max Horkheimer: "Labour, which is a prescribed relationship within society, is reinterpreted to signify freedom."[3] Adorno gave scant justification for this claim, but does suggest that the "idea of freedom from labour is replaced by the possibility of choosing one's work. Self-determination means that within the division of labour already laid down I can slip into the sector that promises me the greatest rewards."[4] In one sense, this chapter can be read as an attempt to flesh out this allusive claim by engaging with neoliberal political philosophy.

The second insight that propels my argument overlaps with the first and comes from Kathi Weeks herself, who describes the postindustrial work ethic as characterizing "work as a path to individual self-expression, self-development, and creativity."[5] Indeed, this postindustrial ethic bears a clear resemblance to Adorno's emphasis on choice in relation to work. As Weeks understands it, the postindustrial work ethic, which marked a shift from the industrial work ethic's emphasis on social mobility as a result of hard work, arose in part out of the movements of the 1960s and early 1970s that opposed the "disciplinary subjectivity of the Fordist period and the problem of worker alienation that they helped to publicize."[6] It is beyond the scope of this paper to consider the particular discourses and practices that might have led Adorno to his description of work in the late

[3] Adorno and Horkheimer, "Towards a New Manifesto?" 38.

[4] Ibid, 37-38.

[5] Weeks, *Problem With Work*, 46.

[6] Ibid, 60.

1950s, but clearly the idea of work as a site of self-determination has roots that extend beyond the social movements of the 1960s. Instead of focusing on the role of workers in demanding and, to some extent, winning employment that promises a measure of self-realization, I turn to neoliberal philosophy to expand our understanding of how freedom has shaped the norms and practices of paid work in contemporary society.[7]

Before laying out my argument in more detail, I want to briefly situate it in a broader historical and conceptual context concerning the relationship between freedom and capitalism. First, as we saw in the introductory chapter, although in the 1840s white workers in the US had used the terms 'white slavery' and 'wage slavery' to highlight the injustice of their terms and conditions of work, by the 1860s 'free labor' had won the discursive battle over how to describe wage labor.[8] As Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon put it, "when white workingmen demanded civil and electoral rights" they needed to reinterpret the "meaning of wage labor so as to divest it of the association with dependency."[9] Needless to say, just because workers labeled their labor 'free' does not mean that they thereby abandoned all criticism of their working conditions. Nevertheless, we need to mark this shift in the meaning of work, and by implication, of the social identity of those who do and do not perform it, as related to the articulation of employment with freedom that this chapter will explore in the work of neoliberal philosophy.

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[7] The text that I shall mainly analyze, Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty*, was published two years after Adorno's conversation with Horkheimer, which means that unless the arguments Hayek developed in that work had already permeated society, they could not have influenced Adorno. Indeed, although neoliberal thought began to develop in the 1930s, it was only from the late 1970s that it began to significantly reshape politics, economy, and society in the United States and Britain.

[8] Roediger, *Wages Of Whiteness*, 67, 81.

[9] Fraser and Gordon, "Genealogy of 'Dependency,'" 127.

Moreover, on a conceptual plane, freedom and equality are deeply woven into the very fabric of capitalism, and are thus clearly not unique innovations of neoliberal thought. For example, in the *Grundrisse* Karl Marx writes that,

> Out of the act of exchange itself, the individual, each of them, is reflected in himself as its exclusive and dominant (determinant) subject. With that, then, the complete freedom of the individual is posited: voluntary transaction; no force on either side; positing of the self as means, or as serving, only as means, in order to posit the self as an end in itself, as dominant and primary [ubergreifend]; finally, the self-seeking interest which brings nothing of a higher order to realization; the other is also recognized and acknowledged as one who likewise realizes his self-seeking interest, so that both know that the common interest exists only in the duality, many-sidedness, and autonomous development of the exchanges between self-seeking interests. The general interest is precisely the generality of self-seeking interest. Therefore, when the economic form, exchange, posits the all-sided equality of its subjects, then the content, the individual as well as the objective material which drives towards the exchange, is *freedom*. Equality and freedom are thus not only respected in exchange based on exchange values but, also, the exchange of exchange values is the productive, real basis of all *equality* and *freedom*.[10]

Thus, when Milton Friedman claims that the "possibility of co-ordination through voluntary co-operation rests on the elementary – yet frequently denied – proposition that both parties to an economic transaction benefit from it, *provided the transaction is bi-laterally voluntary and informed*," and that "exchange can therefore bring about co-ordination without coercion,"[11] he is articulating well established ideas rather than developing new ones. This is not to say that *neo*-liberalism is a misnomer, however, and in the next section I discuss what is 'new' about it. Here, though, I want to emphasize the perhaps obvious point that neoliberalism did not provide the first theorization of capitalist economic and social relations in terms of freedom.

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[10] Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations on the Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 244-5.

[11] Milton Friedman (with the assistance of Rose D. Friedman), *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 13.

Having cleared this ground, allow me to preview my method and the argument that I shall develop in the remainder of this chapter. In what follows, I read Hayek alongside the work of Isaiah Berlin to draw out the distinctive features of Hayek's account of freedom. In doing so, I want to stress that I do not mean to endorse Berlin's argument as expressing some 'true' or 'pristine' account of freedom. There are some important and persuasive critiques of Berlin's theory,[12] and it is quite likely that some other theory entirely would provide a stronger foundation for a 'critique of work.'[13] But since, as I noted in the introduction, I do not propose such a critique, I have selected Berlin's work because it helps bring into relief two significant features of Hayek's account of freedom.

First, although Hayek's concept of liberty appears on its face simply to reiterate Berlin's concept of negative liberty as non-interference, I show that, on closer inspection, Hayek sketches a significantly narrower range of actions that constitute coercion and unfreedom than does Berlin. I argue that, whereas Berlin's account of negative liberty perhaps surprisingly leaves open the possibility of a radical critique of the material, political and social pressures we face to join the 'world of work,' Hayek's theory can admit of no such claim and flatly rejects the very notion of structural coercion. While we should, of course, exercise caution in treating Berlin and Hayek as offering definitive accounts of liberalism and neoliberalism respectively, this finding nevertheless marks the defanging of negative freedom as a critical concept at the hands of neoliberal philosophy.

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[12] For example, Thomas Dumm offers a rich reading of Berlin that draws attention to Berlin's displacement of questions concerning the political construction of space in his account of negative liberty. Thomas L. Dumm, *Michel Foucault and the Politics of Freedom* (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 1996), 48-49.

[13] The republican and humanist Marxist traditions are two possibilities. For example, Alex Gourevitch suggests that "because republicanism has been especially sensitive to the paradox of slavery and freedom, it is from that tradition it has made sense to ask the question 'can work be free?'" Alex Gourevitch, "Labor and Republican Liberty," *Constellations* 18, no. 3 (2011): 445, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8675.2011.00644.x. Of course, Karl Marx's early writings, particularly those addressing alienation, also offer the basis for a freedom-based critique of contemporary work.

As my earlier comments suggest, this conceptual narrowing of freedom cannot 'all by itself' account for our attachment to the value of work. Not only do discourses such as those concerning the dignity of work continue to play an important role in social and political life. In addition, such an interpretation of my argument might lead to the patently false conclusion that, prior to the ascendancy of neoliberal thought, the notion that employment abrogated freedom enjoyed widespread support. My claim is therefore the more modest one that neoliberal philosophy offers a particularly narrow version of negative liberty, which in turn helps shore up the idea that the sale of labor power in capitalism constitutes a free act. The obvious implication of this point is that critics of neoliberalism need to advance alternative conceptions of freedom and coercion. Throughout the remainder of this dissertation I shall contribute to this task by considering how we might realize the possibilities that already exist in the present social formation for the expansion of freedom, particularly with respect to the regime of flexibility (chapter 2) and the basic guaranteed income (chapter 4).

Of course, to claim that Hayek's theory of coercion leads to an "immunization of the economic realm against any kind of criticism based on power or coercive effects inherent in it,"[14] is not the same as saying that work constitutes a practice or instantiation of freedom in and of itself. But as I show in sections IV and V of this chapter, neoliberal freedom provides the ideological support for the figure of the enterprising subject, which in turn undergirds the postindustrial ethic of work as self-realization. Using the work of Berlin once again to shine a light on Hayek, I suggest that Hayek's embrace of the entrepreneur and of competitive capitalism goes beyond a commitment to negative freedom as non-coercion, and instead resembles in certain respects a version of positive freedom as self-realization.

[14] Thomas Biebricher, "Power in Neoliberal Thought," (paper presented at the annual meeting for the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Illinois, August 29-September 1, 2013): 13.

Such a finding might appear implausible given Hayek's worries in *The Road to Serfdom* that socialism leads to fascism and the destruction of individual freedom by organizing society around a "unitary end."[15] Of course, given market freedoms we have the choice about what kind of work to perform – a choice which Hayek stresses that subjects of planned economies lack. Yet in presenting competitive capitalism as in the 'true' and long-term interests of the masses whatever their own thoughts on the matter; in offering an account of freedom that shores it up; and in depicting the entrepreneur as a more fully self-realized subject than the passive employee, I contend that Hayek moves surprisingly in the direction of positive freedom as theorized by Berlin. It thus becomes clear that freedom in Hayek's theory is not only significantly circumscribed, but helps nourish the notion that, when we actively adjust ourselves to the dictates of the market, we are in fact, acting as free subjects. Before fleshing out this argument in the remainder of the chapter, I need first to explain what I think it means to read Friedrich A. Hayek as a philosopher of neoliberalism and what benefits such an exercise can bring.

II. Reading Hayek as a Philosopher of Neoliberalism

To understand what it means to read Hayek as a philosopher of neoliberalism, one must deal with the vexed question of what in fact constitutes neoliberalism and who should stand among its chief authors. It is important to note that, like every 'ism,' neoliberalism does not constitute a unified body of thought and practice, but instead encompasses a range of theoretical arguments and policy prescriptions that have been proposed and adopted in response to changing circumstances. In the face of this heterogeneity, one scholar quite persuasively identifies the attempt to revive liberalism as the "common denominator of neoliberalism."[16] But others offer more substantive definitions. For

[15] Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 31, 56.

[16] Biebricher, "Power in Neoliberal Thought," 4-6.

example, Loic Wacquant suggests that what is 'neo' about neoliberalism is the "*remaking and redeployment of the state* as the core agency that actively fabricates the subjectivities, social relations and collective representations suited to making the fiction of markets real and consequential."[17] Finally, Daniel Stedman Jones defines transatlantic neoliberalism as the "free market ideology based on individual liberty and limited government that connected human freedom to the actions of the rational, self-interested actor in the competitive marketplace."[18] One could go on quoting slightly contrasting definitions almost *ad infinitum*, but what I take as central to any plausible understanding of neoliberalism is the effort to reformulate classical liberalism and its various arts of government to produce and maintain a society organized around the free market. This connection between freedom and market activity will play a key role in my account of the contemporary meaning and value of work, and we will also encounter echoes of it when we consider arguments for flexibility in chapter 2. But it will help first to consider briefly the historical origins of neoliberalism as a philosophy.

When a group of 26 European and American "liberal sympathizers," including Hayek, met in Paris in 1938 at the Colloque Walter Lippmann, the term 'neoliberal' was coined to name a refurbished liberalism that would aim to avoid the twin perils of both laissez faire and collectivist theory and practice.[19] In fact, to the neoliberals of the 1930s and 1940s, the Great Depression had resulted from the failure of laissez-faire policies (including "trusts, cartels, and monopolies"), and it paved the way for collectivism and planning in the shape of the British Keynesian state, New Deal

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[17] Loic Wacquant, "Three Steps to a Historical Anthropology of Actually Existing Neoliberalism," *Social Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2012): 68, doi: 10.1111/j.1469-8676.2011.00189.x.

[18] Daniel Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe: Hayek, Friedman, and the Birth of Neoliberal Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 2.

[19] Rachel S. Turner, "The 'Rebirth of Liberalism': The Origins of Neo-Liberal Ideology," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12, no. 1 (2007): 71, doi: 10.1080/13569310601095614. Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 6.

reforms (which had given a problematically collectivist valence to the term 'liberal'), and the rise of Bolshevism and Fascism in Europe.[20] To stem the tide of this collectivism, Hayek envisioned an international society that would bring together intellectually isolated neoliberal thinkers with the task of breathing new life into liberalism.[21]

At the opening address in 1947 of the Mont Pelerin Society, the group established for this very purpose, Hayek spoke of the intellectual task of "purging traditional liberal theory of certain accidental accretions, which have become attached to it in the course of time, and also facing up to some real problems which an over-simplified liberalism has shirked or which have become apparent only since it has turned into a somewhat stationary and rigid creed."[22] By the late 1940s, neoliberalism had become a "revered symbol of anti-socialism and a powerful voice of liberal hopes," and although there were significant differences of opinion among those who took part in the movement, Rachel Turner suggests that their ideas "somehow managed to co-exist and form a coherent ideology."[23]

Given the dominance of neo-Keynesian policies in Britain and the United States, the period from 1950 to 1980 was a "superficially lean time for neoliberals," but it was also during these years

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[20] Turner, "'Rebirth of Liberalism,'" 70. Biebricher, "Power in Neoliberal Thought," 5. Indeed, in *The Constitution of Liberty*, Hayek later characterized laissez-faire as "a highly ambiguous and misleading description of the principles on which a liberal policy is based." Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty*, quoted in Werner Bonefeld, "Freedom and the Strong State: On German Ordoliberalism," *New Political Economy* 17, no. 5 (2012): 638.

[21] Turner, "'Rebirth of Liberalism,'" 74.

[22] Quoted in Biebricher, "Power in Neoliberal Thought," 6.

[23] Turner, "'Rebirth of Liberalism,'" 68, 69. See also Biebricher, "Power in Neoliberal Thought," 6. On the differences between German and Austrian neoliberals, see Bonefeld, "Freedom and the Strong State," and Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978-79*, ed. Michel Senellart, trans. Graham Burchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

when "neoliberalism generated intellectual coherence and matured politically."[24] Turner notes that it is "difficult to place" the significance of the Mont Pelerin Society, but she quotes Richard Higgs, who estimates that the Society's "influence was probably most significant during the dark age between its founding and the mid-1970s, when classical liberal ideas came close to being suffocated."[25] Although "the line of causation is often impossible to draw," the fact that the Mont Pelerin Society brought together prominent intellectuals and politicians suggests that it had "some form of impact on the attitudes of politicians and the public at large."[26]

While Hayek is one of many neoliberal thinkers in this movement he remains perhaps the most recognized and widely read. For example, Margaret Thatcher wrote in her autobiography that Hayek's *The Road to Serfdom* was the "most powerful critique of socialist planning and the socialist state" that she had read in the 1940s.[27] Moreover, Hayek continues to receive adulation from the likes of Paul Ryan, Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh in the United States.[28] Hayek's work commends itself to those seeking a deeper understanding of neoliberal political philosophy, and his 1960 book, *The Constitution of Liberty* offers a rich and detailed account of freedom and thus lends itself to the

[24] Stedman Jones, *Masters of the Universe*, 7.

[25] Turner, "'Rebirth of Liberalism,'" 78.

[26] Ibid, 79.

[27] Quoted in Simon Griffiths, "'Comrade Hayek' or the Revival of Liberalism? Andrew Gamble's Engagement with the Work of Friedrich Hayek," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 12, no.2 (2007): 190, doi: 10.1080/13569310701285032.

[28] It is worth noting, however, that some of Hayek's contemporary devotees read his policy prescriptions somewhat selectively, and in particular seem to ignore his views on health care and welfare. Bernard Harcourt, "How Paul Ryan enslaves Friedrich Hayek's The Road to Serfdom," *The Guardian*, September 12, 2012, accessed August 20, 2013, www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/sep/12/paul-ryan-enslaves-friedrich-hayek-road-serfdom.

type of conceptual analysis that this chapter will perform. But before analyzing the specific claims that Hayek advances in this work, we need to consider the goals that animate it.

Hayek makes clear that his purpose in *The Constitution of Liberty* "is to picture an ideal, to show how it can be achieved, and to explain what its realization would mean in practice."[29] Indeed, looking to the earlier success of the socialists, Hayek learned the value of utopian thinking and thus set neoliberals the task of constructing a "'liberal utopia' based on the principles of free trade and freedom of opportunity, regardless of how small its prospects of early realization may be."[30] For this reason, we clearly should not read Hayek's work as an attempt to describe the social reality of his time. Of course, one might accept this observation yet maintain that, as an architect of neoliberalism, Hayek's ideal has in some sense come to describe *our* neoliberal social formation. Allow me to explain why this conclusion is also problematic.

Against a tendency to reduce neoliberalism to the practical realization of the work of authors like Hayek or Milton Friedman, various scholars persuasively argue that empirically accurate analyses of a given social formation require greater attention to the particular practices that make up "actually existing" neoliberalism.[31] For example, Nikolas Rose treats the "various tactics" undertaken by Thatcher's Conservative government not as "realizations of any philosophy" but as "contingent lash-ups of thought and action… in which new ways of governing were invented in a rather *ad hoc* way."[32] Work in the field of cultural political economy lends weight to this position when it

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[29] Friedrich A. Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), v.

[30] Turner, "'Rebirth of Liberalism,'" 75.

[31] Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, "Neoliberalizing Space," *Antipode* 34, no. 3 (2002): 382, doi: 10.1111/1467-8330.00247.

[32] Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom: Reframing Political Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 27.

emphasizes the fact that "not all possible discursive construals can be durably constructed materially."[33] In this sense, even if Thatcher's government *had* wanted to realize the entirety of Hayek's philosophy, the success of such an attempt would be conditional on "the properties of the materials (including social phenomena such as actors and institutions) used to construct social reality."[34] Perhaps unsurprisingly, therefore, scholars can identify "significant discrepancies" between the "normative policy prescriptions of neoliberal polemicists" and the institutions that exist during the neoliberal era.[35]

As I have indicated, these points highlight the naivety of reading Hayek's work as a *description* of 'actually existing' neoliberalism. Yet these considerations hardly dispense with the benefits of a close reading of Hayek as a *philosopher* of neoliberalism. What are those benefits? First, even though 'actually existing' neoliberalism understood in terms of concrete and localized practices and institutions parts ways with neoliberalism as a set of more abstract ideals, a clear sense of what those ideals *are* furnishes an indispensable tool with which to understand and criticize the ongoing neoliberal project. How are we to assess claims that, for example, the solution to the present crisis is 'more' neoliberalism if we abandon efforts to understand the philosophical positions and ideals that underpin it?[36]

Second, while the institutions of 'actually existing' neoliberalism may not precisely match those of neoliberal authors, might it not be the case that a broader neoliberal imaginary, political

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[33] Bob Jessop, "Critical Semiotic Analysis and Cultural Political Economy," *Critical Discourse Studies* 1, no. 2 (2004): 164, doi: 10.1080/1740590041000167450 6.

[34] Ibid.

[35] Damien Cahill, "Beyond Neoliberalism: Crisis and the Prospects for Progressive Alternatives," *New Political Science* 33, no. 4 (2011): 483, doi: 10.1080/07393148.2011.619820.

[36] For this point I am indebted to Thomas Biebricher's response to my question at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association in Chicago, Illinois, August 29-September 1, 2013.

rationality or ideology somewhat faithfully reflects the philosophical positions of thinkers like Hayek?[37] For example, both Wendy Brown and Nikolas Rose invoke the Foucauldian concept of political rationality to offer an analysis of neoliberalism that goes beyond its economic policy prescriptions.[38] In particular, both authors place entrepreneurialism at the center of the neoliberal political rationality, which dictates that as many human activities as possible should be organized according to the model of the market, and which constructs the ideal subject in the image of the entrepreneur. While one can find evidence of this political rationality in a multitude of texts – political speeches, technical and self-help manuals, television shows, and so forth – I suggest that the philosophical work of thinkers like Hayek deserves close attention because it offers an unusually sustained theoretical development of the key tenets. Having cleared this ground, we are at last in a position to develop the core arguments of the chapter.

III. Berlin, Hayek, and Freedom as Non-Coercion

I want to begin this section with a brief overview of Isaiah Berlin's "Two Concepts of Liberty," first delivered as a lecture in 1958, because this text offers an indispensable analysis of freedom as well as a sophisticated defense of liberalism.[39] By reading Hayek alongside Berlin, I show the family resemblance between their negative concepts of liberty. But more importantly, I hope to accent the narrowness of Hayek's account of freedom, and thus its insensitivity to the structural

[37] Although I recognize that these terms have different theoretical lineages and perhaps capture slightly different concepts and processes, in many ways I take their meanings to be overlapping.

[38] Wendy Brown, "Neo-liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy," *Theory and Event* 7, no. 1 (2003): 19, doi: 10.1353/tae.2003.0020. Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 27.

[39] Indeed, according to Nancy Hirschmann, "most formulations [of freedom] still divide along the lines offered by Isaiah Berlin… of 'negative' and 'positive' liberty." Nancy J. Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty: Toward a Feminist Theory of Freedom* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), 4.

coercion to engage in paid work. The defanging of freedom as a critical concept in turn helps secure the willing and active consent of those "who live only so long as they find work."[40]

Although the meaning of freedom is, as Berlin puts it, "so porous that there is little interpretation that it seems able to resist," in his view two particular concepts stand out for their historical significance and likely future impact on human affairs.[41] They are, of course, negative and positive liberty. Whereas negative liberty rests on the claim that "I am normally said to be free to the degree to which no man or body of men interferes with my activity," its positive counterpart "derives from the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master."[42] In this section I focus on negative liberty; in the next two sections I consider in more detail Berlin's account of positive liberty.

Berlin's specification of negative liberty, which he traces back to such thinkers as Locke, Mill, Constant, and Tocqueville, is explicitly political. That is to say, Berlin draws a clear line between not being able to attain certain goals (for example, jumping "more than ten feet in the air") due to "mere incapacity," and being "prevented by others from doing what I could otherwise do."[43] This distinction has a particular bearing on economic matters, and he offers a brief yet suggestive analysis of the terms 'economic freedom' and 'economic slavery.' As Berlin notes, there may be no law against my purchasing a loaf of bread, but I may still think I am a victim of economic slavery or oppression if "I believe that my inability to get a given thing is due to the fact that other human

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[40] Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 9.

[41] Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberty: Isaiah Berlin*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 168. The republican conception of freedom as non-domination provides an important third account of freedom.

[42] Ibid, 169, 178.

[43] Ibid, 169.

beings have made arrangements whereby I am, whereas others are not, prevented from having enough money with which to pay for it."[44] Within this seemingly straightforward discussion lie (at least) two ambiguities.

First, Berlin suggests that one may "very plausibly" make the claim of oppression in the bread example, but in doing so he displays ambivalence about whether such a case does in fact constitute an infringement of freedom. Indeed, he sums up this discussion by noting that the "criterion of oppression is the part *that I believe* to be played by other human beings" (emphasis added), with this belief resting on a "particular social and economic theory about the causes of my poverty or weakness."[45] Berlin does not offer an evaluation of the merits of any such theory, and thus leaves the reader unclear as to whether, in *his* view, the person who cannot buy a loaf of bread experiences oppression. Perhaps doing so would have led Berlin too far from his path, since he would have needed to establish various details in the example and then weigh competing theories. In any case, Berlin does not *rule out* the possibility of oppression in this example, and in this respect, as I shall show below, he offers a more expansive account of negative liberty than Hayek.

If we accept Berlin's "criterion of oppression," it becomes clear that what counts as an infringement of liberty will remain contested unless we have a widely approved social or economic theory to help adjudicate claims of oppression. Yet Berlin's famous commitment to value pluralism suggests the inevitability of conflict over theories that might clear up the matter once and for all.[46] Indeed, Thomas Dumm notes that "against the desire to confirm the belief in a final and certain

[44] Ibid, 170.

[45] Ibid, 170.

[46] Berlin's "entire intellectual universe turned on his insight into value pluralism (which he sometimes believed he had been the first to discover.)" Jan-Werner Müller, "Fear and Freedom: On 'Cold War Liberalism,'" *European Journal of Political Theory* 7, no. 1 (2008): 53, doi: 10.1177/1474885107083403.

solution to problems, Berlin poses the openness that is the core ethic of the liberal tradition."[47] Moreover, it is worth noting that, like other so-called 'cold war liberals,' Berlin did not leave a "systematic work of political theory,"[48] nor did he offer, as Steven Lukes puts it, "a 'theory' of liberty… for our times."[49] Based on these observations we might say that Berlin sought to explicate the general criteria according to which one should decide whether an infringement of liberty had taken place, while refraining from offering a definitive pronouncement on the plausibility of particular social and economic theories. I shall return to the significance of this point below.

Second, and related to the first point, there is some ambiguity concerning the role of intentions in whether an act counts as coercive or oppressive. For example, Berlin somewhat confusingly claims both that "coercion implies the deliberate interference of other human beings within the area in which I could otherwise act," and that the "criterion of oppression is the part…played by other human beings,… with or without the intention of doing so, in frustrating my wishes."[50] As Hirschmann points out, Berlin claimed in a later formulation "that obstacles need not be deliberate," although as she understands it, "they still had to be attributable to specific humans who could be held accountable for them."[51] In fact, in one later text, Berlin suggests a distinction between the "absence of freedom" on one hand, and "oppression" on the other: whereas the former may follow from "alterable human practices" whether intentional or otherwise, acts that constitute oppression are "deliberately intended." Yet even to this explicit requirement of intent Berlin adds

[47] Dumm, *Michel Foucault*, 54.

[48] Müller, "Fear and Freedom," 58.

[49] Steven Lukes, "The Singular and the Plural: On the Distinctive Liberalism of Isaiah Berlin," *Social Research* 61, no. 3 (1994): 693, http://www.jstor.org/stable/40971053.

[50] Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 170, 169.

[51] Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, 17.

the possibility that oppression may arise simply when acts "are accompanied by awareness that they may block paths" to choices that a subject might make.[52] Based on this last point, I suggest that Berlin would resist a rigid distinction between coercion and oppression based on the absence or presence of intent, since oppression may arise simply when an individual or group can reasonably be expected to foresee the consequences of their actions.[53]

Turning now to the work of Hayek, I want to first point out the obvious similarity between his understanding of freedom and Berlin's. On the face of it, Hayek offers a view of freedom in line with Berlin's concept of negative liberty when he suggests that "the range of physical possibilities from which a person can choose at any given moment has no relevance to freedom," but that instead, "the only infringement on it is coercion by men."[54] Indeed, John Gray notes that Hayek understood his own concept of freedom as a negative one, a claim which Gray disputes for reasons which need not detain us here.[55] Despite this superficial similarity, however, a closer reading of some of the examples the two thinkers give to work through their respective accounts of freedom reveals disagreement.

Recall that, according to Berlin, if I am unable to buy a loaf of bread because of human arrangements that leave me too poor to do so, I can "very plausibly" argue that I am a victim of

[52] Berlin, "Introduction," in *Liberty: Isaiah Berlin*, ed. Hardy, 32.

[53] Iris Young sketches a similar account of oppression when she notes that oppression results even from the "everyday practices of a *well-intentioned* liberal society" (emphasis added). Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 41.

[54] Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 12.

[55] John Gray, "Hayek on Liberty, Rights, and Justice," *Ethics* 92, no. 1 (1981): 74, doi: 10.1086/292299.

oppression.[56] For Hayek, by contrast, freedom is violated when "somebody else has power so to manipulate the conditions as to make [a person] act according to that person's will rather than his own."[57] In short, whereas Berlin's theory is amenable to claims of indirect and unintentional infringements of negative liberty (to be arbitrated by relevant economic and social theories), Hayek's formulation requires greater intentionality on the part of an agent for a claim of coercion or oppression to get off the ground.[58]

Furthermore, later in *The Constitution of Liberty* Hayek distinguishes between being "compelled by circumstances to do this or that," and being coerced, where the latter involves the actions of another "human agent."[59] Given that for Hayek, a state of liberty is one in which "coercion of some by others is reduced as much as is possible in society,"[60] this is no merely semantic distinction. How, then, does Hayek propose to distinguish between being "compelled by circumstances" and being coerced? Hayek observes that my not being able to borrow a book I want from the library because

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[56] Although she does not attribute this position to Berlin, Hirschmann suggests that on the "responsibility view" of negative liberty – which "focuses less on how barriers are set in place and more on their possible removal" – poverty would count "as a restriction of liberty if one developed an economic theory that identified a definite class of people who were able to alleviate the poverty." Hirschmann, *Subject of Liberty*, 18. Two pages later, however, Hirschmann points out that the methodological individualism of many proponents of negative liberty makes them unable to accept that "generalized social conditions" such as poverty should count as barriers to freedom.

[57] Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 13.

[58] Hayek considers oppression "perhaps as much a true opposite of liberty as coercion," but thinks that it "should refer only to a state of continuous acts of coercion." Ibid, 135.

[59] Ibid, 133.

[60] Ibid, 11. Elsewhere, Hayek makes clear that while 'perfect freedom' would involve the complete absence of coercion, this would require that all members of society "strictly observed a moral code prohibiting all coercion." Since we do not yet know how to create such a society, we must in the meantime use coercion to prevent people from coercing others. See Friedrich Hayek, "Freedom and Coercion: Some Comments and Mr. Hamowy's Criticism," (1961) accessed August 21, 2013, http://oll.libertyfund.org/?option=com_staticxt&staticfile=show.php%3Ftitle=2136&chapter=195266&layout=html&Itemid=27.

someone else already has it does not mean that I am coerced. While Berlin (like most other people) would presumably agree with this conclusion, his route to it differs from Hayek's.

On Berlin's account, to establish coercion or oppression I would need to show that my inability to borrow the book of my choice was the result of arrangements which enable some people, but not me, from accessing it. Since in Hayek's example, the reason I cannot borrow the book is simply that someone else has already checked it out, anyone else who wanted to do so would similarly find his or her hopes dashed. Thus, this example would clearly not constitute coercion or oppression from Berlin's perspective. It is worth remembering, however, that for Berlin, oppression and hence the infringement of freedom need not result from intentional acts. This does not mean that the person who borrows the book I desire before me unintentionally oppresses me, since anyone else who wanted it would face the same disappointment. What it does mean, however, is that human arrangements that 'frustrate my wishes,' even without the intention of doing so, may still be oppressive. What might such arrangements look like?

If I cannot visit the library because I do not own a car and it is not situated on a bus route, and if those who do not own cars are predominantly poorer members of society, then even if the decision to build the library on that particular site was not taken with the intention of excluding the poor, I suggest that on Berlin's theory, the result could nevertheless constitute an infringement of our negative liberty. For Hayek, by contrast, "coercion implies both the threat of inflicting harm and the intention thereby to bring about certain conduct."[61] Clearly, I am not coerced when someone else already has the book of my choice, perhaps unless they took it with the intention of thwarting my plans. But on Hayek's account, nor do I suffer a loss of freedom when the library is situated

[61] Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 134.

beyond my reach, because the site of the library and the planning of public transportation do not amount to acts of coercion.[62]

The examples we have considered thus far illuminate the narrowness of Hayek's account of freedom compared with Berlin's, but they do not bear directly on the question of employment. I want to conclude this section with an analysis of Hayek's thoughts on this very issue. In the next section I return to Hayek's arguments against central planning, but here I want to focus on his claim that a "fully socialist state" would involve a "complete monopoly of employment" in the sense that the government would be "the only employer and the owner of all the instruments of production." One concern from the perspective of freedom, therefore, is that under such conditions the state-cum-employer "would possess unlimited powers of coercion."[63] I am less interested in the soundness of this argument than the light it sheds on Hayek's commitment to competitive capitalism.

In the latter society, according to Hayek, one finds not one but many potential employers. He notes that, "so long as" an individual employer "can remove only one opportunity among many to earn a living, so long as he can do no more than cease to pay certain people who cannot hope to earn as much elsewhere as they had done under him, he cannot coerce, though he can cause pain."[64] Moreover, although Hayek acknowledges that employers may exploit workers' fear of dismissal during periods of high unemployment to "enforce actions other than those originally contracted for," he assumes that such conditions would "be rare exceptions in a prosperous competitive

[62] It is also perhaps important to note that, while Hayek distinguishes between coercion and oppression, he considers both to be "true opposite[s] of liberty," where the latter should "refer only to a state of continuous acts of coercion." Ibid, 135.

[63] Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 137.

[64] Ibid, 136.

society."[65] Finally, one must remember the criterion of intentionality in Hayek's concept of oppression, which leads him to the following conclusion:

> Even if the threat of starvation to me and perhaps to my family impels me to accept a distasteful job at a very low wage, even if I am 'at the mercy' of the only man willing to employ me, I am not coerced by him or anybody else. So long as the act that has placed me in my predicament is not aimed at making me do or not do specific things, so long as the intent of the act that harms me is not to make me serve another person's ends, its effect on my freedom is not different from that of any natural calamity – a fire or a flood that destroys my house or an accident that harms my health.[66]

I want to highlight two important features of this passage. First, notice that in this example there is effectively only one employer, yet still no coercion takes place, a point which casts Hayek's claim about socialism which I just quoted in a different light. It cannot be that a socialist state is *necessarily* coercive on account of there being only one employer or Hayek would have contradicted himself in this later example. Rather, one must conclude that a 'competitive' society has the advantage over a socialist one to the extent that it *guards against* coercion by giving workers an exit option in case they do encounter coercion at the hands of a specific employer.

Second, even when the choice a worker faces is between starving or taking a poorly paid and unappealing job, Hayek definitively rejects the possibility of claiming that he or she is coerced into accepting employment, for the simple reason that no agent has intentionally acted such that the worker must make this invidious choice in the first place. Of course, Hayek would have to object if the only available work eliminated the worker "as a thinking and valuing person" and thus made her into "a bare tool in the achievement of the ends of another."[67] It is telling, therefore, that in this example, the job is "distasteful" rather than exploitative. On my reading of Berlin, by contrast, the

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[65] Ibid,136-7.

[66] Ibid, 137.

[67] Ibid, 21.

lack of intentional act that causes this situation does not disqualify it as coercive or oppressive. Indeed, there are two possible criticisms one might make of it that fit within Berlin's parameters.

First, if I can provide a compelling social or economic theory which shows that my wishes for fulfilling and well-paid work have been frustrated by the acts of others (for example, by the use of labor-saving technology, or various political tactics that reduce the average wage), then I may justifiably claim that in Hayek's example I do in fact suffer a loss of freedom. Indeed, in an example particularly relevant to our concerns, Berlin argues that negative and positive liberty can be curtailed when a situation is permitted or promoted "in which entire groups and nations are shut off from benefits which have been allowed to accumulate too exclusively in the hands of other groups and nations, the rich and strong," and that these arrangements, including the provision of education, cause "doors to be shut to the development of individuals and classes."[68]

But in addition, Berlin would have us consider whether everyone or just some people find themselves in the situation of having to accept a "a distasteful job at a very low wage." If human arrangements, such as the provision of education, the tax system and inheritance rules, or pensions schemes (reforms to which are the focus of chapter 3) are such that some members of society can avoid this type of work – or any work at all – thanks to specialized training or the accumulation of family wealth, while others have no choice but to take it, then again this situation raises concerns about the loss of freedom.

The contrast between Berlin and Hayek on this point could not be starker. While Hayek acknowledges that there is an "effect on my freedom" in this case, he claims that we should understand it exactly as we would a natural disaster or impediment, thus naturalizing a situation which, from Berlin's perspective, can and arguably should be submitted to social and economic analysis. Although Berlin does not offer a critique of the requirement to engage in paid work in

[68] Berlin, "Introduction," 40.

general, his account of negative liberty does open space for a critical assessment of the distribution of opportunities that give rise to particular instances of structural coercion. Hayek, on the other hand, rejects the idea of coercion in this case by insisting that it would need to involve intentional acts.

IV. Positive Freedom and Employment

The discussion so far has focused primarily on what I have called Hayek's defanging of negative freedom, and I have suggested that this domestication erects a significant barrier to criticism, let alone recognition, of the structural coercion to take part in paid work. As I show in this section, Hayek's view of freedom also involves an embrace of the entrepreneur and of the institutional framework of competitive capitalism. Indeed, such a position falls in line with David Harvey's definition of neoliberalism as "a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade."[69] In this section I elaborate the inter-relationship between entrepreneurialism and freedom in Hayek's thought, and suggest that his foray into institutional design has some resonance with Berlin's concerns about positive liberty.

Although we have seen that Hayek defines freedom as the absence of coercion, it is worth considering his explicit criticism of coercion and what he thinks is important about freedom. Hayek contends that "coercion is evil precisely because it…eliminates an individual as a thinking and valuing person and makes him a bare tool in the achievement of the ends of another."[70] Later in *The Constitution of Liberty*, he claims that the "chief aim of freedom is to provide both the opportunity and

[69] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 2.

[70] Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 21.

the inducement to insure the maximum use of the knowledge that an individual can acquire."[71] Given this "opportunity and inducement," individuals can discover "a better use of things or of one's own capacities," thus contributing to the prosperity of society as a whole. While this argument has strong overtones of J.S. Mill's famous argument for individual freedom in *On Liberty*, what stands out is Hayek's description of this use of our abilities as an "entrepreneurial capacity."

In particular, Hayek claims that while some of us work hard to discover "the best use of our abilities" and should be considered entrepreneurs, others do not. Moreover, he claims that free societies reward the person who makes "successful use" of this capacity more highly than they do the individual who "leaves to others the task of finding some useful means of employing his capacities,"[72] although it is unclear whether by 'reward' he means merely pay or also social esteem. This celebration of the entrepreneur as the ideal human subject, who need not actively participate in the world of 'business' but who sees his or her own capabilities of whatever kind as a form of capital to be developed and invested has, of course, become central to neoliberal political rationality as theorized by Michel Foucault, Wendy Brown, and Nikolas Rose, to name just three authors.[73] In the final section of this chapter I analyze the entrepreneur's orientation to work more directly, but here I want to highlight the key role that Hayek gives the entrepreneur in safeguarding the freedom of society as a whole.

It will be recalled from section II that neoliberal thinkers positioned themselves against both the collectivist tendencies of early twentieth century liberalism and totalitarianism. For Hayek, collectivism of various stripes differs from liberalism and individualism by "refusing to recognize autonomous spheres in which the ends of the individuals are supreme," and instead erroneously

[71] Ibid, 80-81.

[72] Ibid, 81.

[73] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 226; Brown, "Neo-liberalism;" Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 27.

"presupposes… the existence of a complete ethical code in which all the different human values are allotted their due place."[74] Thus, in *The Road to Serfdom*, Hayek argues that socialism leads to fascism and the destruction of individual freedom by organizing society around a "unitary end."[75] The apotheosis of collectivism was a central plan to direct all economic activity, a project ultimately doomed to failure in Hayek's view by the limitations to human cognition.[76] As John Gray puts it, Hayek's main argument against reconstructing "society according to a preconceived rational plan" is that "no one can attain a point of Archimedean leverage on and distance from society such that any synoptic knowledge of it is available to him."[77]

Although Hayek opposed rationalism in the form of central planning, it is important to note that he nonetheless sought "new institutional designs to maintain 'the constitution of liberty.'"[78] Indeed, as noted above, neoliberals opposed both central planning *and* laissez faire, arguing that the failures of the latter had led to the rise of collectivist liberalism as well as Fascism and Bolshevism. The problem, as Milton Friedman saw it, was how to reconcile "interdependence with freedom," given the need for economic coordination in "advanced societies" that arises from a highly complex division of labor.[79] As a solution, Friedman and Hayek propose competitive capitalism and the price

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[74] Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 56, 57.

[75] Ibid, 31, 56. Despite similarities with Berlin's critique of positive liberty, Alan Ryan notes that Berlin "was dismissive of Hayek's fears in *The Road to Serfdom*." Alan Ryan, "Isaiah Berlin: The History of Ideas as Psychodrama," *European Journal of Political Theory* 12, no. 1 (2012): 65, doi: 10.1177/1474885112463651.

[76] Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 35. See also David Bholat, "Hayek's 'Great Society': On Civilization and its Savages," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 15, no. 2 (2010): 179, doi: 10.1080/13569317.2010.482376.

[77] Gray, "Hayek on Liberty," 82.

[78] Müller, "Fear and Freedom," 58.

[79] Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom*, 12-13.

mechanism to coordinate individual productive efforts. Against the common misconception of neoliberalism as a return to laissez-faire, moreover, Hayek acknowledges that the creation and maintenance of "effective competition" requires governmental action and coercive interference into economic life.[80]

In the previous section we saw how, according to Hayek, such a system allows workers the freedom to choose where and for whom they will work. Thus, although the employed person may find it "at times highly irksome" that she must "do the bidding of others," this does not mean that the worker is thereby unfree in the sense of being coerced.[81] For Hayek, the very freedom of workers depends on a group of 'independent' persons who will ensure that there is not one but many employers to whom the former can sell their labor power.[82] In other words, to safeguard freedom we need a "multiplicity of opportunities for employment," which rests on "the existence of independent individuals who can take the initiative in the continuous process of re-forming and redirecting organizations."[83]

This argument, of course, gives a particular legitimacy to, and encourages public admiration of, the activities of entrepreneurs, and it is not difficult to detect a version of it in the recent term 'job creator.' For example, according to the Job Creators Network, which in a strikingly Hayekian tone describes itself as "the voice of real job creators that has been missing from the American debate on jobs and our economic crisis,"

> The liberties and livelihood of millions of Americans are in serious danger. Too many are unemployed, and for far too long. Americans are desperate for new jobs,

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[80] Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 36-37.

[81] Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 120.

[82] Ibid, 121.

[83] Ibid, 124.

> yet the federal government weakens free enterprise and ties the hands of job creators.[84]

Although Hayek saw the need for governmental intervention, he too was concerned that it could become overweening and stifle entrepreneurialism. In particular, while employed persons are free in Hayek's sense, they nonetheless present a serious threat to freedom in democratic society once they become a majority, since they do not understand the need for many "opportunities for action" and "exercises of freedom which are essential to the independent if he is to perform his functions." As a result, employed persons are "in many respects… alien and often inimical to much that constitutes the driving force of a free society."[85] In Hayek's estimation, therefore, it may

> prove to be the most difficult task of all to persuade the employed masses that in the general interest of their society, and therefore in their own long-term interest, they should preserve such conditions as to enable a few to reach positions which to them appear unattainable or not worth the effort or risk.[86]

Of course, there is no necessary contradiction in committing oneself to the notion that the "ends of the individuals are supreme,"[87] and suggesting that the masses need to be convinced of the merits of an institutional framework whose value they do not currently understand or accept, provided this 'persuasion' does in fact respect the autonomy of the employed masses and grants them the final say. Yet it is important to note that Hayek's enthusiasm for "drawing up plans for ideal institutional set-ups" betrays a different kind of skepticism toward rationalism than that of 'cold war liberals' like Berlin, who hoped instead for a "commitment to the right 'constellations of

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[84] "What's the Problem. America has lost her way – the American Way," accessed September 17, 2013, http://jobcreatorsnetwork.com/issues.php#sthash.2NT0mSYb.dpbs.

[85] Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 120, 119.

[86] Ibid, 120.

[87] Hayek, *Road to Serfdom*, 56.

certain values' (Berlin) and a gradual liberalization of attitudes."[88] Indeed, Bholat goes as far as to suggest that Hayek "attributes an omniscient foresight to capitalist prices that contravenes his own argument about the limitations of human reason, individual or aggregate."[89]

Moreover, without of course sanctioning coercion, I suggest that Hayek's concern to ensure the institutional framework of competitive capitalism begins to resemble Berlin's account of positive liberty. According to Berlin, proponents of the political theory of positive liberty as self-realization argue that "if it is my good, then I am not being coerced, for I have willed it, whether I know this or not, and am free (or 'truly' free) even while my poor earthly body and foolish mind bitterly reject it."[90] What alarms Berlin about this "positive doctrine of liberation by reason" is that it can serve to justify all manner of coercion in the name of expanding the freedom of those being coerced, particularly when the 'true' self is identified with a class, society, or humanity as a whole, as is the case in "many of the nationalist, Communist, authoritarian, and totalitarian creeds of our day."[91] Hayek's suggestion carries strong echoes of Berlin's account of positive liberty: he implies that workers are at risk of undermining the bases of their true freedom due to ignorance of what their own long-term interests require, and suggests that through the appropriate education, to borrow Berlin's phrase, they can be liberated by reason. While Hayek offers a significantly narrower account of negative liberty than Berlin, he also reveals himself to be more forthright than the latter about the type of institutions – competitive capitalism – that would best foster freedom in his view.

[88] Müller, "Fear and Freedom," 57.

[89] Bholat, "Hayek's 'Great Society,'" 182.

[90] Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 180-181.

[91] Ibid, 179, 191.

V. The Figure of the Entrepreneur: Freedom at Work

> Whereas the individual's freedom hitherto basically meant the possibility of either accepting or refusing his assigned status, it is now seen as meaning the possibility of permanently redeploying one's capacities according to the satisfaction one obtains in one's work, one's greater or lesser involvement in it, and its capacity thoroughly to fulfill one's potentialities.[92]

As noted above, entrepreneurialism lies at the heart of neoliberal political rationality, but in the last section of this chapter I want to explore the more specific relationship between the figure of the entrepreneur, freedom and work. I take as my starting point the insightful documentation by Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose of what they call the rise of "an entrepreneurial identity" in relation to work in the 1980s, captured succinctly by Jacques Donzelot in the quotation above.[93] Miller and Rose suggest that, in the context of concerns about international competitiveness, quality, and the importance of the customer, this identity took root in management doctrines as a way to "overcome organizational problems, and to ensure dynamism, excellence, and innovation by activating and engaging the self-fulfilling aspirations of the individuals who make up the workforce."[94] In these doctrines, the worker was thus "depicted as an enterprising individual in search of meaning, responsibility, and a sense of personal achievement in life, and hence in work."[95] In chapter 2 I shall pick up this thread with an analysis of flexibility at the level of both the organization and the individual worker.

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[92] Jacques Donzelot, "Pleasure in Work," trans. Colin Gordon, in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, eds. Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 252.

[93] Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, "Production, Identity, and Democracy," *Theory and Society* 24, no. 3 (1995): 454, doi: 10.1007/BF00993353.

[94] Ibid, 453.

[95] Ibid, 454.

While I find much of value in Miller and Rose's analysis, I want to consider what Hayek's characterization of the figure of the entrepreneur and the 'independent' can add to it, particularly in terms of the relationship between work and freedom in neoliberal thought. For example, Miller and Rose claim that "The individual is now to be fulfilled *in* work, a realm now construed as one in which we produce, discover, and experience our selves, rather than to be emancipated *from* work, perceived as merely a means to end."[96] But what are the philosophical antecedents to this view? How might a closer reading of Hayek than Miller and Rose offer enable a deeper understanding of this shift in the meaning and experience of work?

In what follows, I show that Hayek's celebration of the 'independent' and the entrepreneur goes beyond the ability of these individuals to secure the freedom of the masses discussed in the previous section, and suggest that they enjoy what contemporary scholars of career counseling call vocation or career. Although employed persons are free as long as they are not coerced in Hayek's sense of the term, I suggest that entrepreneurial-independents surpass this negative liberty and enjoy a form of positive liberty as self-realization as theorized by Berlin. Before going any further with the analysis, however, I must enter an important caveat.

By examining the central role of entrepreneurialism in neoliberalism, I do not mean to suggest that, in 'actually existing' neoliberalism, everyone either does, can, or wants to behave as an enterprising subject. For example, one career counseling scholar points out that some people prefer to treat paid work as "only a means to an end," allowing them to "engage in what they consider their real work," such as the artist with a 'day job' or those who "find satisfaction in family, in community

[96] Ibid, 457.

service, or in personal hobbies."[97] Similarly, Prilleltensky and Stead criticize some career theorists for assuming that individuals have more career choice than may in fact be the case. Thus, they write that

> The assumption underlying all career theories is that at least some career choice is present, if only individuals knew how to properly utilize their inherent characteristics and relational and contextual resources to successfully navigate the world of work. Career psychology has placed little emphasis on oppression, how this maintains the status quo and marginalizes people and the extent to which this may severely limit or remove individuals' career choice options.[98]

While these points highlight the impact of personal preferences and structural barriers on whether a person behaves as an enterprising subject, this does not mean that the ideal itself has no meaning or impact on the world. On the contrary, the figure of the enterprising subject acts as an ideal that both helps legitimize the structural coercion to engage in paid work in a manner befitting a free subject, and at the same time marginalizes those who do not or cannot live up to it, and who thus encounter significant obstacles in exercising their "capabilities in socially defined and recognized ways,"[99] as not fully free.

To begin, we first need to clarify Hayek's use of the terms 'entrepreneur' and 'independent,' which express overlapping though distinct meanings. Notice that Hayek claims that, "in discovering

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[97] Jane Goodman, "Toward A Holistic View: Decision-Making, Postmodern, and Emerging Theories," in *Career Counseling: Foundations, Perspectives and Applications*, eds. David Capuzzi and Mark Stauffer (New York: Routledge, 2012), 87, accessed November 2, 2013, NetLibrary e-book.

[98] Isaac Prilleltensky and Graham B. Stead, "Critical Psychology and Career Development: Unpacking the Adjust–Challenge Dilemma," *Journal of Career Development* 39, no. 4 (2012): 322, doi: 10.1177/0894845310384403.

[99] Here I am supplementing Iris Young's account of marginalization with an analysis of freedom. Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 53; 54. William Connolly seems to make a similar move when he refers to a "diverse population shuffled to the margins of freedom, dignity, social participation, and affluence," which "provides a living contrast through which generally admired conventions of identity and responsibility are tested, validated, and vindicated." William E. Connolly, *Identity\Difference: Democratic Negotiations of Political Paradox* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 204.

the best use of our abilities, we are all entrepreneurs," whereas the term "independent" simply refers to anyone who is not employed as a wage laborer.[100] While an employed person could therefore count as an 'entrepreneur' so long as he worked hard to discover his talents, he could not be an 'independent' without giving up his employment.

In spite of this capacious view of entrepreneurialism, however, Hayek later suggests that 'independents' tend to be more entrepreneurial than the employed, in that they are "inventive" and "experimental," while they also experience work as a process of "shaping and reshaping a plan of life, of finding solutions for ever new problems."[101] The employed person, by contrast, does other people's bidding, and sees work as largely a matter "of fitting himself into a given framework during a certain number of hours."[102] In sum, this distinction suggests that, whereas the entrepreneurial-independent takes control of life to maximize his opportunities and satisfactions, life is something that happens to the non-enterprising employed worker.

But we should not interpret this characterization as suggesting that the employed are simply passive victims of circumstance. On the contrary, Hayek claims that whether a person is independent or employed is essentially a matter of choice: "A great many people will choose employment because it offers them better opportunities to live the kind of life they want than would any independent position." Moreover, "Even with those who do not especially want the relative security and absence of risk and responsibility that an employed position brings, the decisive factor is often not that independence is unattainable but that employment offers them a more satisfying

[100] Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 81, 120.

[101] Ibid, 121, 122.

[102] Ibid, 122.

activity and a larger income than they could earn as, say, independent tradesmen."[103] It is therefore almost as if, in Hayek's view, the employed person 'chooses not to choose.'

Moreover, as David Bholat suggests, although Hayek does not explain why so many people prefer employment to independent positions, "this trend is the result of the capitalist price system he recommends." In other words, "It is because the strategic logic of capitalism materially coerces and ideologically encourages people to direct themselves to production with the highest expected monetary reward that entrepreneurial endeavors are sacrificed for the safety of employment." The provision of a basic income might alter this calculus in favor of greater economic risk taking, for as Bholat points out, "In an economic system without a basic income – a right to provisioning that does not depend on formal employment – it is prohibitive to brook the uncertainty entrepreneurship entails."[104] Indeed, as I shall argue in chapter 4, while the basic income appears to mark a radical departure from the existing welfare state due to its unconditionality, the argument that it would foster entrepreneurial behavior and thus promote employment betrays a continuity with the 'activating' logic of contemporary workfare policies and a less critical posture with respect to the meaning and value of work.

While both the employed and the independent persons are free in Hayek's account, the latter experiences 'more' freedom in relation to work given that it involves a continuous exercise of choice and judgment. This point is significant because it means that employed persons appear in Hayek's scheme as essentially entrepreneurs manqués: they have assessed their options as good entrepreneurs should, but have decided against a life of ongoing entrepreneurialism as an 'independent.' Given the rise of the entrepreneurial identity in the decades following the publication of *The Constitution of Liberty*, as well as the effects of the regime of flexibility – which, as I show in chapter 2, discipline

[103] Ibid, 120.

[104] Bholat, "Hayek's 'Great Society,'" 183.

workers to cultivate an entrepreneurial spirit – Hayek's implication that employed workers lack entrepreneurial spirit may be a less accurate description of contemporary occupational behavior than it was in the early 1960s, although as I noted above, even today not everyone can or does embrace this identity. Nevertheless, Hayek's discussion and celebration of the enterprising-independent person has clear resonance with contemporary understandings of career and vocation.

For example, in a recent career-counseling textbook, one finds the distinction between work, career, and vocation. Whereas work is "designed to fulfill the tasks of daily living and ensure survival," career goes beyond this in that it "is characterized by volition, pay, and hierarchical and thematic relationships among various jobs that may or may not constitute a career."[105] Now, one cannot be sure whether, in 'choosing' employment over an independent position on the grounds that the former offers a more satisfying activity and a larger income than the latter, the employed person pursues a career. It may be the case, for example, that a person chases promotions and thus has a 'career' purely because this allows him or her more disposable income with which to pursue a hobby or support his or her family. But I want to suggest that the distinction Hayek makes between the employed person and the independent is more clearly reflected in the definition these career counseling scholars give of 'vocation.'

Following the National Vocational Guidance Association (now known as the National Career Development Association), they define vocation as "'a time-extended working out of a purposeful life pattern through work undertaken by the individual'… that exists over the course of the life span and highlights the relation between work and identity."[106] Similarly, Benjamin N. Cohen

[105] David S. Shen-Miller, Ellen Hawley McWhirter, and Anne S. Bartone, "Historical Influence on the Evolution of Vocational Counseling," in *Career Counseling*, eds. Capuzzi and Stauffer, 4.

[106] Ibid, 4, 5.

writes that "vocations have the potential to provide a sense of purpose to our life," and that "one of the primary factors motivating vocational choice is a search for a meaningful vocation."[107] This language resonates clearly with Hayek's claim that the independent person experiences work as a process of "shaping and reshaping a plan of life, of finding solutions for ever new problems." Moreover, Hayek claims that, "for the independent, there can be no sharp distinction between his private and his business life, as there is for the employed, who has sold part of his time for a fixed income."[108]

In chapter 2 I will argue that the regime of flexibility erodes this distinction even for employed workers, but the point here is that the independent in Hayek's account experiences work as woven almost seamlessly into life, and thus has what we might call a vocation. Although employed persons can and arguably must cultivate an enterprising disposition in today's flexible labor market, it is also worth noting that even those who sell their labor increasingly do so not by fitting themselves "into a given framework during a certain number of hours," but by working in a variety of flexible ways, meaning that they may determine the place and time of their work, be paid based on the completion of projects rather than by the hour, or have no 'framework' to fit into in the first place since their employer determines at short notice when they are needed to work.

In addition to increasing contingency and precariousness in the labor market, these structural changes mean that, in effect, employed persons, not to mention 'independent contractors,' must behave as Hayek suggests that the enterprising 'independent' does. My interpretation of Hayek's depiction of this figure suggests that it provides an appealing ideal about how work can become a practice of freedom in the sense of self-realization: this person has not just work but vocation, and

[107] Benjamin N. Cohen, "Applying Existential Theory and Intervention to Career Decision-Making," *Journal of Career Development* 29, no.3 (2003): 200, http://link.springer.com/article/10.1023%2FA%3A1021470230341.

[108] Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 122.

not only earns money but creates meaning in his or her life through a series of choices about where to work and how best to capitalize and deploy his or her talents to the benefit of self and community. Of course, as I have noted, various structural barriers reduce the likelihood that members of oppressed groups will succeed in this task, but as Hayek's extremely limited understanding of coercion and oppression suggests, neoliberal thought has difficulty acknowledging them. Instead, as David Harvey points out, the standard explanation for lack of success blames individual and cultural factors like an allegedly insufficient commitment to education or lack of work ethic and discipline.[109] As I shall discuss in chapter 3, these discourses appeared prominently in the aftermath of the 2011 England riots.

To refer to work as a practice of self-realization once again calls to mind Berlin's concept of positive liberty. Berlin suggest that self-mastery looks like a positive way of saying "much the same thing" as negative liberty: both refer to a condition in which one is "a doer – deciding, not being decided for, self-directed and not acted upon by external nature or by other men as if I were a thing, or an animal, or a slave incapable of playing a human role."[110] In many ways, Hayek's figure of the entrepreneur, "shaping and reshaping a plan of life," embodies this idea of freedom as self-direction. Moreover, the inducement to discover and make the "best use" of our abilities echoes Berlin's discussion of the "splitting of personality into two," with a 'higher' or 'true' self dominating one's 'lower' nature, which lies at the heart of positive liberty.[111] As Berlin puts it,

> This dominant self is then variously identified with reason, with my 'higher nature', with the self which calculates and aims at what will satisfy it in the long run, with my 'real', or 'ideal', or 'autonomous' self, or with my self 'at its best': which is then

[109] David Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* (London: Verso, 2006), 42.

[110] Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," 178.

[111] Ibid, 178, 181.

> contrasted with irrational impulse, uncontrolled desires, my 'lower' nature, the pursuit of immediate pleasures, my 'empirical' or 'heteronomous' self, swept by every gust of desire and passion, needing to be rigidly disciplined if it is ever to rise to the full height of its 'real' nature.[112]

As I noted in the previous section, the danger posed by this doctrine is that it can serve to justify coercion by appealing to the 'higher' freedom of those being coerced. While Hayek does not sanction such coercion in his own terms, I have shown throughout this chapter that his view of coercion is so narrow as to preclude all but intentionally harmful acts. Not only does the politically constructed necessity to engage in paid work not register as coercion and hence as an infringement of freedom.[113] In addition, Hayek presents the very system based on the exploitation of wage labor – competitive capitalism – and those who benefit most from it – the capitalist class of employers – as the acme of freedom. Given the deeply entrenched value of freedom in US and British political culture, it is no wonder that one finds so little resistance to work.

VI. Conclusions

In this chapter I have attempted to broaden existing accounts of paid work that frame its meaning and value in terms of the (Protestant) work ethic, the achievement of independence, and the civic duties of all able-bodied members of society. While I do not dispute the continuing salience of these themes, I have argued here that freedom in neoliberal thought also plays a key role in sustaining our commitment to the requirement of paid work. Through a comparative analysis of Hayek and Berlin, I first argued that Hayek effectively defangs negative liberty, thus immunizing the material and social pressures that individuals face to engage in paid work from a potential freedom-based critique.

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[112] Ibid, 179.

[113] As Kathi Weeks puts it, "that every individual is required to work, that most are expected to work for wages or be supported by someone who does, is a social convention and disciplinary apparatus rather than an economic necessity." Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 7-8.

To be clear, Berlin does not explicitly articulate such a critique himself, but I nonetheless presented an interpretation of his account of oppression that leaves open a number of possibilities in this vein. For example, a person or group could plausibly claim that the use of labor saving technology or various political tactics that reduce the average wage coerce them to accept Hayek's "distasteful job at a very low wage." Moreover, one might argue that the provision of education, structure of pensions schemes, and the tax system and inheritance rules allow some members of society to avoid this type of work thanks to specialized skills or savings while simultaneously coercing the less privileged to accept it. Finally, one could argue that the institution of private property as a whole ensures that members of the working class must sell their labor power in order to survive, while it allows a minority of individuals never to work for pay in their lives. As I hope to have shown, none of these situations register as infringements of freedom in Hayek's account.

But as I noted, it is one thing to say that Hayekian freedom remains blind to these forms of structural coercion, another to say that work itself constitutes a practice of freedom. Thus, in sections IV and V I explored his defense of both competitive capitalism (as an alternative to laissez faire on the one hand, and to collectivism on the other) and the leading actor in its drama, namely the entrepreneur. In particular, I argued that the discovery and development of one's abilities and the conscious choice about how best to deploy them mark the entrepreneur as someone who takes control of his or her life and who thus acts as a fully fledged autonomous subject. While Hayek tends to assume that employed persons lack such an ethos, the rise of the entrepreneurial identity in management discourse and practices identified by Miller and Rose, as well as the regime of flexibility which I shall analyze in chapter 2, increasingly incite us all to cultivate it. When we are effectively compelled to behave in a manner that allegedly allows us to realize our true selves, it appears we may have unwittingly stumbled into the dangerous realm of positive liberty so trenchantly criticized by liberals like Berlin.

Through a reading of Hayek, this chapter has offered an account of freedom in neoliberal philosophy. But while this exercise serves to deepen our understanding of the dominant ideology of neoliberalism, it has not directly addressed the material practices that take shape in its name. It is therefore to the regime of flexibility as a neoliberal instantiation of freedom in relation to work that we will turn our attention in the following chapter.

Chapter 2: Bending over Backwards: Flexibility, Freedom, and Domination in Contemporary Work.

I. Introduction

In October 2011, a report commissioned by Downing Street arguing that the UK government should ban unfair dismissal compensation to boost economic growth sparked outrage among unions and senior members of the Liberal Democrats. In response to the furor, the Prime Minister's official spokesperson stated that the government was "going to review [existing employment law] so that employers and employees can ensure they have maximum flexibility whilst protecting fairness and providing a competitive environment that we need for enterprise and growth."[1] Earlier that year but on the other side of the Atlantic, the state of Wisconsin passed a law dramatically restricting the collective bargaining rights of most state, county, and municipal workers. The office of the recently elected Republican governor, Scott Walker, explained that the reform had addressed the state's fiscal crisis by reducing "government spending, while giving government increased flexibility to provide services."[2]

These statements provide just two examples of the pervasiveness of 'flexibility' within contemporary political and economic discourse. In fact, following Nancy Fraser we might say that 'flexibilization' (the process of rendering institutions and individuals flexible) is a "ubiquitous buzzword of globalization."[3] As the two examples suggest, flexibility serves as a guiding principle of almost unquestionable value thanks to its connotations of freedom and efficiency. Like most buzzwords, moreover, flexibility arguably draws its rhetorical power from the ease with which

[1] Hélène Mulholland, "Senior Lib Dem and unions condemn proposal to scrap unfair dismissal," *The Guardian*, October 26, 2011, accessed October 27, 2013, http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2011/oct/26/unions-condemn-report-unfair-dismissal.

[2] "Reforms and Results," Office of Scott Walker, 1-2, accessed September 17, 2012, walker.wi.gov/Documents/Act_10_Success_Recap.pdf.

[3] Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 129.

different actors can assign meanings to it that align with their own interests.[4] The apparently amorphous character of flexibility, however, should not lead us to dismiss it as just another piece of management speak, lacking substance or effect. On the contrary, this chapter shows that flexibility lies at the center of the neoliberal organization of work and labor markets, and its construction of subjects as workers.

In the following pages, I respond to Fraser's invitation to analyze flexibility as an "emerging new mode of regulation" and to identify its "characteristic ordering mechanisms and political rationality."[5] In particular, I draw out two distinct modes of flexibility: under the guise of 'deregulation,' the first reduces the influence of collective institutions like the state and unions on the organization of paid work, thus increasing the control that employers have over this domain, and in the process transforming the terrain of class struggle; the second actively empowers individual employees by granting legal rights and promoting workplace norms, which in turn enable various forms of flexible working arrangements. By eroding the strength of collective protections and voice available to workers, the decollectivizng mode of flexibility effectively compels the latter to adopt an individualistic ethic of self-responsibility and entrepreneurialism, or risk unemployment and social marginalization. The second mode of flexibility, on the other hand, provides (some) individual workers with an appealing measure of control over their employment, which can significantly soften tensions between the demands of paid work and other aspects of life, including family, community, and leisure. While this analysis suggests antagonism between the two modes of flexibility, however, at the level of ideology they act in a more complementary fashion.

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[4] Christina Garsten and Jan Turtinen, "'Angels' and 'Chameleon': The Cultural Construction of the Flexible Temporary Agency Worker in Sweden and Britain," in *After Full Employment: European Discourses on Work and Flexibility*, ed. Bo Stråth (Brussels: P.I.E. Peter Lang, 2000), 163.

[5] Fraser, *Scales of Justice*, 125.

To approach flexibility in terms of ideology I follow Wendy Brown, for whom discourse is ideological in the sense that it naturalizes "effects of power." According to this account, ideology does not refer to a distorted version of 'the truth.' Rather, critical analysis of ideology reveals the ways in which discourse first constructs subjects, then renders them "as objects in the prediscursive world."[6] Whatever the material effects of the first mode of flexibility on the working conditions of employees, its claim to liberate workers from the yoke of the Keynesian welfare state and unions helps construct an image of society founded on (naturally) free individuals. Any deficit of justice, equality, or freedom that remains is now seen as inherent to the 'natural' order, beyond the reach of politics, and inevitable. The second mode of flexibility, meanwhile, helps shore up this negative conception of freedom with the promise (though not always the delivery) of individual empowerment through greater 'work-life balance.' By appealing to, and basing itself on, the deeply entrenched value of freedom, flexibility as a mode of social organization draws widespread support among employees who yearn for greater control over work (see section IV below). Meanwhile, as the broader political project of neoliberalism subsumes greater swaths of life under the logic of the market, the figure of the flexible worker, in all its entrepreneurial glory, becomes increasingly normative.

This chapter aims to disrupt the hegemony of flexibility by elucidating its political construction and by drawing attention to the double-edged character of the social transformation it has wrought; as such, it does not present a case for or against flexibility, but instead aims to complicate our understanding of it. Flexibility undoubtedly offers opportunities for some individuals to exercise a degree of control over the place (both literal and metaphorical) of work in their lives, but since these benefits are somewhat familiar and self-explanatory, I devote the greater portion of

[6] Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 142.

the following analysis to its less conspicuous yet nonetheless problematic implications. In particular, I show that flexibility has played a key role in the transformation and maintenance of the contemporary class structure, by marginalizing collective institutions and inducing instability and precariousness for many workers, while allocating empowering working arrangements predominantly to the more privileged. Moreover, this enhancement of the individual's control over work comes at the price of a subtle mode of domination that operates by compelling a disciplined devotion to the expectations of employers and the market. As a result, work threatens to envelop life in a way which subverts flexibility's promise of providing individuals with greater control over employment.

The chapter is structured as follows: in section II, I offer a short history of flexible labor markets. In section III I delineate the two modes of flexibility mentioned above by focusing on legislative reforms and other government actions that target labor unions, and workplace rights that empower individual employees. Section IV builds on this analysis by considering the various forms of flexibility that exist at the level of the firm or organization, and distinguishes between those that primarily advance the interests of employers and those that potentially enhance the work-life balance of employees. In section V I develop these insights to sketch the outlines of the flexible worker, a subject more committed than ever to devoting his or her energies to the demands of work through adaptability and a spirit of self-entrepreneurialism. Section VI concludes by considering some possible trajectories of flexibilization and suggests two related strategies to capitalize on the potential of flexibility to afford all individuals greater freedom in relation to work: the formation of a movement to displace employment as the centerpiece of identity and cornerstone of social relations, and the introduction of a guaranteed basic income.

II. A Short History of Flexible Labor Markets

Much like neoliberalism, flexibility takes shape in concrete political, institutional and cultural settings, with the result that flexible labor markets, firms, and workers may look rather different from place to place.[7] Nevertheless, just as a narrow focus on local neoliberal strategies risks overlooking the more generic features of neoliberalism as an "extralocal project,"[8] so emphasizing the resilience of national industrial relations institutions to common economic pressures tends to underestimate the degree to which those institutions are being transformed in a broadly neoliberal vein.[9] In what follows I map the general contours of flexibility in the 'North Atlantic zone,'[10] focusing particularly on the United Kingdom and the United States, with the recognition that the conclusions I draw may have limited generalizability to other regions of the globe.

Faced with the almost chameleon-like figure of flexibility (one might even say that 'flexibility' has heeded its own exhortations), we can begin by examining what this concept opposes or is intended to replace. Proponents of flexibility most commonly place it in opposition to rigidity; hence attempts to achieve labor market flexibility typically arise following a diagnosis of friction between the mobility of capital and so-called rigidities of labor.[11] The term 'Eurosclerosis' evocatively expressed concerns about labor market rigidity in the 1970s and 1980s, "conjuring up the image of

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[7] Noel Whiteside, "Britain and France in Comparison," in *After Full Employment*, ed. Bo Stråth.

[8] Peck and Tickell, "Neoliberalizing Space," 382.

[9] Lucio Baccaro and Chris Howell, "A Common Neoliberal Trajectory: The Transformation of Industrial Relations in Advanced Capitalism," *Politics and Society* 39, no. 4 (2001): 521-563, doi: 10.1177/0032329211420082. The authors define the general characteristics of the neoliberal project, as it relates to industrial relations, as the movement toward fewer constraints on how employers manage workplaces, whether these constraints came originally in the form of laws or collective regulation.

[10] Peck and Tickell, "Neoliberalizing Space," 384.

[11] Beck, *Brave New World of Work*, 85.

an elderly man suffering from a tightening of the arteries, a stiffening of the sinews and a failure to summon up the blood."[12] Although the more appealing values of 'stability' and 'security' do stand in some tension with flexibility (especially from the perspective of the worker who may face dismissal, reduced wages, or altered working times, all in the name of the flexible labor market and flexible firm), rigidity functions as the key 'counter-concept' to flexibility within mainstream academic and policy discourse.[13]

An early version of the flexibility/rigidity opposition appeared in the mid-1970s in the context of wages, wherein 'wage flexibility' was seen as preferable to the so-called 'downward rigidity' of wages, which referred to the refusal or unwillingness of workers to accept the lower wages upon which companies claimed their continuing profitability depended. This form of rigidity, according to its critics, stemmed from the Keynesian welfare state, which intervened in the economy by deficit spending and the commitment to full employment, and unionism, which was blamed for keeping wages unsustainably high.[14] The welfare state and organized labor have long been close allies, as the role of labor parties in the development of the US welfare state, especially during the 1960s, attests.[15] If overweening and mutually reinforcing collective institutions were dragging down

[12] Guy Standing, *Global Labour Flexibility: Seeking Distributive Justice* (Basingstoke, UK: MacMillan Press, 1999), 59.

[13] Peter Wagner, "'The Exit from Organised Modernity: 'Flexibility' in Social Thought and in Historical Perspective," in *After Full Employment*, ed. Stråth, 37.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, "The Decline of Labor Parties," in Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *The Breaking of the American Social Compact* (New York: The New Press, 1997), 21.

national economic competitiveness, as the Republican Party and its corporate allies began arguing in the 1970s,[16] then the remedy was their dismantlement under the auspices of flexibility.

Discourses and practices concerning the flexibility of the labor market as a whole then appeared in the 1980s and 1990s,[17] and broadened the initial focus of 'wage flexibility' to include hiring arrangements, working conditions, and working time – in other words, to address all aspects of the regulation of labor supply, whether enacted by statute or by collective bargaining.[18] In this sense, flexibility is of a piece with the neoliberal ideology of 'deregulation,' as I discuss at greater length below. A recent report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) includes six policy areas in its composite indicator of labor market flexibility, demonstrating the continuing antagonism between flexibility, on the one hand, and unionism and state intervention into the economy, on the other. Here, minimum wage requirements, hiring and firing regulations, centralized collective wage bargaining, mandated cost of hiring (including all social security and payroll taxes and the cost of other mandated benefits like health care), mandated cost of work dismissal (including advance notice and severance), and conscription all constitute impediments to labor market flexibility.[19]

At the same time as flexibility became the remedy for high unemployment, members of the new right, civil libertarians, traditional liberals and even left-wing radicals on both sides of the Atlantic were also criticizing the powers of regulatory states and the corporatist relations between government, business, and unions on the basis of a desire to restore "control to the citizen as a free

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[16] Ibid, 34.

[17] Steve Fleetwood, "Why Work-Life Balance Now?" *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 18, no. 3 (2007): 393, doi: 10.1080/09585190601167441.

[18] Wagner, "Exit from Organised Modernity," 38.

[19] Lorenzo E. Bernal-Verdugo, Davide Furceri, and Dominique Guillaume, "Labor Market Flexibility and Unemployment: New Empirical Evidence of Static and Dynamic Effects," International Monetary Fund, Working Paper 12/64 (2012): 4, accessed April 24, 2012, www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2012/wp1264.pdf.

individual."[20] Particularly in the United States, supporters of what Thomas Frank calls 'market populism' assailed Keynesians and unionists as elitists who were trying to act outside of the market, the institution they identified with the will of the people.[21]

The call to make labor markets flexible thus appeals to both economic and philosophical arguments: flexibility will increase efficiency, productivity and competitiveness, but also freedom, by 'liberating' firms and individuals from the 'dead weight' of regulations. The ideology of flexibility, moreover, claims to redress the presumptively illegitimate intrusion by the state and unions into the economic realm. Yet in spite of the hostility that flexibility shows toward regulation at the ideological level, the relationship between flexibility and regulation is more harmonious at the level of practice. In the following section I show how governments in the US and UK have used regulations (among other means) to constrain and diminish the power of unions in pursuit of labor market flexibility. As we will see, the granting of individual employment rights also helps to establish flexible working arrangements.

III. Flexibility as Decollectivization and Individualization

To gain a deeper understanding of the process of flexibilization, it will help to first consider the development and transformation of the broader neoliberal project. Rather than unfolding according to a singular logic, during the Thatcher and Reagan years neoliberalism involved the 'roll back' of the welfare state and the reduction of the influence of labor unions, while from the 1990s and into the 2000s, it featured the 'roll out' of the state by constructing individualistic labor market regulations as well as interventionist and at times paternalistic social policy to address some of the

[20] Miller and Rose, "Production, Identity, and Democracy," 453. See also Harvey, *Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 53.

[21] Thomas Frank, *One Market Under God* (New York: Anchor Books, 2000), 31.

negative consequences of the earlier mode.[22] Building on this insight, I argue that flexibilization proceeds according to two distinct logics: decollectivization, which deploys regulatory and other means to reduce union strength, restrict collective bargaining, and limit recourse to strikes; and individualization, which actively empowers individual workers by granting new employment rights and protections and promoting flexible working arrangements. Recent developments in both countries following the 2007-2008 economic collapse indicate a revival of decollectivization as well as a reversal of some of the individual employee gains made during the 1990s. While the individualizing mode of flexibility stands in tension with the idea of labor market flexibility as expressed by the IMF report discussed earlier, the two modes nonetheless support one another in the construction of an individualistic social formation, which simultaneously demands and praises a self-entrepreneurial relation to work.

When Thatcher and Reagan assumed their offices in 1979 and 1981 respectively they encountered quite differently structured labor markets, with the 'voluntarist' system of industrial relations in the UK involving significantly less regulation by the state than was the case in the US.[23] While Conservative governments carried out six rounds of legislative reform during the 1980s,[24] Reagan and subsequent presidents left federal industrial relations law largely unaltered.[25] Nonetheless, under Reagan the political balance of the National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) shifted in the direction of management, which helped to establish a regulatory framework more

[22] See Peck and Tickell, "Neoliberalizing Space."

[23] Chris Howell, "The Changing Relationship Between Labor and the State in Contemporary Capitalism," *Law, Culture and the Humanities* (2012): 3, doi: 10.1177/1743872112448362.

[24] Ibid, 7-8.

[25] Jack Fiorito, "The State of Unions in the United States," *Journal of Labor Research* 28, no. 1 (2007): 47, accessed October 29, 2013, http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/23815043/state-unions-united-states.

favorable to employers than union organizers. In particular, the NLRB increased employers' latitude to interrogate and even fire union supporters and to disseminate misleading or speculative information about unionization. Employers also benefited from a diminished obligation to bargain in good faith and the deregulation of reprisals against strikers.[26]

One key difference between US and UK labor law in the latter half of the twentieth century concerned the legal status of the closed shop, which makes union membership a condition of employment and thereby ensures that all employees at a given workplace are dues-paying members of a union. Whereas closed shops had been abolished in the US under the 1947 Taft Hartley Act, when Margaret Thatcher came to office in 1979 they were still legally permitted in the UK. Successive legislative restrictions on closed shops, ultimately leading to their abolition in 1992 under the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act, was thus a key regulatory strategy to weaken organized labor in the UK.[27] The establishment of the 'right not to belong to a union' in the UK represents a similar strategy of decollectivization to so-called 'right-to-work' laws in the US. The Taft Hartley Act permits states to enact legislation prohibiting compulsory payment of fees to the legally recognized union at a given workplace. Withholding payment of fees to a union that is required to represent all workers (whether members of the union or not) within a bargaining unit not only creates a classic free rider problem, it also reduces union funds and thus strength. While the majority of right-to-work laws were passed in the 1940s and 1950s,[28] in December 2012 Michigan

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[26] Henry F. Farber and Bruce Western, "Ronald Reagan and the Politics of Declining Union Organization," *British Journal of Industrial Relations* 40, no. 3 (2002): 385, doi: 10.1111/1467-8543.00240.

[27] Sandra Fredman, "The New Rights: Labour Law and Ideology in the Thatcher Years," *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies* 12, no. 1 (1992): 33-36, doi: 10.1093/ojls/12.1.24.

[28] "State Right-to-work Laws and Constitutional Amendments in Effect as of January 1, 2009 With Year of Passage," United States Department of Labor, December 2008, accessed November 12, 2012, http://www.dol.gov/whd/state/righttowork.htm#.UKFCBIXOZV4.

became the twenty-fourth state to enact such legislation, demonstrating the continuation of the decollectivizing mode of flexibility. Speaking in support of the legislation, Michigan governor Rick Synder explained that workers "deserve the freedoms to make decisions for themselves."[29] Right-to-work movements are also currently forming in Missouri, New Hampshire, Ohio, and Wisconsin.[30]

A second feature of decollectivization can be seen in the recent attacks on the right to collective bargaining, most notably in Wisconsin, where in early 2011 the Republican governor Scott Walker introduced Senate Bill 11 to the state legislature. According to the Governor's Office, Walker chose to address Wisconsin's fiscal crisis by reducing "government spending, while giving government increased flexibility to provide services."[31] The bill, eventually signed into law in June 2011, sought to achieve this flexibility in part by restricting the collective bargaining rights of most state, municipal and county employees to the subject of base level wages, requiring annual certification elections of unions that already represent collective bargaining units, limiting the term of collective bargaining agreements to one year, and prohibiting the deduction of mandatory dues and services fees from employees' salaries.[32] One can glimpse the rationale for governor Walker's opposition to unions and collective bargaining in his office's analysis of the reforms: collective bargaining is a "burden" to efficiency, an obstacle to managing staff on the basis of "merit and performance," and even the cause of teacher layoffs due to the fact that it made salaries and benefits

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[29] Ashley Woods and David Dands, "'Right To Work' Michigan: Gov. Rick Snyder Says New Legislation Gives Union Workers 'Freedom,'" *The Huffington Post*, December 6, 2012, accessed December 18, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/12/06/right-to-work-michigan-snyder-unions_n_2250601.html.

[30] Nicole Pasulka, "Right-to-Work Laws, Explained," *Mother Jones*, March 16, 2012.

[31] "Reforms and Results," 1-2.

[32] State of Wisconsin, 2011-2012 Legislature, January 2011 Special Session, *Senate Bill 11*: 2, accessed September 17, 2012, docs.legis.wisconsin.gov/document/proposaltext/2011/JR1/SB11.pdf.

"untouchable."[33] These criticisms resonate with the individualistic thrust of much anti-union rhetoric: talented individuals are being stifled, held back, and even denied employment, because of the overly rigid and collectivist outlook of unions, and fare better when the employer-employee relation is individualized.

A third key plank of the decollectivizing mode of flexibility involves the handling of strikes by the state and employers. By firing the striking air traffic controllers' union (PATCO) and replacing them with non-union workers in the first year of his presidency, Reagan set a powerful example to employers about how to deal with restive employees.[34] Although the right to permanently replace lawfully striking workers had existed ever since a 1938 Supreme Court decision,[35] in the wake of Reagan's handling of the PATCO strike the permanent replacement of striking workers proceeded at an accelerated rate.[36] Similarly restricting recourse to industrial action in the UK, Thatcher defeated the National Union of Mineworkers in 1985,[37] and introduced complex and technical industrial action balloting rules, beginning with the Trade Unions Act of 1984.[38] Employers exploited these rules as a delaying tactic in legal challenges against strikers, notably in the 1989 dock strike. During the four weeks that it took the House of Lords to uphold

[33] "Reforms and Results," 5-6.

[34] Farber and Western, "Ronald Reagan," 392-3.

[35] *NLRB v. Mackay Radio and Telegraph Co.*, 304 U.S. 333 (1938). See Fiorito, "The State of the Unions," 47.

[36] Farber and Western, "Ronald Reagan," 394.

[37] Clare Beckett, *Thatcher* (London: Haus Publishing, 2006), 76-77.

[38] Nicola Countouris and Mark Freedland, "Injunctions, *Cyanamid*, and the corrosion of the right to strike in the UK," UCL Labour Rights Institute On-Line Working Papers, *LRI WP 1/2010*:1-20, accessed October 27, 2013, http://www.ucl.ac.uk/laws/lri/papers/Injunctions_Cyanamid_the-corrosion-of-the-right-to-strike-in-the-UK.pdf.

the legality of the industrial action, the original strike ballot had expired, necessitating a new election, by which time the action had lost momentum.[39] Once again, this element of decollectivization has been resumed in recent years: Between 2009 and 2010 no less than five injunctions were granted or confirmed against UK strikes due to "balloting or procedural defects," with courts making increasingly narrow readings of the procedures unions must follow in order to call lawful strikes.[40]

By creating conditions hostile to union organizing, collective bargaining, and industrial action, the decollectivizing mode of flexibilization diminishes the collective power of workers to advance their interests and helps increase the discretion of employers to manage workplaces. In the next section I consider various facets of this increase in employer discretion, but before that let us examine the second mode of flexibility, which has involved the 'roll out' of pro-individualistic regulations. In many cases, these work against labor market flexibility, as defined by the IMF index considered in the previous section. At the same time, some rights empower individual employees in such a way as to offer them new forms of flexibility. Indeed, in the context of a significantly weakened labor movement, New Labour introduced a raft of regulations to protect individual workers, such as a statutory minimum wage, enhanced protections against unfair dismissal, and the "first statutory entitlement to paid holidays in the UK," even for part-time workers.[41] Moreover, the government enhanced maternity and paternity leaves and, in 2002, granted parents the right to request flexible working practices from their employers.[42] Although these are rights granted to

[39] Fredman, "The New Rights," 35-36.

[40] Countouris and Freedland, "Injunctions," 5, 7.

[41] Howell, "From New Labour to No Labour?" 221-222.

[42] The Employment Act (2002) provides this right for parents of children under 6 years old and of disabled children under 18 years old. In 2007 this right was extended to parents of children under 17 and of carers of disabled people over 18, while in 2009 all parents of children under 17 could claim the right. See Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service, "Acas consultation on:

individual employees, it is worth noting that unions influence the extent to which employers comply with them, so that "collective procedures guarantee individual rights."[43] In this sense, the weakening of unions under the first mode of flexibility might diminish the effects of the pro-individualistic mode of flexibility. The current climate of austerity, moreover, is proving hostile to these rights, as in 2012 the coalition government lengthened from one to two years the "qualifying period of continuous employment needed…to acquire the right not to be unfairly dismissed."[44] In the name of reducing the risks of hiring, the coalition government effectively doubled the period of 'at will' employment.[45]

Finally, it is worth noting that the relatively recent roll-out of individualistic regulations in the UK contrasts with the US, where for at least thirty years the state has played a strong role in the enforcement of basic individual employment rights. The origins of this regime can be found in equal opportunity legislation dating back to the civil rights movement, and in particular, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Subsequent legislation has expanded protection against workplace discrimination for women, people with disabilities, the aged, and sexual minorities. During the 1980s and 1990s, moreover, legislation at the federal, state, and local levels granted workers rights to family

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Draft Code of Practice on the extended right to request flexible working," (February 2013): 3, accessed October 27, 2013, http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/2/r/Consultation_draft_COP_FW.pdf.

[43] Paul Willman and Alex Bryson, "Union Organization in Great Britain," *Journal of Labor Research* 28, no. 1 (2007): 102, http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/detail?vid=3&sid=87414c4a-e116-4482-92ac-d14a909772d3%40sessionmgr10&hid=25&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=bth&AN=23815053.

[44] Explanatory Note to The Unfair Dismissal and Statement of Reasons for Dismissal (Variation of Qualifying Period) Order 2012, No. 989, accessed November 5, 2012. http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2012/989/note/made.

[45] Damian Grimshaw and Jill Rubery, "The end of the UK's liberal collectivist social model? The implications of the coalition government's policy during the austerity crisis," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 36, no. 1 (2012): 111, doi: 10.1093/cje/ber033.

leave and living wages.[46] Perhaps most notable in this regard is the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1994, which guarantees employees twelve weeks of unpaid leave for family and medical reasons. Other federal legislation enacted in the 1990s provides minimum health and safety standards and regulates pension and other employee benefits plans.[47] These statutory protections arguably impede labor market flexibility, yet rights to family leave increase the flexibility of individual employees.

In this section I have cataloged a range of actions taken by governments both to constrain the scope and power of unions and to expand the rights of individual employees. Although these two modes can operate in harmonious ways, especially in their construction of an individualistic social formation, they can also clash: to some extent, individual rights benefit from collective protection, while an increase in the discretion of employers as a result of the first mode can stand in tension with the empowerment of individual workers carried out by the second.

IV. Flexible Organizations and Working Practices

Although the macro-economic policy goal of flexibility is central to the construction of the 'free' labor market, we turn now to consider how flexibility can operate at the level of the firm or organization. Having a flexible or 'deregulated' labor market does not necessarily equate to flexible working arrangements, for these also depend on the techniques and practices managers use to organize workplaces as well as the individual rights of workers to various forms of flexibility with respect to their employment. Thus, the Equal Opportunities Commission notes that, "despite claims

[46] Michael J. Piore and Sean Safford, "Changing Regimes of Workplace Governance, Shifting Axes of Social Mobilization, and the Challenge to Industrial Relations Theory," *Industrial Relations: A Journal of Economy and Society* 35, no. 3 (2006): 300-302, doi: 10.1111/j.1468-232X.2006.00439.x.

[47] Stephen F. Befort, "Labor and Employment Law at the Millennium: A Historical Review and Critical Assessment," *Boston College Law Review* 43 (2001): 380, accessed October 29, 2013, http://lawdigitalcommons.bc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2201&context=bclr.

of a flexible labour market, Britain is lagging behind its competitors in flexible work arrangements."[48]

From the outset it is worth stressing that 'flexibility' encompasses different sets of arrangements for employers and employees. As we saw above, the neoliberalization or flexibilization of industrial relations involves the removal of constraints on how employers manage workplaces, whether these constraints came originally in the form of laws or collective regulation.[49] An increase in employer discretion thus facilitates flexibility understood as the ability to hire and fire employees as needed (numerical flexibility), and to adjust compensation levels in ways not fully determined by collective bargaining or statute (financial flexibility). A diminution of collective regulation also enhances the ability of employers to change the content of jobs and move employees from one task or department to another (functional flexibility). Finally, temporal flexibility refers to the ability of employers to alter the total working time of their workforce, not by changing the number of employees as in numerical flexibility, but by varying the hours the same number of employees work according to fluctuations in demand.[50]

These four managerial capacities have themselves been altered by the emergence of what Guy Standing calls 'global managerialism.' As he sees it, "[t]echnological changes, economic reforms

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[48] "Enter the Timelords: Transforming Work to Meet the Future," Equal Opportunities Commission (2007): 20, accessed September 29, 2012, www.bitc.org.uk/document.rm?id=8625.

[49] Baccaro and Howell, "Common Neoliberal Trajectory." Guy Standing calls this form of flexibility 'subordinated,' and notes that it requires workers to be more adaptable, a theme I explore in greater detail in section V. 'Liberating' flexibility, on the other hand, gives workers more freedom to pursue diverse lifestyles, and in this sense corresponds with 'employee-friendly' flexibility discussed below. Guy Standing, *Beyond the New Paternalism: Basic Security as Equality* (London: Verso, 2002), 6. My analysis complicates this dichotomy, however, by showing that the broader regime of flexibility induces a subtle form of domination even for more privileged workers who enjoy 'liberating' flexibility.

[50] The four forms of flexibility discussed here are set out in Marino Regini, "The Dilemmas of Labour Market Regulation," in *Why Deregulate Labour Markets?*, eds. Gosta Esping-Andersen and Marino Regini (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 16-17.

and structural changes have allowed many more managerial options, in terms of organizational structures, relations of production, locational choices and speeds of relocatioan." This means that the bargaining power of managers has significantly increased as they can easily shift locations as needed. Taking this into account, we can add a fifth form of flexibility, which Standing calls 'organizational flexibility."[51] These five faces of flexibility help generalize insecurity and precariousness within the labor market, with insecure, low-paid and irregular work "spreading relative to… regular, unionized, stable, manual or craft-based" employment.[52]

This brief overview of flexibility in the context of management shows that the term has multiple connotations, but the effects of flexibility from the vantage point of individual workers are similarly diverse. For example, focusing specifically on temporal flexibility, one scholar divides working practices into three groups: 'employer-friendly,' 'employee-friendly' and 'neutral.' According to this classification, employer-friendly practices, such as involuntary part-time or temporary working, zero-hours contracts, and on-call arrangements, aim primarily to increase company profits.[53] The development of scheduling software has assisted in this goal by allowing employers, particularly in the retail and services sector, to precisely plan staffing levels in accordance with predicted demand, thus reducing labor costs. Such technology reportedly led one company, Jamba Juice, to save millions of dollars a year. But it also can result in irregular and unpredictable shift patterns for employees, increasing stress and uncertainty about the future and potentially limiting

[51] Standing, *Beyond the New Paternalism*, 33.

[52] Guy Standing, "Global Feminization Through Flexible Labour: A Theme Revisited," *World Development* 27, no. 3 (1999): 583, accessed October 29, 2013, http://www.guystanding.com/files/documents/Global_Feminization_Through_Flexible_Labor_-_theme_revisited.pdf.

[53] Fleetwood, "Why Work-Life Balance Now?" 389.

employees' freedom to use non-work time in ways that they choose, whether it be the pursuit of an acting career or active involvement in the community.[54]

'Employee-friendly' arrangements, on the other hand, such as flexible start and finish times, job shares, and sabbaticals, potentially enhance 'work-life balance.'[55] A busy parent juggling childcare and paid work may benefit enormously from exercising some control over the hours of his or her employment, but so too might the employee who wants to take a sustained period of time off work for travel, or the commuter who simply wants to beat the rush-hour traffic. The widespread appeal of flexibility is suggested by a 2010 survey of UK professionals, who listed flexible working as the number one benefit they sought, and by a 2009 report in the United States, which found that 83% of hourly paid workers saw flexibility as "an important factor in deciding to take the job."[56] Of course, employee-friendly practices can also benefit employers as a whole by increasing the supply of labor and making more skills and expertise available at a lower cost.

While employee-friendly practices are said to improve work-life balance, 'neutral' practices are generally employee-friendly *and* offer the chance of enhanced profits, since more contented employees tend to be more productive, committed, and healthy.[57] There is reason to suspect that many 'employee-friendly' practices might fall into this category, for although one can imagine managers reluctantly conceding a limited number of strictly employee-friendly working arrangements to well-organized employees, perhaps in exchange for other concessions on the part of workers, it seems unlikely that they would do so if this posed a serious threat to the company's profitability.

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[54] Steven Greenhouse, "A Part-Time Life, as Hours Shrink and Shift," *The New York Times* October 28, 2012.

[55] Fleetwood, "Why Work-Life Balance Now?" 389.

[56] Alison Maitland and Peter Thomson, *Future Work: How Businesses Can Adapt and Thrive in the New World of Work* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2011), 21.

[57] Fleetwood, "Why Work-Life Balance Now?" 389.

Articulating this view, an investigation into the transformation of work by Britain's Equal Opportunities Commission argues that increased flexibility "must deliver a sustainable 'win-win-win' for employees, employers and their customers and be seen, not as a concession to personal needs, but as a tool for improving business performance." According to this logic, adapting working arrangements to personal needs is only permissible when it also benefits the employer (and customers).[58]

Another key aspect of flexible working involves the ability to choose where to perform one's work, a freedom greatly enhanced by advances in information technology. A 2010 report examining IBM employees found that flexible working arrangements increased the number of hours per week by 19 that employees could work before they experienced comparable work-life conflict to their colleagues who worked only at the office.[59] This finding suggests that tele-working can offer an effective means of reducing stress levels and other work-related health problems. More broadly, the ability to work from home (or anywhere with an internet connection) can be particularly beneficial to parents, for example, who may be allowed to leave the office early to collect children from school, and who then finish their day's work at home in the evening. Yet this example also points to the possibility of employers using tele-working to increase working time beyond standard office hours. When this happens, work has "invaded personal space, instead of helping to free people's time."[60] As I discuss in section V below, however, even employee-friendly forms of flexibility blur the distinction between the formerly discrete realms of work and 'private life,' such that one is potentially never fully away from work, never 'off the clock.' While this loss of a clear separation from work may be a price worth paying for many workers, it nonetheless points to the need to

[58] "Enter the Timelords," 10.

[59] Maitland and Thomson, *Future Work*, 4.

[60] Ibid, 36.

approach even 'employee-friendly' practices with a critical eye and to avoid treating them as an unqualified 'good.'

However conducive to helping employees meet their other responsibilities and needs, flexibility with respect to time and place of work essentially leaves intact the conventional model of paying workers for their time. Underlying this approach is the traditional control model of management, or Douglas McGregor's 'Theory X,' which "assumes that people have to be forced to work by constant management control." A more radical transformation of work, endorsed by Alison Maitland and Peter Thomson, for example, involves a corresponding shift in assumptions about how best to manage employees. According to 'Theory Y,' "people are self-motivated and can be left to manage themselves."[61] This means that, rather than focusing on time and place of work, managers pay attention to the results employees achieve for the company or organization.

An example of such a system is the Results-Only Work Environment, which has been rolled out in both the private and public sectors (Best Buy, Gap, and the White House Office of Personnel Management have all adopted it). As Maitland and Thomson summarize the case for this type of approach, "Assume people are responsible, give them the freedom to manage themselves, treat them like adults and watch them flourish."[62] While Maitland and Thomson refer to their preferred mode of organization as 'future work,' and usefully point to the constraints of more conventional forms of flexibility in terms of their commitment to a command form of management, it could be argued that 'future work' merely represents a more fully developed form of flexibility than arrangements like flexi-time and tele-working. This 'flexibility plus' comes to closely resemble a form of self-employment, wherein workers decide for themselves how to deliver the contracted work, and are often paid on the basis of results rather than working time. This in turn means "[r]unning yourself as

[61] Ibid, 43.

[62] Ibid, 45.

an enterprise and charging your customers for your services."[63] The idea of self-entrepreneurialism, as we saw in chapter 1 and will explore further in the next section, is a central plank of the neoliberal ideology of the free individual.

Finally, just because one has the option to work flexibly does not mean that it will always be prudent to exercise that choice. For example, in a study of temp workers in Sweden and Britain, researchers found that the attraction of temping lay in the *potential* freedom it offered "to travel, to study, or to take time off from working-life to be with one's children," but that the risk of not receiving future assignments if they turned down offers meant that workers "want to work as much as possible while they can, and to postpone ideas of making the promises of flexibility come true."[64] Similarly, taking maternity or paternity leave means potentially risking one's reputation as a committed employee and stalling one's career advancement. More broadly, risk and uncertainty play a central role in neoliberal discourse and policy programs, ranging from the supposedly perilous economic consequences of failing to 'deregulate' labor markets, to the need for individuals to constantly work on themselves to ensure continuing employability in an ever-changing economy. As we will see in the next section, this disciplines individual workers to think in terms of "harnessing the uncertainties of working in a global market in order to reduce their individual risks and maximize their personal rewards."[65] The pressure to remain competitive in both the workplace and the broader labor market can thus constrain the capacity of employee-friendly flexible working practices to expand the freedom individuals enjoy in relation to paid work.

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Garsten and Turtinen, "'Angels' and 'Chameleon,'" 181.

[65] See Louise Amoore, "Risk, reward, and discipline at work," *Economy and Society* 33, no. 2 (2004): 176, doi: 10.1080/0308514041000167711.

V. The Construction of the Flexible Worker

As we have seen, the ideology of flexibility centers on a strong conceptual opposition between the individual and the collective, which implies that individuals need to be liberated from 'bad' rigidities associated with collective institutions in order to reduce unemployment and stimulate economic growth. Beyond these economic justifications for the dismantlement of collective institutions, moreover, we noted the libertarian and populist criticisms of the welfare state and unionism as threats to individual freedom and control. To the extent that the ideology of flexibility seeks to establish a socio-economic order in which individuals are free from the influence of collective institutions it resonates with the classical liberal tradition, within which the buyer and seller of labor power are idealized as free and equal individuals.[66] This fiction has been perpetuated since the late nineteenth century by the legal understanding of corporations as legal persons, and intensified in recent years by the US Supreme Court's recognition of them as persons with First Amendment rights to free speech in *Citizens United v. Federal Elections Commission* (2010). Corporations are also, to some extent, anthropomorphized by the identification that is often made in popular culture between them and their CEOs.[67]

The characterization of the market as inhabited by free and equal individuals is particularly delusional, however, when the actors are a firm on the one side and individual on the other, for despite the legal status of corporations as 'persons' the former is always already an association of

[66] As Marx famously quipped, the sphere within which labor power is bought and sold is a "very Eden of the innate rights of man. There alone rule Freedom, Property and Bentham." Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Volume 1, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 176.

[67] See Laura E. Lyons, "'I'd like my life back': Corporate personhood and the BP Oil Disaster," *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly* 34, no. 1 (2011): 96-107, doi: 10.1353/bio.2011.0012.

capital.[68] Although the ideology and policies of labor market flexibility capitalize on the deeply-held value of individualism, then, they attack collectives in a selective manner, targeting unions and some of the regulatory powers of the state while leaving intact, and even augmenting, the power of employers, including corporations and public bodies (as in the case of Wisconsin). In such an environment, individuals may be 'liberated' from unions and the state, but they are arguably more vulnerable than ever to the vicissitudes of capital and 'the market,' given their diminished collective protections and voice.

As we saw in the above section, flexibility does not only connote an opposition to the welfare state and to unionism, it also contrasts with a rigid set of expectations on the part of employers concerning the place and time at which work is performed. Indeed, an important refinement to the analysis of labor market flexibility offered above acknowledges that governments have also granted rights to individual employees, such as a legal entitlement to family leave, which in turn facilitate some flexible working arrangements. Yet here it is also important to note that the 'culture' of a workplace, as well as broader narratives concerning risk and success within the economy and society, condition employees' exercise of those rights.

Drawing these threads together, and referring back to Wendy Brown's account of ideology, we can see that flexibility constructs and naturalizes the 'flexible worker' as one who enjoys a liberation from earlier effects of political intervention and power: the Keynesian welfare state and its corresponding goal of full employment, unions, and the Fordist mode of accumulation, which requires "conformist discipline" to factory-centered conditions of industrialization.[69] This account

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[68] Claus Offe and Helmut Wiesenthal, "Two Logics of Collective Action: Theoretical Notes on Social Class and Organizational Form," *Political Power and Social Theory* 1 (1980): 67-115, accessed October 29, 2013, http://www.hwiesenthal.de/downloads/2logics.pdf.

[69] Andrew Ross, *Nice Work if You Can Get It: Life and Labor in Precarious Times* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 5.

describes the flexible subject in terms of what it is *free from*, but what characteristics and attributes, if any, does the flexible worker possess?

As I show in the remainder of this section, the flexible worker embodies an active form of adaptability that aligns with a spirit of self-entrepreneurialism that will be familiar from the discussion of Hayek's characterization of the independent-entrepreneur in chapter 1: He or she acts as his or her own manager by determining the place and time of work, and by completing tasks in an environment of autonomy and trust. Smart phone and laptop at the ready, the flexible worker is willing and able to work evenings and weekends, at home or in the office. In fact, these once discrete space-times become blurred for the flexible worker, so that work is potentially everywhere, all the time; in such an environment, the looming danger is that one may choose when and where to work without ever really being 'off the clock.' Moreover, the flexible worker relentlessly develops and capitalizes upon his or her skills and attributes, preparing for new opportunities by scouring job listings even when already employed and by taking evening classes to gain career-advancing qualifications.

While some people may accept or at least tolerate this condition if they perceive it as affording them greater consumption or leisure opportunities, it would be a mistake to see it as purely 'optional.'[70] Rather, the individualized, competitive, and precarious nature of the flexible labor market compels the individual to cultivate a spirit of self-entrepreneurialism and adaptation to the demands of employers and the market to remain employable, while the goal of employability in turn puts pressure on the pursuit of valuable unpaid activities, such as care and community work.[71] Work

[70] Here I adapt Will Kymlicka's discussion of alienation in his *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 188-189.

[71] In a similar vein, Guy Standing notes that members of the 'precariat' experience a loss of control over time, ethics, and knowledge, as well as the tendency of paid work to 'crowd out'

thus envelops life in a way which subverts flexibility's promise of providing individuals with greater control over employment.

In elaborating this account of the flexible worker, let us begin with an examination of adaptability, which, as we will see shortly, is closely related to the discourse of employability and to the notion of the 'enterprising self.' An allusive source on the subject of adaptability is Tom Rath's *Strengths Finder 2.0*, which sets out 34 'themes of talent.' Readers are encouraged to take an online test to discover which talents apply to them, then to follow the book's advice on how to make the best use of them in their professional lives. Indeed, reading this book in one's 'free' time exemplifies the spirit of self-entrepreneurialism that flexible workers must cultivate and the degree to which that time is not as 'free' as one might tend to think.

One feature of adaptability as a 'theme of talent' is an openness to the future, such that the adaptable person lives "in the moment" and sees the future not as a "fixed destination" but instead as "a place that you create out of the choices that you make right now."[72] Even future plans are constantly subject to revision by the adaptable person: Adaptability enables him or her to "respond willingly to the demands of the moment even if they pull you away from your plans."[73] It is worth noting that the only agency in the above quotation is that of the adaptable person, since the things that might derail one's earlier plans are rendered impersonal by the phrase 'the demands of the moment.' No mention is made of what, or more precisely who, makes these demands and why. Again: "You are, at heart, a very flexible person who can stay productive when the demands of work

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"activities that have social or personal value." Guy Standing, *The Precariat: The New Dangerous Class* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2011), 126.

[72] Tom Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0* (New York: Gallup Press, 2007), 45.

[73] Ibid.

are pulling you in many different directions at once."[74] Here we see not only an obfuscation of the power relations in the workplace ('the demands of work' as opposed to the 'demands of the employer'), but also the attribution of adaptability to the very core ('heart') of a person's being.

Elsewhere, when Rath does mention the agency of 'others,' it is to acknowledge that too much adaptability can leave a person vulnerable: "Though your Adaptability serves you well, don't compromise your long-term success by bending to every whim, desire, and demand of others." In this advice we catch a glimpse of the downside of 'too much' adaptability and flexibility: a self-sacrificing approach to co-workers and managers that ultimately risks thwarting personal advancement. Here too one recalls Hayek's depiction of the employed worker who does other people's bidding, and sees work as largely a matter "of fitting himself into a given framework during a certain number of hours."[75] Moreover, successful workers actively monitor their own adaptability to avoid this risk: "Use smart guidelines to help you decide when to flex and when to stand firm."[76] Despite this warning, Rath doesn't give specific reasons as to why excessive adaptability might thwart one's 'long-term success' (nor does he say explicitly what the latter might consist of), but two possibilities suggest themselves.

First, managers may interpret a surplus of adaptability as evidence of subservience or a lack of ambition, thus rendering the employee a less suitable candidate for promotion in the eyes of employers looking for someone proactive and ready to take the initiative. Bending to *literally* "every whim, desire, and demand of others" would, of course, leave little or no scope for choosing the shape of one's own future; rather, it would place this entirely in the hands of 'others.' This form of adaptability equates to docility and resonates with the traditional feminine role of selflessly serving

[74] Ibid.

[75] Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 122.

[76] Rath, *Strengths Finder 2.0*, 46.

the needs of fathers and husbands. Of course, for some roles, particularly those in low-level service work, this is precisely the characteristic some employers *are* looking for, because too much initiative and ambition will likely breed dissatisfaction and high staff turnover rates. But, if one wants to 'get ahead,' and in many white-collar jobs this is increasingly required simply to *stay* employed,[77] adaptability-as-docility will likely be a barrier to success.

In contrast with docile adaptability, adaptability that would be more conducive to long-term professional success entails a degree of self-awareness and reflexivity, in that the subject conceives of his or her life as a project to be worked on and approaches his or her skills and attributes as resources or human capital to be exploited (by the self and by others). This contemporary preoccupation with one's employability results in a "*reflexive exploitation*, the ongoing reflection on the self as object of exchange, a kind of ongoing self assessment."[78] For example, it is a commonplace that successful job applicants know how to 'sell themselves' by framing their skills and experience as commodities that employers need or value. This reflexivity contrasts with the passive form of adaptability I identified above, in that the 'excessively' adaptable worker fails to appreciate the possibilities for capitalizing on his or her talents. Indeed, he or she may fail to conceptualize those talents as resources or elements of human capital at all. Employers may also take such qualities for granted, particularly if they are seen as 'natural' to the worker. This is, of course, a particular barrier to the recognition of women's reproductive labor, broadly construed.

A second but closely related possible pitfall of "bending to every whim, desire, and demand of others" is that one might grow dependent on particular employers and managers, rather than developing 'transferable' skills that will better advance one's career in other firms and organizations

[77] Standing, *Beyond the New Paternalism*, 50.

[78] Colin Cremin, *Capitalism's New Clothes: Enterprise, Ethics, and Enjoyment in Times of Crisis* (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 45-46.

as the demand for labor and skills changes over time. Thus, the subject must "desire what employers in the abstract desire," even though one can never be quite sure what that is.[79] Regular perusal of job vacancies, for example, enables the flexible worker to stay abreast of the demands and expectations of employers, and teaches which new qualifications would assist in career advancement, as well as how to 'package' experience and skills in an effective and appealing manner. It is easy to see how this drive for employability can all too easily become a fear-driven and cynical opportunism, which is arguably now a "professional requirement" of post-Taylorist society.[80]

This brief exploration has shown that adaptability, and hence flexibility more broadly, seems to call for what Nikolas Rose calls a "life of incessant job seeking," constant training, and the "continuous economic capitalization of the self."[81] The notion of capitalizing on one's talents and skills underscores the point that much of the responsibility for remaining in employment in a flexible labor market falls on the individual. This process begins even before full-time entry into the labor market, as students bear an increasing share of the costs of financing their own higher education, despite the fact that we are continually told that economic growth depends on a well-educated workforce.

Once at work, employees have increasingly had to manage their own career development as a result of firms' reduced training budgets, part of the overall goal of flexibility and the attempt to remain competitive, as well as unpredictable job prospects.[82] Moreover, flexible working

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[79] Ibid, 44.

[80] Paolo Virno, "The Ambivalence of Disenchantment," in *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, eds. Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 17.

[81] Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 161

[82] Ken Kamoche, Mary Pang, Amy L.Y. Wong, "Career Development and Knowledge Appropriation: A Genealogical Critique," *Organization Studies* 32, no. 12 (2011): 1671, doi: 10.1177/0170840611421249.

arrangements are often justified on the grounds that they enable workers to further their education without leaving employment.[83] And organized labor's weak position in relation to capital leaves the individual(ized) worker with few options but to be enterprising, in the sense that he or she must now 'cherry-pick' the "ripest" of his or her available "use-values of subjectivity, attitudes, experiences, skills, human qualities and characteristics."[84] Indeed, books like *Strengths Finder 2.0* help us to identify and then capitalize upon our talents, our stock of 'human capital,' that we may not even have realized we had.

It is worth noting that the idea of human capital, and the related view of workers as self-entrepreneurs, is a conceptual innovation specific to neoliberal thought. The rationale is simple: people work for wages, wages are a form of income, with the income in question a return on the capital workers possess, namely "all those physical and psychological factors which make someone able to earn this or that wage."[85] Foucault thus argues that, rather than seeing *homo oeconomicus* as a partner in exchange as classical liberalism had done in the nineteenth century, under neoliberalism *homo oeconomicus* is "for himself his own capital, … for himself his own producer, … for himself the source of [his] earnings," and in this sense "an entrepreneur of himself."[86]

As discussed in chapter 1, this was a "new identity for the employee, one that blurred, or even obliterated, the distinction between worker and manager."[87] In fact, the portmanteau

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[83] "Work-Life Balance and the Economics of Workplace Flexibility," Executive Office of the President, Council of Economic Advisers (2010), accessed September 4, 2012, www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/03/31/economics-workplace-flexibility.

[84] Cremin, *Capitalism's New Clothes*, 34, 42.

[85] Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*, 24-25.

[86] Ibid, 226.

[87] Miller and Rose, "Production, Identity, and Democracy," 455.

'entreployee' aptly conveys the sense in which the employee within neoliberal capitalism is "himself an entrepreneur."[88] This blurring of the roles of worker, entrepreneur and manager can be registered on multiple levels. First, as we have already seen, we are now all understood to be the owners of our own human capital, and in that sense, entrepreneurs. Furthermore, a distinguishing feature of neoliberal capitalism is the employee's self-motivation and readiness to deploy his or her own "abilities and emotional resources … in the service of individualized projects."[89] At the extreme, these characteristics merge into the conditions of 'future work' discussed above, whereby the individual runs him- or herself "as an enterprise" by determining his or her own working time and being paid on the basis of delivering goods and services as contracted.[90]

These trends have taken shape under conditions of post-Fordist production, in which shorter production runs involve placing more decision-making into the hands of employees. The employee as "reflexive actor" is less constrained by the rules and resources of the shop floor than was the case in the Fordist production regime, such that he or she "makes decisions as to alternative rules and resources" and "is responsible for the continuous transformation of both shopfloor rules and (in process and product) resources."[91] Similarly, the organization of work around the model of the project and team means that workers cooperate with one another for fixed periods of time before being assigned to another project.[92]

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[88] The term 'entreployee' was first coined by Hans J. Pongratz and G. Günter Voß. See Martin Hartmann and Axel Honneth, "Paradoxes of Capitalism," *Constellations* 13, no. 1 (2006): 45, doi: 10.1111/j.1351-0487.2006.00439.x.

[89] Ibid.

[90] Maitland and Thomson, *Future Work*, 45.

[91] Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), 122.

[92] Piore and Safford, "Changing Regimes of Workplace Governance," 311.

Of course, these accounts are highly stylized and we must make the usual caveats concerning generalizations. Yet broad shifts in workplace relations corresponding to the regime of flexible production also mesh with well-documented developments in management theory, particularly the so-called human resources movement. This school of thought began in the 1960s in response to problems associated with Taylorism, including wildcat strikes, mass absenteeism and sabotage, and sought to improve worker satisfaction and motivation by increasing the scope for autonomy, responsibility, and variety.[93] In particular, semi-autonomous teams would "divide the work between themselves as they thought best, vary the rhythm of work throughout the day and monitor the result."[94]

Moreover, since at least the late 1980s, managerial discourse has tended to understand the world as complex and ambiguous, and has accordingly emphasized the need for "looser organizational forms which are more able to 'go with the flow'" and the "production of subjects who can fit these forms."[95] The Equal Opportunities Commission's report on flexibility exemplifies a commitment to this approach by arguing that empowering workers by extending trust "to employees at all levels and in all types of work" and by moving away from 'command and control' management benefits business and improves "worker engagement and productivity."[96] This move away from 'command and control' management can be seen in the way that values like commitment are prized over obedience, and in the expectation that employees not merely submit to the authority

[93] Sharon Beder, *Selling the Work Ethic: From Puritan Pulpit to Corporate PR* (London: Zed Books, 2000), 108.

[94] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 59.

[95] Nigel Thrift, *Knowing Capitalism* (London: Sage Publications, 2005), 33.

[96] "Enter the Timelords," 11.

of managers, but actually adopt their perspectives.[97] Similarly, as presentation, communication and appearance have become key elements of much paid work, especially in the services sector, work has taken on a strongly performative character, with employees largely disciplining and managing themselves in this dimension of their work.[98] As the demands of work are experienced less as an imposition from outside the worker, so they penetrate more deeply into the individual's consciousness, with the result that the flexible worker becomes an agent of his or her own subordination through an ongoing process of self-disciplining.

Although the ideology of flexibility tends to gloss over class differences, it is worth noting that access to employee friendly forms of flexibility remain the preserve of more privileged members of the workforce. For example, employee control over working time in the United States is correlated with race and educational attainment, such that a significantly greater share of Whites (29%) report such practices than Blacks (20%) and Hispanics (18%). Moreover, having a bachelor's degree or higher makes a worker more than twice as likely to report flexible working practices than one with less than a high school diploma (38% compared with 15%).[99] Since flexibility of the employee-friendly variety means greater autonomy at work, access to these forms of working arrangement is a key factor in determining a person's occupation-based social status. Iris Marion Young, for example, argues that the privilege of professionals includes "considerable day-to-day autonomy."[100] The college professor who must attend meetings and classes but can manage the rest of his or her work time as desired stands in stark contrast with the retail assistant or cleaner who

[97] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 70.

[98] See Lisa Adkins and Celia Lury, "The Labour of Identity: Performing Identities, Performing Economies," *Economy and Society* 4 (1999): 600, doi: 10.1080/03085149900000020.

[99] "Work Life Balance."

[100] Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, 57.

must report for work at times (and a place) often outside his or her control. Employee friendly flexible working arrangements are not merely practical benefits; they also confer status and a positive sense of self on those who enjoy them since they visibly and palpably lessen the degree to which work is experienced as an external imposition onto a person's life.

At the same time, even if flexibility may have lowered the rate of unemployment in countries like Britain,[101] there is consensus among scholars that this has come at the price of the "deterioration in wages, growing insecurity and increasing poverty."[102] This analysis also finds support in Perucci and Wysong's argument that the United States went from being a 'middle-class' society in the mid-twentieth century, to a "bifurcated and polarized two-class society" today, due in part to a pattern of shrinking benefits (like healthcare, pensions, life insurance, and vacation time) and to the growing contingency workforce, characterized by low wages, low prestige, and minimal job security.[103] These trends can be linked back to the decollectivizing mode of flexibility, and with the shifting of responsibility for employment to the individual, discussed above, it becomes easier to blame economic hardship and under- and unemployment on the 'bad choices' and behavior of those individuals. David Harvey notes that, while on the whole the neoliberal experiment has not brought the promised levels of economic growth, some countries (including the US and the UK) have done spectacularly well at the expense of others, and within those more prosperous nations neoliberalism has indeed been a success from the vantage point of the upper classes. The standard explanation for

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[101] On the basis of data from 97 countries (including the UK and the US) between 1980 and 2008, the IMF argues that "policies aimed at increasing labor market flexibility *may* have an important effect in reducing unemployment" (emphasis added). Bernal-Verdugo, Furceri, and Guillaume, "Labor Market Flexibility and Unemployment," 4.

[102] See Simon Deakin and Hannah Reed, "Britain – River Crossing or Cold Bath?" in *Why Deregulate Labour Markets?*, eds. Esping-Andersen and Regini, 141.

[103] Robert Perrucci and Earl Wysong, *The New Class Society: Goodbye American Dream?* (Lanham Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003), xii, 48.

any deterioration of conditions among the lower classes, however, is failure, "usually for personal and cultural reasons, to enhance their own human capital (through dedication to education, the acquisition of a protestant work ethic, submission to work discipline and flexibility, and the like)."[104] Success in such a precarious environment demands the cultivation of employability and the spirit of self-entrepreneurialism discussed in this section.

VI. Conclusions

This chapter has highlighted the double-edged character of the social transformation that flexibility has helped to initiate. On the one hand, flexibility can enhance the freedom that individual workers experience in relation to paid work, to some extent ameliorating the sense of alienation that many feel toward employment and offering the possibility of a more rewarding and healthy work-life balance. In this respect, the promise of flexibility to inject freedom into various levels of the organization of work helps sustain the wage relation by lessening feelings of alienation and general dissatisfaction with employment. On the other hand, access to employee-friendly flexibility is uneven and implicated in the contemporary class structure, while employer-friendly flexibility has heightened insecurity and precariousness.

Furthermore, even when the second mode of flexibility expands the freedom individuals enjoy with respect to work, the accompanying self-management, blurring of work and 'private' life, and imperative to maintain and increase one's employability inaugurate a new mode of domination that allows work to subtly subsume more and more of life to its demands. When the pursuit of employability entails the capitalization of one's skills and attributes, moreover, one may reasonably fear for the continuing existence of endeavors and social relations performed for their own intrinsic value, rather than instrumentally for profit or the enhancement of employability.

[104] Harvey, *Spaces of Global Capitalism*, 42.

Looking to the future, employee-friendly flexible working arrangements may yet be extended to a broader cross-section of the workforce. Presumably, the impetus for such a transformation would come from a coalition of forward-looking managers (some of whom already recognize the economic benefits of employee-friendly flexibility), government, and workers themselves. As access to this form of flexibility became more evenly distributed across different occupations, one might even imagine a softening of the class and status hierarchy. Moreover, as Philippe Van Parijs and many others argue, the provision of a basic income adequate to a decent standard of living offers an effective and just way of compensating for the insecurity engendered by flexibilized labor markets.[105] The basic income is also a fitting complement to flexibility's promise of freedom and empowerment, since its rejection of the conditionality of benefits upon the performance of work could free people up to pursue a range of activities outside of paid employment, potentially replacing what Ulrich Beck has called the 'work society' with a 'multi-activity society.'[106] I explore these issues and others at greater length in chapter 4.

In light of recent developments in both the US and the UK, however, there is every reason to expect further decollectivization and an increase in employer discretion with respect to the organization of work. While more privileged workers may continue to enjoy flexible working arrangements, the erosion of union strength and dismantlement of individual employment rights would leave those lower down the socio-economic ladder with even less power to negotiate favorable terms and conditions of work with employers. Meanwhile, in the context of concerns about budget deficits and the perseverance of the work ethic, there are few signs of the introduction of a basic income on the horizon. Aside from these practical problems, though, it is also worth

[105] Philippe Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All: What (If Anything) Can Justify Capitalism?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 222-223.

[106] Beck, *Brave New World of Work*, 58.

asking whether the domination that I have identified with the second mode of flexibility can be overcome, or at least softened.

In this chapter I have not developed an ethical critique of the cultivation of a self-entrepreneurial spirit *per se*, although I have suggested that non-market activities may suffer at its hands. Some might also find that self-entrepreneurialism cultivates an objectionably self-interested individualism, but to do justice to such claims would take us far outside the scope of this dissertation. More modestly, I have drawn attention to the ways in which flexibility subverts it own promise of providing individuals with greater control over work, by compelling their adaptation to the demands of the market and employers, and by enabling work to envelop life.

To the extent that the basic income would provide individuals with economic security regardless of whether or not they are or have been gainfully employed, its introduction might make both paid work and the self-entrepreneurial spirit more a matter of choice than of necessity.[107] To be sure, much would depend on the details of the scheme and the "*nature of the ideological social environment in which it was implemented*."[108] As I shall argue in chapter 4, in a society which, like Britain or the United States, attaches great social significance to paid work, the removal of the brute economic necessity to capitalize upon one's skills and attributes may not suffice to make self-entrepreneurialism purely 'optional.' Realizing the potential of flexibility to provide freedom in relation to work therefore requires not only the introduction of a basic income, but also a movement to reconfigure the social meaning and value of work (also known as the 'refusal of work').[109]

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[107] See Weeks, *Problem With Work*, 138.

[108] Tony Fitzpatrick, *Freedom and Security: An Introduction to the Basic Income Debate* (Basingstoke, UK: MacMillan, 1999), 5.

[109] I am not alone in connecting the refusal of work and the basic income. See Weeks, *Problem with Work*, chapters 2 and 3.

Only when paid work ceases to function as a primary source of social recognition and as a mechanism for meeting basic material needs can we expect individuals to enjoy a more substantial freedom to control the place of work in their lives, and if they so choose, to invest a greater portion of their energies into activities and relations that do not primarily serve the goals of employability or profit. Before exploring the emancipatory potential of the basic income in chapter 4, though, in the next chapter I want to consider the emergence of significant fissures in the meaning and value of work in the UK. As we will see, while the ideology of work enjoys considerable support from across the political spectrum, widespread resistance to the extension of working life also suggests instability in the meaning and value of work, which in turn helps denaturalize and politicize the ideology.

Chapter 3: The Unstable Meaning and Value of Work: An Exploration of the Refusal of Work through the 2011 UK Riots and Public Sector Strikes

I. Introduction

The riots and public sector strikes that took place across Great Britain in 2011 provide a rare opportunity to explore instability in the meaning and value of work within contemporary capitalist society. In the space of less than six months, Britain witnessed both a mass outpouring of support for the notion that paid work provides the basis for a responsible and inclusive society, and the mobilization of hundreds of thousands of workers resisting the government's plans to prolong working life through changes to their pensions. While the post-structural axiom of the "radical contingency of social relations" suggests that the meaning and value of paid work are inherently unstable, this instability may not always be apparent or acknowledged.[1] The juxtaposition of discourses on work during the latter half of 2011, however, brings the contingency – and potential fragility – of what I shall call the ideology of work to the fore.

Although explanations for the causes of the riots ranged from the breakdown of the family to the morally corrosive effects of a society fixated on consumer goods and celebrities, I show that a concerted exaltation of the virtues of paid work also emerged from across the political spectrum. According to the ideology of work, employment acts as a key mechanism of social inclusion and stability and lays the bedrock of a good and responsible society. While the responses to the riots reveal the breadth of support for such an ideology, the public sector strikes demonstrate that the demands of work cannot be continuously expanded without meeting significant opposition. Indeed, the common complaint that the government's plans would require workers to "pay more [into the

[1] Jason Glynos and David Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* (London: Routledge, 2007), 110-111.

pension fund], get less and work longer"[2] expresses resistance to the further subordination of life to work.

On one hand, responses to the riots seem to confirm Kathi Weeks's claim that the "social role of waged work has been so naturalized as to seem necessary and inevitable."[3] On the other, although the riots did not make specific demands or advance a political agenda, they nonetheless provoked an unusually high level of collective anxiety about the unraveling of social ties. Whether intentionally or not, the rioters exposed a crack in the otherwise smooth veneer of the ideology of work and prompted extensive discursive labors to protect the stability of a society organized around paid employment. Furthermore, while the strikers did not oppose the ideology of work outright, they did object to the version of the ideology that the coalition government sought to enact through pensions reforms. In this sense, the opposition of workers amounts to a struggle over the terms of the ideology of work, especially the duration of working life and the expectation of a comfortable retirement as a period of *freedom from* the labor market.

In what follows, then, I suggest that we can trace this instability in the ideology of work back to contrasting accounts of the relationship between employment and freedom. Responses to the riots may not identify those who participated explicitly as 'unfree,' but the circulation of such terms as 'pure criminality,' 'savagery,' and 'wild beasts,' along with the suggestion of a lack of 'character' and self-discipline all point to the judgment that the rioters failed to meet the minimum standards of civilized and responsible liberal subjects. According to the various accounts I analyze below, these shortcomings were both cause and effect of unemployment. By contrast, public sector workers mobilized in support of a period of life free from paid work, albeit as a reward for a 'lifetime' of

[2] Tim Lezard, "NUT support workers vote 'yes' for Nov 30 strike," *Union News*, November 17, 2011, accessed March 7, 2013, http://union-news.co.uk/2011/11/more-teachers-vote-yes-for-nov-30th-strike/.

[3] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 7.

employment. In both sets of discourses work and freedom stand interconnected; but whereas in the former, employment is a site of freedom, in the latter, freedom entails exiting this space.

In the final section of the paper I place my analysis of the riots and strikes into a "recursive relation" with the burgeoning literature on the refusal of work.[4] In doing so, I hope to use the riots and strikes to bring "contemporary vitality" (as Thoburn puts it) to the theory of the refusal of work, at the same time as employing the latter to help "shed light" on the riots and strikes. In particular, I argue that whereas the riots do not articulate a refusal of work properly conceived (but instead should be understood as an example of 'non-work' behavior), the strikes occupy a more ambiguous position. Although they fall short of a 'complete' refusal of work as conceptualized by its leading theorists, the demands of those who took part evince an attachment to a vision of life *beyond* work.

I suggest that those searching for a movement that renounces "the mode of life now defined by and subordinated to work"[5] should not dismiss mobilizations like the strikes as merely affirming the status quo. On the contrary, by entering into a struggle over the relation between work, life, and freedom, they help denaturalize the ideology of work and thus lay the groundwork for potentially more expansive and destabilizing critiques. Moreover, by insinuating themselves in the cracks and crevices of the ideology of work rather than in engaging in a sweeping renunciation of our whole "mode of life," it could be the case that such seemingly modest movements stand to attract more followers and achieve greater success in challenging the subordination of life to work.

In the pages that follow, a peculiar and perhaps even unsettling asymmetry between the riots and the strikes will emerge. Specifically, while I do consider the thoughts and feelings of the rioters

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[4] This approach is inspired by Nick Thoburn, "Minor Politics, Territory and Occupy," *Mute* 3, no. 3 (2012), accessed February 5, 2013, http://www.metamute.org/editorial/articles/minor-politics-territory-and-occupy.

[5] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 99.

concerning the events in which they participated, the bulk of the analysis focuses on responses to those events by a range of *non*-participant observers. If my purpose were to explain why the riots took place, this privileging of commentary about them would, of course, prove deeply problematic. But what interests us here is both the fact that the riots stimulated a celebration of work and the particular form this took, especially in relation to freedom. When we come to consider the public sector strikes, on the other hand, we must attend mainly to the voices of striking employees, because, although much could be said about their portrayal by the government and media, here we are concerned with the grievances and demands of public sector workers as they express resistance to the expansion of the ideology of work.

I acknowledge from the outset that proceeding in such a manner risks marginalizing the rioters as an apolitical rabble while legitimizing the strikers (if not their particular demands) as an authentic political movement. Let me be clear that such is not my intention. Although the rioters lacked a coherent demand or complaint, and while many were perhaps simply 'caught up in the events' and acted out of a sense of opportunism and excitement rather than protest, such a significant breach of social peace bespeaks a disaffection that calls for careful diagnosis lest meaningful conclusions evade our grasp. While I doubt that this daunting task could be achieved *solely* by listening to the rioters, surely no profound understanding of the events can be reached without a deft and sensitive treatment of their experiences of the world. The series of interviews, articles, and reports carried out by *The Guardian* and the London School of Economics (LSE), from which I draw below, exemplifies the finest work in this area. Nevertheless, that understanding the riots requires such care, whereas the strikes appear to 'speak for themselves,' points to an asymmetry which finds its genesis in the starkly different opportunities, aspirations, and challenges faced by those who took part in the two sets of events.

The remainder of the chapter consists of six parts. In the next three sections, I offer a brief explanation of what I mean by the ideology of work, an overview of the riots, and an analysis that shows how responses to them articulate the ideology of work. In the fifth section I discuss the public sector strikes and the government's reforms that provoked them, and in the sixth I place this material into dialogue with the concept of the refusal of work. In the seventh and final section I offer some concluding remarks.

II. The Ideology of Work

In the following pages I map the contours of the ideology of work and consider its points of weakness by analyzing two concrete 'cases.' André Gorz provides a helpful starting point for this inquiry when he refers to the ideology of work as encapsulating the following set of beliefs: "the more each individual works, the better off everyone will be; those who work little or not at all are acting against the interests of the community as a whole and do not deserve to be members of it; those who work hard achieve social success and those who do not succeed have only themselves to blame."[6] Somewhat similarly to Gorz, Kathi Weeks has more recently described the work ethic as ideological in that it consists of a "set of ideas about the value of work" that are both "explicitly pronounced and intentionally propagated," and that "inhere in apparatuses and are inscribed in ritualized practices."[7] This observation gestures in turn to an understanding of ideology akin to the one Stuart Hall proposes when he refers to the "concepts and languages of practical thought which stabilize a particular form of power and domination."[8] If, as Kathi Weeks puts it, the "social role of

[6] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 219-220.

[7] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, fn 13, 239.

[8] Stuart Hall, "The Problem of Ideology – Marxism without Guarantees," *The Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (1986): 29.

waged work has been so naturalized as to seem necessary and inevitable,"[9] then following Hall we can say that this naturalization helps stabilize and legitimize the capitalist wage relation.

Finally, the notion of ideology as stabilizing forms of power through a process of naturalization helps distance us from the questionable version of ideology that implies the existence of a 'false' consciousness. Ideology in my usage refers not to epistemological misrecognition, therefore, but like in chapter 2, to ontological misrecognition, wherein the contingent is mistaken as necessary, natural, or essential.[10] To name as ideological the claim that employment acts as a mechanism of social inclusion and stability is therefore not necessarily to dismiss it as 'false,' for within the contemporary social formation work may indeed perform this role. The point is that, even if it were possible to empirically verify the putative positive social effects of paid work, one should not underestimate the degree to which, as Claus Offe puts it, "dominant institutions and values have decimated options for making oneself useful and feeling appreciated other than through gainful kinds of activities."[11] In other words, the claims of the ideology of work may be empirically 'true,' but naming them as ideological emphasizes both their contingent character, and their role in legitimizing and structuring a society significantly oriented around paid work.

As I shall show in the proceeding discussion, while all three elements of Gorz's account of the ideology of work are present in responses to the riots, the latter also make a connection between work, social stability, morality, and freedom. Furthermore, the government's pension reforms imply the belief that "the more each individual works, the better off everyone will be," and it is effectively this belief that the strikers contested. Yet as mentioned in the introduction, public sector workers

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[9] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 7.

[10] Jason Glynos, "The Grip of Ideology: a Lacanian Approach to the Theory of Ideology," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 6, no. 2 (2001): 191, doi: 10.1080/13569310120053858.

[11] Claus Offe, "Basic Income and the Labor Contract," *Analyse & Kritik* 1 (2009): 65, accessed October 29, 2013, http://www.analyse-und-kritik.net/2009-1/AK_Offe_2009.pdf.

did not reject the ideology of work outright, and for this reason, I suggest that the strikes are better understood as a struggle over the *terms* of the ideology of work. With this theoretical preparation complete, we are now ready to embark on our analysis of the riots.

III. The August 2011 Riots

The five days of urban disorder that took place in August 2011 continues a long history of rioting in Britain, dating as far back as the fourteenth century Peasants' Revolt.[12] Most recently, riots broke out in the north of England in the early 2000s, and previously in response to the imposition of a poll tax in 1990, but it is the urban unrest at the beginning of the 1980s that seems to offer the most direct parallels with the events that unfolded in 2011.[13] As in the St. Paul's, Brixton, Toxteth, and Broadwater Farm riots of this earlier period, a "confrontation between members of the black community and the police" provided the catalyst for the 2011 disturbances, in this case over the police's shooting of Mark Duggan, a 29 year-old black man.[14] The Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) initially stated that Duggan had opened fire on a police officer before himself being shot dead,[15] but later tests revealed that the bullet that lodged itself in the officer's radio was

[12] "The Fire This Time: The Worst Rioting in Decades Will Cost the Country More than Money," *The Economist*, August 13, 2011, accessed January 10, 2013, http://www.economist.com/node/21525945.

[13] See Tim Bateman, "With the Benefit of Hindsight: The Disturbances of August 2011 in Historical Context," in *The English Riots of 2011: A Summer of Discontent*, ed. Daniel Briggs (Hook, UK: Waterside Press, 2012).

[14] Ibid, 100.

[15] "Man killed in shooting incident involving police officer," *The Telegraph*, August 4, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/crime/8682655/Mark-Duggan-killed-in-shooting-incident-involving-police-officer.html.

not, in fact, fired by Duggan.[16] Protesting the lack of communication from the police and the IPCC concerning Duggan's death, members of his family and the local community peacefully gathered outside the police station in Tottenham, London on August 6.

It is unclear what exactly led a group of younger men to set light to two nearby police cars, but those present at the demonstration report that violence erupted after the police failed to send a high-ranking officer to address the protesters as they had requested, and allegedly beat a sixteen-year-old woman to the ground after she approached them for information.[17] In the days and nights that followed, disorder spread to sixty-six areas in major towns and cities across the country, where an estimated fifteen thousand people engaged in looting and arson, resulting in five deaths, hundreds of injuries, and up to half a billion pounds of financial damage.[18] In the swift dispensing of justice in the months following the riots, 827 people were sentenced for more than 5000 crimes, 85% of whom received "immediate custodial sentences."[19]

A joint inquiry into the riots carried out by *The Guardian* and the LSE would later reveal pervasive animosity toward the police among those who took part in the riots, underscoring the importance of Mark Duggan's death and the police's handling of the protest as a catalyst for the

[16] Vikram Dodd and Diane Taylor, "Mark Duggan's family have little confidence in police probe, court hears." *The Guardian*, December 12, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/dec/12/mark-duggan-family-police-court.

[17] Paul Lewis, "Tottenham riots: a peaceful protest, then suddenly all hell broke loose," *The Guardian*, August 7, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/aug/07/tottenham-riots-peaceful-protest.

[18] "Final Report," Riots Communities and Victims Panel, 2012: 3, accessed December 28, 2012, http://riotspanel.independent.gov.uk/evidence/.

[19] Ibid, 17.

ensuing disturbances.[20] A separate report carried out by NatCen and commissioned by the Cabinet Office reached a similar conclusion that the desire to retaliate against the police was a key motivating factor for those who took part.[21] The *Guardian*/LSE report also identified a general sense of injustice among rioters stemming from increases in university fees, the scrapping of the education maintenance allowance,[22] and a general "lack of money, jobs, or opportunity."[23] Many of those involved in the riots spoke of "getting their 'just rewards,'" and expressed resentment about their exclusion from a "consumerist world."[24] In this context, the riots presented them with an opportunity to acquire "free stuff" and to do "something exciting."[25]

Despite the obviously political character of many of these concerns, it is worth noting that, unlike the riots that spilled over from the November 2010 student demonstrations against tuition

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[20] Paul Lewis, Tim Newburn, Matthew Taylor and James Ball, "Rioters say anger with police fuelled summer unrest," *The Guardian*, December 4, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/dec/05/anger-police-fuelled-riots-study.

[21] Ibid. See also Gareth Morell, Sara Scott, Di McNeish, and Stephen Webster, "The August Riots in England: Understanding the Involvement of Young People," National Centre for Social Research, 2011: 31, accessed January 3, 2013, http://www.natcen.ac.uk/study/the-august-riots-in-england-. Unlike the *Guardian*/LSE inquiry, which involved interviews with 270 rioters, of the 206 people interviewed for the NatCen report, 133 were neither there nor involved and only 50 actually took part in the riots. The motivations for involvement that the report offers are thus constructed in part on the basis of the views of people who did not in fact participate in the riots.

[22] The education maintenance allowance is a means-tested scheme intended to support families with children in 16-19 education. It remains in Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland but was abolished in England in 2010. See Janet Murray, "Students hit by scrapping of the education maintenance allowance," *The Guardian*, October 25, 2010, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2010/oct/25/education-maintenance-allowance.

[23] Lewis et al, "Rioters say anger with police fuelled summer unrest."

[24] Alexandra Topping and Fiona Bawdon, "'It was like Christmas': a consumerist feast amid the summer riots," *The Guardian*, 5 December 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/dec/05/summer-riots-consumerist-feast-looters.

[25] Morell et al, "The August Riots in England," 31.

fees, the August 2011 disturbances were not directly connected with a political campaign.[26] Moreover, the rioters "made no demands to those in power, nor were they possessed of an ideological vision of a new and progressive path."[27] These factors arguably made easier the task of depicting the riots as instances of criminality, as I discuss below. Nevertheless, the riots offer multiple interpretive possibilities, particularly in light of the insights into the feelings and motivations of those who took part considered above. For example, on one hand, they appeared "strangely conformist," in the sense that the looting betrayed a deep attachment to, and investment in, the symbols and culture of consumerism;[28] on the other hand, the destruction and theft of private property can plausibly be read as a response "to the power of commodities and the rule of property, which are themselves, of course, often vehicles of racial subordination."[29] Moreover, while Slavoj Zizek declared that "the UK rioters had no message to deliver," a fact which for him made them more akin to a Hegelian rabble than a Marxist revolutionary subject,[30] Hardt and Negri claim that the riots form part of a "cycle of struggles" that included the Arab Spring and Occupy Wall Street.[31]

In section VI I engage more closely with the work of Hardt and Negri, but here I refer to the wide range of interpretations of the riots because they throw into stark relief the simplification and condemnation of the riots by politicians and the media. In particular, the immediate response of

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[26] Bateman, "With the Benefit of Hindsight," 94.

[27] Simon Winlow and Steve Hall, "Gone Shopping: Inarticulate Politics in the English Riots of 2011," in *The English Riots*, ed. Briggs, 153.

[28] Winlow and Hall, "Gone Shopping," 149.

[29] Michael Hardt and Toni Negri, *Declaration* (Argo Navis Author Services, 2012), 6.

[30] Savoj Zizek, "Shoplifters of the World Unite," *London Review of Books*, August 19, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.lrb.co.uk/2011/08/19/slavoj-zizek/shoplifters-of-the-world-unite.

[31] Hardt and Negri, *Declaration*, 6.

the government and press was to diminish the significance of Mark Duggan's death at the hands of the police compared with the theft and destruction of property by the rioters,[32] and thereby to reduce the riots to instances of criminality and (im)morality as opposed to political protests. Thus, Prime Minister David Cameron quickly described the riots as "just pure criminality," explicitly rejecting the possibility that they could be understood as expressions of discontent about racial and economic inequality or his government's recently imposed austerity measures.[33] Furthermore, Mr. Cameron claimed that "we don't need an inquiry to tell us" that the riots amounted to "common or garden thieving, robbing, and looting," although pressure from the Liberal Democrats and Labour ultimately led to the establishment of the Riots Communities and Victims Panel (RCVP), that went on to produce two reports about the riots, which we will consider shortly.[34]

Similarly, the Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, told Clapham residents that "It's time we heard a little less about the sociological justifications for what is in my view nothing less than wanton criminality."[35] From the ranks of the conservative commentariat, meanwhile, Melanie Phillips wrote that "[w]hat has been fuelling all this is not poverty…but moral collapse," which she

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[32] Alain Badiou, *The Rebirth of History* (London: Verso, 2012), 19-20.

[33] "PM's speech on the fightback after the riots," Cabinet Office and Prime Minister's Office, August 15, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pms-speech-on-the-fightback-after-the-riots/. As Tim Bateman points out, this formulation echoed Margaret Thatcher's statement that "no one should condone" the riots in 1980 and 1981, which she condemned as "criminal." Bateman, "With the Benefit of Hindsight," 96.

[34] Tim Newburn, Paul Lewis, and Josephine Metcalf, "A new kind of riot? From Brixton 1981 to Tottenham 2011," *The Guardian*, December 9, 2011, accessed December 28, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/dec/09/riots-1981-2011-differences

[35] Quoted in Tom Slater, "From Criminality to Marginality: Rioting against a Broke State," *Human Geography* 4, no. 3 (2011): 107, http://www.hugeog.com/index.php/component/content/article?id=206:v4n3-criminality-to-marginality.

attributed largely to the "breakdown of the family."[36] Such a view received widespread support among the general public, with 82% of respondents to a *Guardian*/ICM poll identifying 'moral decline' as a key cause of the riots.[37] Thus, Fidelma Ashe suggests that "poor parenting was an enduring theme in public debates about the causes of the events and became the dominant explanatory framework for young men's aggressive behaviour."[38]

IV. Responses to the Riots and the Ideology of Work

Although these responses display a reticence to understand the causes of the riots in general, or to see them as political protests in particular, politicians, media commentators, and other researchers nonetheless developed various explanations of the disturbances, the most interesting of which for our purposes will be what I call the *embrace* of work as a panacea for personal and social ills. The riots thus set the stage for a flurry of discursive production around the importance of employment to individuals and their communities, which in turn functioned to shore up the ideology of work.

One fairly simple connection between (un)employment and the riots, given the widespread occurrence of looting, concerns the ability of people to acquire the things that they need or want. For example, the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen) report quotes one person who thought that fewer young people would resort to a life of street crime if there were more employment opportunities available to them. According to this view, unemployment and poor job

[36] Melanie Phillips, "Britain's liberal intelligentsia has smashed virtually every social value," *The Daily Mail*, August 11, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2024690/UK-riots-2011-Britains-liberal-intelligentsia-smashed-virtually-social-value.html.

[37] Yemisi Adegoke and Paul Lewis, "The Morality of Rioters," *The Guardian*, 5 December 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/dec/05/morality-of-rioters-summer-riots.

[38] Fidelma Ashe, "'All about Eve': Mothers, Masculinities and the 2011 UK Riots," *Political Studies* (2013): 3, doi: 10.1111/1467-9248.12033.

prospects stimulate criminal behavior like looting, because it offers a way to "get what you really want."[39] It is worth noting, however, that the opportunity to acquire material goods was not the only motivation of rioters, since many also engaged in confrontations with the police and the destruction of property.

The final report of the Riots Communities and Victims Panel (RCVP) offers a more complex, if not more ambiguous, statement of the relationship between work and the riots. Here we learn that "neighbourhoods that suffered from riots are more pessimistic about their local areas and the opportunities for local people than those areas that did not suffer from riots."[40] The report identifies rising unemployment as a particular source of stress, and goes on to claim that "if we are to avoid further riots, we have a responsibility to ensure young people receive an education which stimulates and inspires them, and prepares them for future work."[41] The panel found that "hopes and dreams" were low among young people, and recommends a series of measures to reduce youth unemployment as part of the broader goal of building "social and economic resilience."[42] These measures would reduce the number of "young people falling through the net and ending up NEET [not in education, employment, or training] and at risk of rioting."[43]

While the report finds a strong correlation between coming from a deprived neighborhood, 'being NEET' and taking part in the riots,[44] it appears less confident about making causal claims.

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[39] Morell et al, "The August Riots in England," 48.

[40] "Final Report," 3.

[41] Ibid, 59.

[42] Ibid, 8-9.

[43] Ibid, 59.

[44] The report notes that "70 per cent of rioters were from the 30 per cent most deprived neighbourhoods," where there is also a high risk of being NEET for more than a year. Ibid, 70-71.

Almost in passing, the panel claims that "having a job is key to people feeling that they have a stake in society,"[45] and that when people have a stake in society there is a lower likelihood of unrest and disorder.[46] This conclusion also coincides with NatCen's finding that "poor job prospects" and long-term unemployment meant that some young people felt they had little to lose by taking part in the riots.[47] The implication is that employment incentivizes moral and law-abiding behavior, a much celebrated virtue amid fears about the 'breakdown of morality' and 'law and order.'

Although he does not explicitly refer to jobs, Nick Clegg (the Deputy Prime Minister and Leader of the Liberal Democrats), expressed a similar view when he told party members just days after the riots (and months before the publication of the panel's final report) that "the best defence against this kind of nihilistic behaviour is to ensure that everyone has a stake in society."[48] For this to happen, according to Mr. Clegg, people must have "opportunities" (presumably related to education and employment), which in turn "gives them the drive, discipline and responsibility to do the right thing." Within days of this speech, David Cameron echoed its sentiment when he suggested that "work is at the heart of a responsible society. So getting more of our young people into jobs, or up and running in their own businesses is a critical part of how we strengthen responsibility in our society. …it's only by getting our young people into work that we can build an ownership society in which everyone feels they have a stake."[49] Although the RCVP identifies other factors besides

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[45] Ibid, 74.

[46] Ibid, 32.

[47] Morell et al, "The August Riots in England," 34.

[48] "Nick Clegg's speech to Liberal Democrat members on the riots," *Liberal Democrat Voice,* August 14, 2011, accessed January 10, 2013, http://www.libdemvoice.org/nick-cleggs-speech-to-liberal-democrat-members-on-the-riots-25010.html.

[49] "PM's speech on the fightback after the riots."

unemployment to explain the disturbances, it is striking that their findings in this area so neatly match the pronouncements made within days of the riots by the very same politicians who set up the panel. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the report has drawn criticism for being "a superficial glossy brochure" that "tells us nothing new about the riots."[50]

The notion that unemployment can account, at least in part, for the outbreak of urban unrest has thus received support from government commissioned inquiries as well as politicians of liberal and conservative persuasions, but one can find a broadly complementary narrative on employment and social inclusion in academic work too. Geographer Tom Slater, for example, argues that we must connect the riots "to urban marginality in British society and pay attention not only to material deprivation but to the *denial of dignity* it implies"[51] Both politicians and state institutions have essentially failed young people, according to Slater, leaving them in poverty and unemployment. The riots, then, were a "response that should have been expected" to what Loic Wacquant has called the "massive structural violence" visited upon urban youth.[52] In an interview with *The Guardian*, Simon Hallsworth, director of the Centre for Social and Evaluation Research at London Metropolitan University, complements this analysis by criticizing the shift away from a commitment to full employment and toward labor market flexibility. In his view this has excluded young people from

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[50] The quotations are from Simon Hallsworth, director of the Centre for Social and Evaluation Research at London Metropolitan University. Chris Arnot, "Academic Seeks New Understanding of Rioters," *The Guardian*, November 28, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2011/nov/28/gang-culture-riots-research.

[51] Slater, "From Criminality to Marginality," 107.

[52] Ibid, 108.

the jobs that would allow them to buy consumer items, like clothes and phones, which are so central to social respect in contemporary society.[53]

As Slater goes on to note, the denial of dignity to young people has fuelled "collective rage" in France and Greece, to name just two recent examples. The coalition government's swingeing budget cuts in the climate of austerity have heightened the British youth's sense of being "abandoned and betrayed," while many who took part in the riots must daily endure the dishonor of living in a stigmatized neighborhood, with all the social and economic costs that this imposes on them.[54] Similarly, youth charity founder Camila Batmanghelidjh draws attention to the "repeated humiliation" that disadvantaged young people experience in London, and suggests that, while we are all capable of "savagery," "some of us have been lucky enough not to have to call upon it for survival; others, exhausted from failure, can justify resorting to it."[55] While this account of the rioters' behavior expresses empathy and understanding for their plight, its invocation of 'savagery' conjures up the threatening figure of an undomesticated and unruly beast, an image to which we will return shortly.

These various reports, speeches, and articles express the belief that unemployment creates a sense of marginality, hopelessness, and indignity that will almost inevitably produce violent disturbances among young people. Yet a common theme in these texts concerns the fact that not everyone in challenging socio-economic circumstances took part in the riots. In the speech quoted

[53] Arnot, "Academic Seeks New Understanding of Rioters."

[54] Slater, "From Criminality to Marginality," 109.

[55] Camila Batmanghelidjh, "Caring costs – but so do riots," *The Independent*, August 9 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/commentators/camila-batmanghelidjh-caring-costs-ndash-but-so-do-riots-2333991.html.

above, Nick Clegg, for example, stressed that the "rioters were the exception, not the rule,"[56] while the RCVP undertook to discern why some young people engaged in the disturbances while others shied away. In its final report, we learn that 'character' is a key factor both in determining whether or not young people took part in the riots, and in shaping their employment prospects. These explanations qualify the almost deterministic accounts of the riots that focus on socio-structural factors by introducing the theme of agency. While this move is to be welcomed by those seeking rigorous empirical understanding of the riots, it is worth noting that it also helps legitimize the status quo by pointing to those who, despite adversity, did not feel compelled to 'act out.'

According to the panel, young people with 'character' display "self-discipline, application, the ability to defer gratification and resilience in recovering from setbacks."[57] Although the panel notes that "it is difficult to gather quantitative evidence on whether a lack of character in the rioters led to their criminal actions," it claims that "rioters *chose* not to resist the temptations and excitement that the riots offered them while many of their peers, experiencing similar disadvantage, made a *positive choice* not to go on to the streets and damage their communities" (emphases added). The tension between the claim that the rioters effectively chose to take part in the disturbances, on the one hand, and the notion that a lack of self-discipline and the ability to defer gratification were at the root of their involvement, on the other, deserves closer scrutiny.

To be clear, in raising this point I do not mean to suggest that, even if those who took part in the riots did indeed lack self-discipline, they should not be held responsible for their acts. Rather, I want to highlight the panel's insistence on the 'choice' of the rioters, and suggest that this supports Nikolas Rose's claim that contemporary liberal society governs "autonomous individuals through their freedom," where freedom includes determining "the course of one's own existence through

[56] "Nick Clegg's speech to Liberal Democrat members on the riots."

[57] "Final Report," 49.

acts of choice."[58] While the panel isolates the moment of 'choice' on the part of the rioters, thus holding them accountable for their actions, by contrasting it with the "positive choice" of those in similar circumstances who did not take part in the riots, it implies that the rioters' choice was 'flawed.' Of course, this choice was 'negative' in terms of its impact on those whose property was stolen or destroyed, but I use the word 'flawed' to convey the sense that, from the panel's perspective, the rioters' lack of self-discipline tarnished the *process* by which they made that choice.

Moreover, given that liberal subjects operate within in a "space of action" which leaves them free to choose among a range of options, Rose shows that "well-regulated liberty" in the nineteenth century required the cultivation of "normality, rationality and sensibility." As he puts it, "these practices governed *through* liberty, to the extent they sought to invent the conditions in which subjects themselves would shape their conduct."[59] He goes on to note that riots were a particular concern in the nineteenth century, because they were perceived to be "not the exercise of freedom but its antithesis: the greatest challenge to a public order of liberty."[60] These same concerns are highly visible within the responses to the 2011 riots: those who took part in them were presumed devoid of self-discipline and, we will see below, rationality, and thus fell short of the standards of conduct befitting a liberal subject. In this sense, the rioters provoked such anxiety precisely because they posed a threat to "well-regulated liberty."

In its report, the panel goes on to link character with employability, noting that employers value "personal and social skills" and are frustrated by "problems with punctuality, attendance, and productivity." Strong character is thus key to obtaining and keeping a job because it ensures

[58] Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 84.

[59] Ibid, 72.

[60] Ibid, 72-3.

effective 'soft skills' and self-discipline.[61] The 'flawed choice' by young people to succumb to their acquisitive and destructive drives and engage in unlawful behavior bespeaks their lack of capacity for freedom, but this lack of self-control and deficient freedom also explains (at least in part) their unemployment. Freedom, moral/lawful behavior, and employment/employability form a vicious triad: unemployment raises the specter of immorality, law-breaking and dependency, while employment connotes moral rectitude and freedom; criminality and moral deviance suggest a lack of self-discipline and undermine, often with very real consequences, a person's claim to employability. In this sense, the ideology of work condenses disparate discourses on morality and freedom and treats their inter-connection as a matter of common knowledge: no matter that it is "difficult to gather quantitative evidence on whether a lack of character in the rioters led to their criminal actions," for who could doubt that their lack of self-discipline, so clearly reflected in high rates of unemployment, was ultimately to blame?

The conservative commentator Max Hastings provides a more polemical expression of these views in a *Daily Mail* editorial, claiming that the rioters "have no jobs to go to or exams they might pass."[62] The vagueness of this statement makes it hard to refute: many rioters were unemployed (35% of those on trial for participating in the riots received out-of-work benefits,[63] and "in some areas over 61% of rioters were unemployed"),[64] while the educational attainment levels of rioters

[61] "Final Report," 51.

[62] Max Hastings, "Years of liberal dogma have spawned a generation of amoral, uneducated, welfare dependent, brutalised youngsters," *The Daily Mail*, August 12, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2024284/UK-riots-2011-Liberal-dogma-spawned-generation-brutalised-youths.html.

[63] Simon Rogers, "Data journalism reading the riots: what we know. And what we don't," *The Guardian*, December 9, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/news/datablog/2011/dec/09/data-journalism-reading-riots.

[64] "Final Report," 31.

were in fact "lower than those of the population as a whole."[65] But the purpose of Hastings's claim about education and employment becomes clearer when we learn that the rioters are "essentially wild beasts" who are "bereft of the discipline that might make them employable."[66] Rather than a lack of employment opportunities encouraging crime, the disorderly behavior of the rioters simply expresses the lack of discipline that makes them unemployed in the first place. Discipline and employability are thus inextricably linked with humanity, and by implication, freedom: those who (appear to) lack discipline are unemployable, and as such also lack an essential trait of humanity.

While Hastings takes care to specify that the rioters included black and white youths, his branding them as sub-human partakes of the long and dishonorable practice of denigrating and stigmatizing members of oppressed groups, including ethnic and racial minorities and colonial subjects. Performing an apparent reversal of the conservative anti-immigrant discourse, Hastings suggests that "every firm in the land knows that an East European — for instance — will, first, bother to turn up; second, work harder; and third, be better-educated than his or her British counterpart." But although this portrait certainly commends the work ethic displayed by Eastern European immigrants, its real function is to shame the British by comparing them unfavorably to a group that so frequently acts as a scapegoat for many of the country's woes.

The object of Hastings's contempt (or pity?), then, is not a race or ethnic group, but a "layer of young people" at the "bottom of society" who have "no skills, education, values or aspirations." When Hastings says they do not have "what most of us would call 'lives': they simply exist," he implies that a life without these attributes is barely worth the name. Taken literally, it is hard to disagree with such a claim, for little of what makes life rich and rewarding would remain in the

[65] James Ball, Matthew Taylor and Tim Newburn, "Who were the rioters?" *The Guardian*, December 4, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2011/dec/05/who-were-the-rioters.

[66] Hastings, "Years of liberal dogma."

absence of *any* skills, education, values, or aspirations. However, who really does lack all of these attributes entirely? Perhaps one should infer that they only count toward 'a life' when they are placed in service of "doing a nine-to-five job, marrying and sticking with a wife and kids, taking up DIY or learning to read properly." If so, it appears that a properly constituted human subject is a male, heterosexual, married parent who earns a wage and owns a home.

Far from acknowledging the role of structural inequalities that might lead to lower educational attainment and employment levels among some sectors of society, not to mention recent government spending cuts, Hastings places sole responsibility on individuals themselves: they "lack education because they have no will to learn," and are "too idle to accept work waitressing or doing domestic labour, which is why almost all such jobs are filled by immigrants." Here it is worth noting the appearance of the third belief that Gorz lists as part of the ideology of work, namely that "those who work hard achieve social success and those who do not succeed have only themselves to blame."[67] Hastings constructs a profile of the rioters as members of an 'underclass' of society who lack the requisite discipline and ambition to succeed in education and the labor market. In this way, he distances himself from accounts of the riots that pay more attention to the structural causes of unemployment by placing full responsibility on individuals. Yet as with the other interventions discussed above, once again we see the identification of employment as a key mechanism of social inclusion and the bedrock of a stable and good society.

According to the various articulations of the ideology of work analyzed in this section, employment not only functions to provide a means of material existence through wages, it encourages individuals to take personal responsibility for their lives, to behave in a moral, law-abiding fashion, and in doing so lays the groundwork for 'well-regulated liberty.' Responses to the riots thus lend support to the conclusion that Britain exemplifies a 'work society,' in the sense that

[67] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 219-220

authors such as Kathi Weeks and André Gorz give that term, since they not only defend work "on grounds of economic necessity and social duty," but also understand it "as an individual moral practice and collective ethical obligation."[68] But it is important to note that the invocations of work considered here focus less on its promise of social mobility or self-actualization, as in the industrial and post-industrial work ethics that Weeks identifies, and more on its general social benefits.[69] In this respect, the aftermath of the riots provides a glimpse of the construction of work as "fundamental to the basic social contract" and as a "basic obligation of citizenship."[70] Indeed, this formulation helps understand the existential threat posed by the rioters: how can a rabble of undisciplined, unfree and irrational 'beasts' be incorporated into the political community when the social contract (like any contract) depends on the freedom and rationality of its parties?[71]

Although the riots were not political in the sense of making demands or advancing a cause, it is clear that they nonetheless provoked a collective anxiety about the unraveling of social ties, which, in a 'work society,' are to a large extent sustained by employment. It would not be difficult to trace elements of the work ethic in contemporary British society, and it is both a familiar Foucauldian insight, and evident in myriad quotidian practices (from careers counseling to the imposition of rigid deadlines for school assignments), that habits, routines, desires, and hopes adequate to work require

[68] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 11. For a similar view of the 'work society,' see Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*.

[69] Weeks also discusses the Protestant ethic, in addition to the industrial and post-industrial ethics I mention here. Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 38-46.

[70] Ibid, 8.

[71] In making this observation I take inspiration from Martha Nussbaum's critique of the social contract tradition from the perspective of people with disabilities. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press, 2006).

continuous inculcation.[72] By contrast, if Weeks is right that the "social role of waged work has been so naturalized as to seem necessary and inevitable,"[73] then we should understand the articulation of the ideology of work as fundamental to society in the aftermath of the riots as an event of singular importance. Indeed, the rioters exposed a fissure in the ideology of work that politicians and the mainstream media rushed to repair, not only revealing its inherent contingency, but also suggesting a more significant threat to its hegemony. For just as the claim that 'internet dating is fine' betrays the persistence of a taboo, so too must we interpret the frenetic celebration of work as a sign that its meaning and value is no longer taken for granted, at least by some members of society. As we will see in the following sections of this chapter, the mobilization of millions of workers against changes to their pensions suggests a further fault line in the ideology of work.

V. The Public Sector Strikes of 2011

Throughout 2011, Britain witnessed a series of protests against the government's imposition of austerity measures, as well as more targeted strikes over changes to public sector pensions and an increase in the age at which men and women can draw the state pension.[74] In this section I examine the principal grievances motivating the public sector strikes; owing to the large numbers of workers involved, I focus on those that took place across the country on November 30, 2011. The 'day of action,' as organizers called it, resulted in the closure of more than half the state (public) schools in Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the cancellation of thousands of appointments and non-

[72] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 54.

[73] Ibid, 7.

[74] Note that there are numerous optional public sector pension schemes available to workers on the basis of occupation, whereas the state pension is a social insurance pension available to all. Protests concerned changes to both types of pension, since workers typically draw on both. Indeed, reductions in the value of occupational pensions makes retired workers more reliant on the state pension.

urgent hospital operations in the National Health Service.[75] Participating public sector workers, who ranged from border agency staff to road sweepers, numbered up to two million, which for some observers made the 'day of action' the "biggest display of industrial discontent in three decades," harkening back to the infamous 1978-9 Winter of Discontent.[76] A BBC News poll suggested 61% of the general public thought that the strikes were justified, a figure that rose to nearly 80% among 18-24 year-olds.[77] The sheer scale of the strikes, and the public's support for them, delivers an important message regarding attitudes to work and retirement, as well as the government's handling of the economic crisis more broadly.

The framing by union leaders of the government's proposals for pensions reform prove particularly illuminating in this regard, as they not only argued that the changes were unnecessary and unfair, but mobilized workers on the basis of fears about a shorter and more financially precarious retirement. Reading the strikes as widespread resistance to the prolongment of working life and potential immiseration of retirement, and thus as a challenge to the belief that, as Gorz puts it, "the more each individual works, the better off everyone will be,"[78] I discern an orientation to work that contrasts with the 'embrace of work' expressed in the aftermath of the riots.

Before examining the specific changes that the government proposed and the union responses to them, it will help to consider the broader unfolding of pensions reforms and the

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[75] Dan Milmo, Caroline Davies, Polly Curtis and Hélène Mulholland, "Strikes over public sector pensions hit services across UK as 2 million walk out," *The Guardian*, November 30, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/nov/30/strikes-public-sector-pensions-impact.

[76] Ibid. See also "Politics 97," *BBC*, May 3, 1979, accessed January 11, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/special/politics97/background/pastelec/ge79.shtml.

[77] "Strike: BBC poll suggests strong support," *BBC*, November 28, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-15910621.

[78] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 219-220.

political-economic effects of the 2008 financial crisis. Since the 1990s, both Conservative and Labour governments have implemented policies that try to extend working life, amid concerns about the falling economic activity of men between the ages of 50 and 64 since the 1970s, the fiscal challenges posed by an aging population, the declining value of the state pension since 1980, as well as the crisis in occupational and private pensions, and the effects of early retirement on economic growth and the dignity of the unemployed.[79] The Pensions Act (2007) thus included the gradual increase of the State Pension Age for women, starting from age 60 in 2010 and reaching 65 in 2020. For both men and women, the State Pension Age would then increase from 65 to 68 between 2024 and 2046.[80] Changes made in 2007 and 2008 also involved "significant increases in employee contributions for NHS staff and teachers, following earlier increases for civil servants," as well as a rise in the normal pension age from 60 to 65 for most public sector workers.[81]

Rather than wait for the findings of the December 2010 report by the National Audit Office, which projected that the 2007 and 2008 changes to public service pensions would stabilize long-term costs and "deliver substantial savings,"[82] however, both the Conservatives and Liberal Democrats made clear in the run-up to the 2010 general election that they saw the need for further reforms, on account of the cost of the schemes and concerns about their 'fairness' for taxpayers and

[79] John Macnicol, "Older Men and Work in the Twenty-First Century: What Can the History of Retirement Tell Us?" *Journal of Social Policy* 37, no. 4 (2008): 579-580, doi: 10.1017/S0047279408002225.

[80] "The Pensions Act 2007," Department for Work and Pensions, accessed March 7, 2013, http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/pensions-reform/the-pensions-act-2007/.

[81] "The impact of the 2007-08 changes to public service pensions" (Executive Summary), National Audit Office, December 8 (2010): 9, accessed January 24, 2013, http://www.nao.org.uk/publications/1011/public_service_pensions.aspx.

[82] Ibid.

private sector workers.[83] In 2008, for example, David Cameron played up the fairness question, saying that "we have got to end the apartheid" between public and private sector pensions.[84] By the 2009-10 financial year, the effects of the financial crisis had helped push the UK's budget deficit to a record high,[85] and following the formation of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition government in May 2010, Chancellor George Osborne unveiled a package of spending cuts and tax increases intended to eliminate Britain's structural deficit by 2014-15.[86] In this harsh economic climate, and given that they had already been the subject of debate for some years, further changes to public service pensions seemed inevitable.

In March 2011, 250,000 people took to the streets of London in opposition to the government's austerity measures,[87] which the Institute for Fiscal Studies described as the "longest,

[83] Tony Cutler and Barbara Waine, "But Is It Fair? The UK Coalition Government, 'Fairness' and the 'Reform' of Public Sector Pensions," *Social Policy and Administration* 47, no. 3 (2013): 327-345, doi. 10.1111/j.1467-9515.2012.00871.x. The fairness question centers on the fact that whereas private sector workers tend to have defined contribution pensions (if they have an occupational pension at all), public sector workers more often have defined benefit plans, which are more generous because payments are based on their final salary. See Polly Curtis, "Are public sector pensions fair?" *The Guardian*, November 25, 2011, accessed January 23, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/reality-check-with-polly-curtis/2011/nov/25/public-sector-pensions-pensions.

[84] James Chapman, "David Cameron pledges to end 'pensions apartheid' as public sector retirement costs rocket," *The Daily Mail*, November 27, 2008, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1089956/David-Cameron-pledges-end-pensions-apartheid-public-sector-retirement-costs-rocket.html.

[85] "Q&A: Government Spending Review," *BBC*, October 18, 2010, accessed February 15, 2013, www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-10810962.

[86] "Budget 2010," HM Treasury, June 2010, 1-2, accessed January 17, 2013, http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/junebudget_easyread.htm.

[87] "EU austerity drive country by country," *BBC*, May 21, 2012, accessed January 16, 2013, www.bbc.co.uk/news/10162176.

deepest, sustained period of cuts to public services spending at least since World War II."[88] Although the anti-austerity movement overlapped in both personnel and substantive concerns with the public sector strikes, it is worth noting that the November 30 'day of action' came amid negotiations over the implementation of the Independent Public Service Pension Commission's recommendations and following a series of more concrete reforms announced by the government, the details of which I review below. In a statement on November 2, 2011, the Trades Union Congress (TUC) claimed that the "groundswell of support" for the mobilization on November 30 had pressured the government to improve some of its proposals,[89] but according to the Public and Commercial Services Union (PCS) the government had refused to negotiate on the most controversial items: the change in pension calculation, the increase in employee contributions, and the rise in the pension age.[90] The TUC warned that "unless and until further real progress is made and acceptable offers are made within those negotiations, unions remain firmly committed to continuing their preparations for the planned day of action on November 30."[91]

In a cynical attempt to vilify those who supported the strike and discourage anyone not yet decided, Michael Gove, the education secretary, claimed that some union leaders were "militants itching for a fight," and said that they "want to make economic recovery harder" and "provide a platform for confrontation, just when we all need to pull together."[92] For his part, Brendan Barber,

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[88] "Budget: UK faces worst cuts since World War II says IFS," *BBC*, June 23, 2010, accessed January 17, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/10393585.

[89] "Statement after pensions meeting," TUC, November 2, 2011, accessed January 17, 2013, www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-20238-f0.cfm.

[90] "Pensions Update," Public and Commercial Services Union, accessed January 21, 2013, http://www.pcs.org.uk/en/campaigns/campaign-resources/.

[91] "Statement after pensions meeting."

General Secretary of the TUC, blamed the government "for failing to engage in serious talks until unions decided on a day of action," and said that "dedicated public sector workers take no pleasure in taking action next week."[93] Labour leader Ed Milliband also held the government responsible, and asked Mr. Cameron why he thought "so many hard-working public sector workers" felt that "the government simply isn't listening."[94]

Coverage of the November strikes noted the "complicated" spirit of the day, however, with few people "joyously withdrawing their labour, let alone glorying in any kind of seditious fight."[95] A police inspector from Liverpool, for example, said that he felt "angry that [he was] paying a 50% increase in pension contributions" and that he was "going to have to work longer and at the end of it to get less."[96] This statement clearly recalled the slogans of the Trades Union Congress (TUC) and other unions in the run-up to the strikes. For example, Brendan Barber (then General Secretary of the TUC) said that many public sector workers felt that "they have no choice but to vote to take action on 30 November," given that they "are being told that they need to work longer, pay more and get less from their pensions at a time when they've not had a pay increase for years and are

[92] Jeevan Vasagar, Dan Milmo and Nicholas Watt, "Michael Gove blames strike action on 'militants itching for a fight,'" *The Guardian*, November 28, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/nov/28/striking-workers-employers-notice-gove.

[93] "Government claims on cost of the day of action are fantasy economics, says TUC," TUC, November 24, 2011, accessed January 17, 2013, http://www.tuc.org.uk/industrial/tuc-20327-f0.cfm.

[94] Milmo et at, "Strikes over public sector pensions."

[95] John Harris, "Public sector strike rookies in a tangle of emotions and convictions," *The Guardian*, November 30, 2011, accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2011/nov/30/public-sectors-strike-protest-rookies.

[96] Milmo et al., "Strikes over public sector pensions."

finding it increasingly hard to make ends meet."[97] Similarly, a UNISON briefing to its members from August 2011 said that "in plain terms the Government's proposal will mean that you will Pay More, Work Longer and Get Less when you retire."[98] What were the precise changes announced by the government and union responses to them?

In its June 2010 budget, the coalition government announced that it would save £5.8 billion by 2015 by calculating rises in benefits, tax credits, and public service pensions on the basis of the Consumer Price Index (CPI), instead of the Retail Price Index (RPI), with effect from April 2011. Although both track changes in the price of retail items, only the RPI includes housing costs and council tax, which its defenders say makes it a fairer measure than the CPI.[99] Unions estimated that, over the course of a "normal retirement," pensions would lose "up to 20%" of their value.[100] According to Brendan Barber of the TUC, this change amounted to a "stealth cut on the pensions of middle income Britain."[101] As well as engaging in strike action, in 2011 six unions challenged the legality of this change in the High Court. Losing their case, in 2012 they also unsuccessfully appealed

[97] "Low-paid women workers miss out on public sector pensions protection promise," TUC, November 17, 2011, accessed January 17, 2013, http://www.tuc.org.uk/industrial/tuc-20290-f0.cfm.

[98] "Protect our Pensions: NHS Briefing," UNISON, August 2011: 2, accessed January 18, 2013, www.unison.org.uk/pensions/pages_view.asp?did=13369.

[99] Paul Farrow, "Budget 2010: Blow for public sector workers as move to CPI link saves £6bn for Government," *The Telegraph*, June 23, 2010, accessed January 21, 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/finance/budget/7847707/Budget-2010-Blow-for-public-sector-workers-as-move-to-CPI-link-saves-6bn-for-Government.html.

[100] Hilary Osborne, "Unions lose CPI pensions appeal," *The Guardian*, March 20, 2012, accessed January 21, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/money/2012/mar/20/unions-lose-cpi-pensions-appeal.

[101] "CPI indexing will reduce value of occupational pensions," TUC, July 8, 2010, accessed January 17, 2013, http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-18192-f0.cfm.

this decision in the Court of Appeal.[102] Receiving significantly less for one's pension than expected not only raises the specter of retiring in poverty, it also suggests that retirement may become a luxury that more and more older workers simply cannot afford, and thus threatens its existence as a period of freedom from the imperative of labor market participation following a lifetime's paid work.

In October 2010 the government issued its Spending Review, which proposed an increase of employee contributions by an average of 3.2 percent over a three year period starting in 2012, a change which unions described as unnecessary.[103] Of concern was not only the pressure that the increased contributions would place on already struggling households, especially in the context of a public sector pay freeze and the ongoing economic malaise. In addition, unions warned that the increase in contributions would force some workers to opt-out of pension schemes altogether. According to UNISON, the possibility that a significant number of members might do so would have the perverse effect of increasing "dependency on the State," as well as threatening the financial viability of the NHS pension scheme as a whole.[104] Given the significant cuts to welfare spending

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[102] "RPI/CPI legal challenge reaches Court of Appeal," *Professional Pensions*, February 20, 2012, accessed January 21, 2013, http://www.professionalpensions.com/professional-pensions/news/2153597/rpi-cpi-legal-challenge-reaches-court-appeal. See also Tom Selby, "Court of Appeal rejects union CPI challenge," *Money Marketing*, March 20, 2012, accessed January 21, 2013, http://www.moneymarketing.co.uk/pensions/court-of-appeal-rejects-union-cpi-challenge/1048298.article.

[103] "Public Service Pensions," HM Treasury, December 6, 2010, accessed March 22, 2013. http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/tax_pensions_index.htm Original link expired. See also "Spending Review 2010: George Osborne wields the axe," *BBC*, October 20, 2010, accessed January 17, 2013, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-11579979. "Public sector workers already paying a pensions price, says the TUC," TUC, March 9, 2011, accessed January 17, 2013, http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-19288-f0.cfm. "UNISON response to Department of Health NHS Pension Scheme Consultation on proposed increases to employee contribution rates effective from April 2012," UNISON, October 21, 2011, accessed January 18, 2013, www.unison.org.uk/acrobat/NHSPC_consultation_response.pdf.

[104] "UNISON response to Department of Health," 5, 2.

made in the 2010 budget, the thought of relying on the state for material support in later life would doubtless arouse fear and uncertainty among public sector workers, while the stigma attached to being 'dependent' only worsens the outlook. Once again, the promise of withdrawing from the labor market in old age appeared less and less tenable.

In addition to changes to the benefits calculation and increases in employee contributions, the Spending Review also announced that in 2020 the state pension age (i.e. the age at which workers in the private and public sectors are eligible for the state pension) would rise to 66 for men and women.[105] David Cameron later sought to justify the proposed reforms by appeal to increased life expectancy: "We have to accept the simple fact that people are living longer, and that in order to have affordable pension schemes they have to contribute a little bit more and retire a little later."[106] The prospect of having to work longer clearly raises the specter of a diminished period of retirement from work, unless life expectancy keeps pace with increases in the normal pension age (i.e. the age at which one can draw one's pension without penalties).

It is worth noting that the state pension age has become more relevant to public sector workers than ever, not only because they, like all workers, are eligible for the state pension, but also because the Public Service Pensions Act passed in April 2013 links the normal pension age of many public service pension schemes to the state pension age.[107] From this point on, increases in the state pension age therefore translate to increases in the age at which a public sector worker can draw his or her occupational pension without penalty. In 2011, Brendan Barber thus called the proposed increase in the state pension age a "frightening prospect" for those living in less affluent regions of

[105] "Spending Review 2010."

[106] Vasagar et al, "Michael Gove blames strike action on 'militants itching for a fight.'"

[107] Public Service Pensions Act (UK) 2013, Section 10, accessed August 6, 2013, http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2013/25/section/10/enacted.

the UK, since their life expectancy was increasing more slowly than those in more prosperous areas. As a result, they "can expect their retirement to be a decade shorter than those from more affluent parts of the UK."[108] Not only does this change raise a question of fairness, given that the impact of the reform would be unevenly experienced across classes, but it also warns of a life increasingly subordinated to work, at least for less privileged members of society.

One might be tempted to conclude that opposition to the changes in pensions derived more from a criticism of the government's handling of the economic crisis than from concerns about the effects of the changes themselves. For example, Len McCluskey, Unite general secretary, acerbically said that workers were "being asked to pay for the economic mess caused by the greedy City elite whose behavior this spineless government has repeatedly failed to tackle,"[109] while UNISON viewed the increases in employee contributions as a way to "counteract the effects of the financial crisis caused by reckless risk taking in the banking sector," and claimed that the additional money would "go straight to the Treasury" to help reduce the deficit rather than into the NHS pension scheme.[110] Of course, more detailed empirical analysis would be needed to see how much the belief that the government was using pensions reform to pay for its (mis)handling of the economic crisis motivated workers to take part in the strikes. But I argue that the specific criticisms of the government's measures discussed above nonetheless reveal deep concerns about the erosion of the ideal of retirement as a period at the end of working-life, when one can enjoy a comfortable existence free from the requirements of wage-labor.

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[108] "Growing life expectancy divide is a warning against forcing people to retire later," TUC, October 19, 2011, accessed January 17, 2013, http://www.tuc.org.uk/economy/tuc-20181-f0.cfm.

[109] Milmo et at, "Strikes over public sector pensions."

[110] "UNISON response to Department of Health," 2.

Indeed, one scholar notes that "an expectation of retirement has become culturally embedded."[111] Unions have played a key role in this process, with the TUC insisting in 1949, for example, that "retirement should be a time of genuine leisure on adequate pension as a reward for a lifetime's work."[112] This attitude persists to this day, with UNISON praising the National Health Service pension scheme for allowing "many low paid workers… [to] retire in dignity and not have to rely on future taxpayers."[113] And, in its 2010 report on public sector pensions, GMB said that its "vision is for a decent and dignified retirement for all, whatever they do, wherever they work."[114]

While the sense that the government was forcing ordinary people to shoulder the burden of reducing the nation's budget deficit undoubtedly mobilized support for the 'day of action,' what also emerges from our analysis is a principled resistance to the extension of working life and the concomitant erosion of the norm of retirement. The public sector strikes thus disclose a set of beliefs about the proper relationship between work, life, and freedom, and in the process struggle with the government over the terms of the ideology of work. Furthermore, they reveal that the expansion of the demands of work is neither universally accepted nor inevitable. Yet, it is one thing to oppose the slow creep of employment into one's later years, and quite another to reject the ideology of work outright. To shed more light on the broader significance of the strikes in relation

[111] Macnicol, "Older Men and Work in the Twenty-First Century," 589-590.

[112] The retirement condition made drawing the pension conditional upon retirement, and remained in force until 1989. In addition to their commitment to retirement as a reward to workers, though, unions also saw it as a means of ensuring jobs for younger workers. Colin Duncan, Wendy Loretto and Phil White, "Ageism, early exit, and British trade unions," *Industrial Relations Journal* 31, no. 3 (2000): 224, doi: 10.1111/1468-2338.00159.

[113] "UNISON response to Department of Health," 1.

[114] "Public Sector Pensions," GMB, January 2010, foreword, accessed January 21, 2013, http://www.gmb.org.uk/gmb_campaigns/other_campaigns/public_sector_pension_campaign.aspx Link expired.

to the ideology of work, in the final section of the paper I explore the principle of the refusal of work.

VI. The Refusal of Work

Before delving into the literature on the refusal of work, I want to offer a brief note on my theoretical approach in this section of the chapter. In his talk entitled "Minor Politics, Territory and Occupy," Nicholas Thoburn deploys concepts drawn from the work of Deleuze and Guattari to develop a series of reflections on Occupy.[115] From the outset, Thoburn is clear that his "aim is deliberately not to try and *explain* Occupy, to sew it up in a theory," since, this would both "negate what is inventive in a movement," and strip theory of *its* "inventive quality," thus rendering theory "merely a *representation* of a state of affairs." Avoiding these twin pitfalls, Thoburn instead analyzes "certain themes or *problems* in Occupy" with the aid of Deleuzian concepts, "in a way that might help shed light upon them and possibly aid their further development." Above all, he sees this as "a recursive relation, for reflection upon Occupy's themes or problems should also help extend Deleuzian concepts, lending them a contemporary vitality." Because some aspects of the public sector strikes resemble the principle of the refusal of work while others diverge from it, an attempt to 'sew up' the former in terms of the latter would similarly involve an act of distortion. Yet, to adopt Thoburn's language, the refusal of work can prove "helpful in thinking about" the strikes, at the same time as the riots and strikes can help lend the refusal of work a "contemporary vitality" which is much needed given a pervasive nostalgia for the 1960s and 1970s among its theorists.

'Anti-work' arguments and political practices can be located in diverse sources: Marx's coupling of the abolition of private property to the abolition of labor,[116] Paul Lafargue's famous

[115] Thoburn, "Minor Politics, Territory and Occupy."

[116] According to Marx, "'Labour' by its very nature is unfree, unhuman, unsocial activity, determined by private property and creating private property. Hence the abolition of private

essay "The Right to be Lazy," the surrealist and Situationist rejection of work, Rastafari, and a current of Italian Marxism known as *operaismo* (loosely translated as 'workerism') in the 1960s, and *autonomia* ('autonomy') in the 1970s.[117] More recently, authors including Kathi Weeks, Thoburn, and Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (the latter himself a key figure in *autonomia*) have helped bring renewed attention to the principle of the refusal of work within the English-speaking world. It is impossible to offer a systematic analysis of all these texts here. In what follows, I therefore provide an overview of the more recent work in this area by both Hardt and Negri and Weeks, and also briefly discuss the formative arguments of Mario Tronti. Although this selection necessarily fails to run the gamut of anti-work positions, it can nonetheless help illuminate the orientations to work I have sketched in the preceding sections of this paper.

According to Hardt and Negri, the "refusal of factory work" was at the heart of social struggles against the "disciplinary regimes of capitalist labor" during the late 1960s and into the 1970s.[118] Here the refusal of work meant the rejection of "any model of development based on increasing the productivity of factory labor," but also included the affirmation of "the sphere of non-work."[119] This could be seen in the rejection of a disciplinary regime based on the eight-hour work day and fifty week year, in favor of the "cultural experimentation" that swept across the US in

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property will become a reality only when it is conceived as the abolition of 'labour'." Quoted in Gilles Dauvé and Karl Nesic, "Love of Labour? Love of Labour Lost," *Endnotes* 1 (October 2008), accessed September 20, 2013, http://endnotes.org.uk/articles/12.

[117] Nicholas Thoburn, *Deleuze, Marx and Politics* (London, England: Routledge, 2003), 113, 71. See also Dauvé and Nesic, "Love of Labour?"

[118] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 261.

[119] Ibid.

the 1960s, epitomized by life in Haight-Ashbury.[120] As I noted in chapter 2, shifts in management theory and practice that mesh with the broader regime of flexibility took shape in response to this opposition. At the same time, the student and feminist movements increased the value of intellectual, cooperative, communicative, and affective labor, which resulted in a "massive transvaluation of the values of social production and the construction of new subjectivities."[121] The refusal of work thus involves a moment of rejection or exit, but is also related to a "process of invention."[122]

Kathi Weeks offers a complementary reading of the refusal of work, which she sees as a "general political and cultural movement" that renounces "the mode of life now defined by and subordinated to work."[123] In broad agreement with Hardt and Negri, Weeks insists on the link between the refusal of work and the affirmation and invention of 'non-work' activities, which means that the refusal should not be seen as an end in itself, but rather as "a path of separation that creates the conditions for the construction of subjects whose needs and desires are no longer consistent with the social mechanisms within which they are supposed to be mediated and contained."[124] Indeed, the refusal of work does not boil down to a renunciation of "labor *tout court*,"[125] presumably because some amount of work is a necessary fact of life, whatever our thoughts and feelings on the matter.

The fact that examples of the refusal of work 'in practice' are often drawn from the 1960s

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[120] Ibid, 273-274.

[121] Ibid, 275.

[122] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 100.

[123] Ibid, 99.

[124] Ibid, 100.

[125] Ibid, 99.

and 1970s tends to give contemporary writings on the subject the air of nostalgia for a more revolutionary past and, in my view, suggests the urgency of breathing new life into the concept. In particular, what signs of the refusal of work, however faint, can be seen in contemporary society, and how might they provide the impetus for theoretical renewal? Hardt and Negri make a partial, but ultimately unsatisfactory response to this question by identifying a number of more recent "powerful events on the world scene that reveal the trace of the multitude's refusal of exploitation," including the Tiananmen Square protests in 1989, the Intifada against Israel, the riots in Los Angeles in 1992, the Zapatista rebellion in 1994, and strikes in Paris and South Korea in the mid-1990s.[126] But we should be careful not to conflate the refusal of exploitation (or, for that matter, alienation) with the refusal of work: as Kathi Weeks shows, the celebration of work remains central to both socialist modernization and socialist humanist strains of anti-capitalist theory and practice.[127]

In their more detailed discussions of these individual struggles, it is worth noting that Hardt and Negri describe the Los Angeles riots as expressing a more specific "refusal of the post-Fordist regime of social control."[128] It might be plausible to read the riots that broke out in England in 2011 in a similar way, and in their latest work, *Declaration*, Hardt and Negri do in fact make the comparison between the riots in Los Angeles and across Britain.[129] But I suggest that to see in the latter an example of the *refusal of work* when they lacked a coherent message or demand concerning the meaning and value of work, risks distorting the principle beyond recognition. It might be objected that this assessment rests on an unwarranted requirement of coherence and intentionality for action to reach the threshold of the refusal of work. After all, whatever motivated the rioters, I

[126] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 54.

[127] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 83-92.

[128] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 55.

[129] Hardt and Negri, *Declaration*, 6.

have argued that their actions revealed a fissure in the ideology of work that politicians and the mainstream media rushed to repair.

To help resolve this confusion, we must distinguish between behavior that seeks to meet material needs and desires without engaging in paid work, on the one hand, and the refusal of work, on the other. Examples of the former include a wide range of activities from theft and other criminal behavior, such as illegal trafficking, to subsistence forms of living and the active pursuit (and advocacy for the expansion) of welfare entitlements. These activities may be undertaken individually or collectively, and some may even overlap with the refusal of work. The essential difference between such 'non-work' behavior and the refusal of work, however, lies in the fact that, even when carried out collectively (such as in organized criminal gangs), the former represents an attempt by individuals to evade the practical demands of work placed upon them by society, whereas the refusal of work expresses a critique of (some or all facets of) the ideology of work. Those practicing the refusal of work may or may not engage in forms of behavior that allow them to meet material needs without engaging in paid work, while not everyone who looks for 'non-work' means to satisfy their needs engages in an explicit critique of the ideology of work.

Based on this distinction, I argue that while the riots certainly included examples of 'non-work' behavior, because participants did not attempt to communicate a critique of the ideology of work (beyond the implicit rejection of the link between earning and consumption) they fall short of the refusal of work. The public sector strikes, on the other hand, contain at least the *germ* of a refusal of work, because, although they also failed to advance a critique of the ideology of work as a whole, grievances centered on changes that would effectively extend the subordination of life to work. Moreover, although the element of social innovation stressed by Weeks and Hardt and Negri is not immediately apparent in the strikes, given the professed inevitability of budget cuts, it is clear that the "needs and desires" of many workers are becoming inconsistent "with the social mechanisms

within which they are supposed to be mediated and contained"[130]

Whereas the public sector strikes express a partial refusal of work as articulated by Weeks and Hardt and Negri, it is worth noting that the central role of unions in their organization is at odds with Mario Tronti's call to reject "the whole trade union terrain."[131] While Tronti's claim that union organization equates to control by the bosses appears simplistic to say the least, the fact that shortly after the strikes the TUC brokered broad lines of agreement with the government covering local government and health workers, and that the National Union of Teachers and Public and Commercial Services union pulled out of a coordinated strike planned for March 2012 may provide evidence of the "vacillations and conservatism inherent in the trade union bureaucracy."[132]

Based on these insights, one might be tempted to follow Tronti's analysis and conclude that the strikes acted as an element of stabilization, and even helped shore up the ideology of work rather than destabilizing it. Indeed, based on the Gramscian concept of hegemony, the promise of retirement, like that of flexibility, arguably helps secure the "active consent" of workers to the 'work society' by offering an attractive period of freedom from paid labor.[133] If they had successfully defended their pensions, workers might therefore have unwittingly helped preserve the hegemony of the work society. As it was, of course, the government pressed ahead with its reforms against the protests of workers, so we can neither confirm nor refute such a hypothesis. Paradoxically, this

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[130] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 100.

[131] Mario Tronti, "The Strategy of Refusal," 1965, accessed March 24, 2013, http://libcom.org/library/strategy-refusal-mario-tronti.

[132] Alex Callinicos, "British Sounds," *International Socialism: a Quarterly Journal of Socialist Theory* 137 (2013), accessed February 15, 2013, http://www.isj.org.uk/index.php4?id=863&issue=137#137analysis13.

[133] Here hegemony refers to the notion that "class relations are sustained in significant ways through the *active consent* of people in the subordinated classes." Erik Olin Wright, "Working-Class Power, Capitalist-Class Interests, and Class Compromise," *American Journal of Sociology* 105, no. 4 (2000): 964, doi: 10.1086/210397.

refusal to compromise may threaten the ongoing legitimacy of the ideology of work.

Although the more radical strain of the refusal of work might cast a critical eye on the activities and demands of the strikers, I argue that their resistance to the further incursions of paid work into life constitutes a "path of separation" which in turn serves to denaturalize the ideology of work itself. Whether this will lead to a more radical critique of the ideology of work one cannot say, but the act of denaturalization itself nonetheless constitutes a necessary condition for such a development. While I have mentioned the absence of an explicit critique of the ideology of work as a reason for understanding the strikes as containing only the germ of the refusal of work, it is also worth considering whether Weeks's characterization of the refusal as a "general political and cultural movement" that renounces "the mode of life now defined by and subordinated to work"[134] might itself be too exacting.

In other words, this formulation of the refusal of work seems to assume that it should express an all-encompassing critique of the work society. Yet, by insinuating themselves in the cracks and crevices of the ideology of work rather than in engaging in a sweeping renunciation of our whole "mode of life," it could be the case that seemingly more modest movements stand the chance of attracting more followers and achieving greater success. This is, of course, an empirical question and beyond the scope of this paper, but these considerations suggest the merits of a more pluralistic conception of the refusal of work as consisting of a mosaic of discourses and practices that critique particular elements of the ideology of work. For example, acknowledging the risks of exaggerating the political import of a piece of academic writing, I believe that this dissertation, and of course, some of the texts to which I refer in it, articulates a version of the refusal of work.

VII. Conclusions

The riots and public sector strikes that took place in 2011 provide an unusual vantage point

[134] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 99.

from which to survey discourses on work in contemporary British society. While the sanctification of work regularly surfaces in connection with discussions of welfare entitlements, the riots catalyzed a deeper, broader, and more sustained reflection on the meaning and value of work. In particular, whereas discourses on welfare tend to focus on the appropriate means by which to ensure that everyone who can work does so (as the slogan 'making work pay' vividly depicts), in the aftermath of the riots it became clear that work is seen by many to function as the very linchpin of society. Indeed, the linchpin, which the Oxford English Dictionary defines as a "pin passed through the end of an axle-tree to keep the wheel in its place," proves to be a particularly apt metaphor for the perceived function of work in contemporary society. For as I have shown, responses to the riots reveal how the ideology of work constructs employment as an uncontestable mechanism of social inclusion and the bedrock of a stable society, without which the wheel, so to speak, would inevitably spin dangerously off its axle.[135] Indeed, widespread commitment to this ideology goes a long way to explaining resistance to the guaranteed basic income, the subject of the next chapter.

The riots thus provided the material for a cautionary tale of social regression, suggesting that we must redouble our efforts to ensure full compliance with the norms of the work society. Faced with the specter of social disintegration, the prescribed remedy is 'more work.' Although the government's changes to public sector pensions were, of course, not motivated by fears of social unrest, here too we see the prescription of 'more work' as a cure for Britain's presumed maladies, namely its ailing economy and lumbering budget deficit. This is not the place to evaluate the coherence of the coalition government's economic policy. Suffice it to say, however, that by

[135] Zygmunt Bauman makes a similar argument that in modern industrial society "work served as the linchpin" that brought together individual, social and systemic "levels of modern arrangement." In the late-modern society of consumers, however, he claims that consumer activity now performs this role. My analysis of the riots suggests that the continuing significance of paid work may be greater than Bauman's account of the shift from a society of producers to a society of consumers allows. Bauman, *Work, Consumerism, and the New Poor*, 19, 24, 27.

increasing the supply of labor, the extension of working life appears likely to render the problem of youth unemployment more intractable than ever.

In this regard it is worth noting that, during the period of high unemployment in the 1970s, employers and unions alike agreed that "older workers should be encouraged to leave the labour force."[136] If advocates of the basic guaranteed income are right that, by "supporting the reduction and redistribution of working hours," such a scheme "will facilitate a new form of full employment,"[137] it appears that the long-term viability of the ideology of work may depend on a social policy that none of the mainstream political parties is currently willing to consider. Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, a commitment to the work society not only grounds resistance to the basic income, but in a counterintuitive fashion, such a commitment motivates some activists and scholars to *advocate* the basic income.

Moreover, however "simple" the "fact that people are living longer" may have seemed to Mr. Cameron, the public sector strikes show that a substantial section of the population disagreed that this meant they should "have to contribute a little bit more and retire a little later."[138] Indeed, I have suggested that we read the strikes as a spirited defense of retirement as a period of life in which one is free from the necessity of engaging in paid labor. The November 30 'day of action' thus expresses resistance to the immiseration and erosion of retirement and to the concomitant extension of working life. In this regard, I argued that the strikes contain a germ of the refusal of work, for they oppose the further subordination of life to work. Furthermore, this discontent might provide fertile ground for the growth of support for the idea of a basic income.

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[136] Duncan et al, "Ageism, early exit, and British trade unions," 225.

[137] "Annex," European Citizens' Initiative for an Unconditional Basic Income: 3, accessed October 29, 2013, http://basicincome2013.eu/ubi/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Full_Annex_ECI_unconditionnal-basic-income-2.pdf.

[138] Vasagar et al, "Michael Gove."

Of course, one should not confuse resistance to changes that would dismantle the culturally embedded expectation of retirement with a more fundamental critique of the dominance of work in contemporary society. Despite falling short of a fully-fledged refusal of work, however, we should acknowledge the important role of the strikes (as well as the riots) in denaturalizing the ideology of work. Moreover, rather than wait expectantly for the emergence of a movement that renounces the work society outright, critical theorists should approach the refusal of work as a potentially heterogeneous cluster of struggles that take aim at specific aspects of the ideology of work and its articulation in particular forms and contexts. Paradoxically, the greatest damage that the ideology of work may suffer could come from the government's success in pressing ahead with pensions reforms against the wishes of the hundreds of thousands who took part in the November 30 'day of action.' Even if such large-scale mobilizations do not occur in the future, it is unlikely that the moral feelings that motivated these strikes will simply evaporate, particularly if the government (and private sector employers) continues to ratchet up the demands of work and to erode pensions and retirement. Analyzing these changes and the responses by workers to them will remain an ongoing task for those committed to reconfiguring the meaning and value of paid work. As I have suggested, the basic guaranteed income can play an important role in such a social transformation, so it is to demands for this scheme that we turn our attention in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Strange Brew: Basic Income, Freedom, and the Work Society

I. Introduction

The case of Mick Philpott who, along with his wife and a friend, burned down his house in May 2012 in a plot to frame his ex-lover for the crime, and in the process accidentally killed his six children, reignited public debate about the British welfare state during the Spring of 2013. Although the connection between this plan, equally bizarre as it was tragic, and the benefits Mr. Philpott and his family received appeared tenuous at best, the tabloid press and even some politicians seized upon it as evidence of the failings of the welfare system and the need for reform. In the same week that a fresh round of welfare reforms and cuts had already taken effect, Chancellor George Osborne said "there is a question for government and for society about the welfare state … subsidising lifestyles like [Philpott's]."[1] A *Daily Mail* editorial by A.N. Wilson described Mr. Philpott as a "domestic tyrant" who hadn't changed his trousers or washed himself for twelve weeks, and who passed his time taking drugs, drinking beer, and having group sex.[2] One might expect such proclivities to incite the disapprobation of conservative readers, and by discussing them alongside the fact that Mr. Philpott allegedly had never even tried to find work, and instead used his children to "milk the welfare system," the author appears intent on provoking moral outrage over welfare 'dependency.' In fact, Wilson sardonically coins the phrase the "Philpott morality," to describe the sense of being "entitled to 'something for nothing,'" which he also associates with those who took part in the 2011 English riots.

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[1] "Mick Philpott case: George Osborne benefit comments spark row," *BBC*, April 5, 2013, accessed April 6, 2013. http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-22025035.

[2] A.N. Wilson, "Mick Philpott is a perfect parable for our age: His story shows the pervasiveness of evil born out of welfare dependency," *The Daily Mail*, April 2, 2013, accessed April 6, 2013, http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2303071/Mick-Philpotts-story-shows-pervasiveness-evil-born-welfare-dependency.html.

Mr. Philpott may not know it, but his temporary enlistment in the ongoing debates over welfare makes him a distant cousin of the infamous 'surfer off Malibu,'[3] who for some years has exercised philosophical minds engaged in arguments about the basic guaranteed income (hereafter referred to simply as the 'basic income').[4] In these debates, the surfer has acted as chief representative for one of the most stubborn moral objections to the basic income, namely, Why should society provide an income to someone without requiring that he or she give something back in return? Indeed, by guaranteeing every citizen or permanent resident material support in the form of a regular cash payment regardless of their contribution to society, the basic income would effectively give everyone 'something for nothing,' and thus according to its opponents violate the norms of fairness and reciprocity.[5]

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[3] Even those who support the basic income, such as Philippe Van Parijs, make use of the image of the surfer. For example, the cover of Van Parijs's *Real Freedom for All* features an image of a male surfer riding a wave. Before this, Van Parijs wrote an influential article with the title "Why Surfers Should be Fed: The Liberal Case for an Unconditional Basic Income," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 20, no. 2 (1991): 101-131, http://www.jstor.org/stable/2265291. In this piece he quotes a 1988 article by John Rawls, who makes reference to those "who surf all day off Malibu."

[4] I do not offer a comprehensive history of the basic income here, but the writings of Paine, Jefferson, and J.S. Mill provide noteworthy intellectual milestones. During the twentieth century, proposals related to the basic income included the national or social dividend (in the years following World War I), and the 'demogrant' and 'negative income tax' schemes (in the 1960s and '70s). Since the mid-1980s, however, the basic income has "become the subject of an unprecedented and fast expanding public discussion." Philippe Van Parijs, "Basic Income: A Simple and Powerful Idea of the Twenty-First Century," *Politics and Society* 32, no. 1 (2004): 8, doi: 10.1177/0032329203261095. See also Bill Jordan, "The Low Road to Basic Income? Tax-Benefit Integration in the UK," *Journal of Social Policy* 41, no. 1 (January 2012): 1-17, doi: 10.1017/S0047279411000353. Simon Birnbaum and Karl Widerquist (ed), "History of Basic Income," 2008, accessed June 10, 2013, http://www.basicincome.org/bien/aboutbasicincome.html#history.

[5] William Galston offers one of many articulations of this view, when he objects to the basic income on the grounds that "people who receive benefits should make contributions – if they are able." William Galston, "What about Reciprocity?" in *What's Wrong with A Free Lunch?* ed. Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2001), 32.

Given the current state of welfare discourse, in which 'even' members of the centre-left appear intent on strengthening the contribution principle within the welfare state,[6] and figures like Mr. Philpott and the 'feral youth' who took part in the 2011 English riots are used to epitomize all that is wrong with the 'something for nothing' principle, the surfer off Malibu seems a fitting worry for a plan that many might dismiss as the stuff of philosophical fantasy. Yet despite the fact that the basic income lies at the periphery of social policy debate and practical politics,[7] advocates present compelling arguments about why it remains worthy of consideration.

For example, Erik Olin Wright stresses the importance of engaging "in rigorous analysis of alternative visions of institutional change even when there seems to be little support for such ideas since posing clear designs for alternatives may contribute to creating the conditions in which such support can be built."[8] This approach implies the danger of self-fulfilling prophecies, and suggests that support for the basic income may build simply through discussion: If you want the basic income, don't give up talking about it! In a slightly different vein, Kathi Weeks characterizes the basic income not "merely as a policy proposal but a perspective and a provocation, a pedagogical practice that entails a critical analysis of the present and an imagination of the future."[9] Similarly, André Gorz argues that the basic income has "*heuristic value*" in that "*it reflects the most basic and*

[6] Toby Helm and Daniel Boffey, "Labour Plans Radical Shift over Welfare State Payouts," *The Observer*, April 6, 2013, accessed June 10, 2013, http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2013/apr/06/labour-plans-shift-welfare-payouts.

[7] Fitzpatrick, *Freedom and Security*, 3. Jordan, "The Low Road to Basic Income?" 3-4. For example, Jordan notes that, while the Liberal Democrats campaigned for the basic income 1992, in 2010 only the Green party advocated it.

[8] Erik Olin Wright, "Introduction," in *Redesigning Distribution: Basic Income and Stakeholder Grants as Cornerstones for an Egalitarian Capitalism*, ed. Erik Olin Wright (London, Verso: 2006), xi.

[9] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 146.

advanced meaning of present developments."[10] Even if the basic income is never adopted as a policy, these views suggest, perhaps it can play a role in sharpening our awareness of current conditions and provoke us to imagine alternative futures.

Guided by the spirit of these suggestions, in what follows I offer a reading of the basic income as a political demand that seeks to transform the welfare state,[11] at the same time as situating it in relation to the key coordinates of the work society.[12] This means that my discussion of the basic income will not weigh the merits of the numerous arguments for and against it, less still try to develop original justifications or objections. As I have suggested in earlier chapters, I believe that the basic income would provide an important source of economic security that would in turn help realize the emancipatory potential of the existing regime of flexibility. In this sense, I approach the demand for the basic income in a manner akin to Herbert Marcuse's program for critical theory to analyze "historical alternatives" that might alleviate "man's struggle for existence."[13]

In doing so, I shall take for granted that, provided at an adequate level, the basic income would "ensure that waged work would be less a necessity than a choice;"[14] in this sense it promises an expansion of freedom in relation to paid employment and new opportunities to pursue a range of non-paid activities according to our own needs and desires. But while the basic income, owing to its

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[10] André Gorz, *Reclaiming Work: Beyond the Wage-Based Society*, trans. Chris Turner (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1999), 91.

[11] Here I adopt the terminology of Glynos and Howarth's post-structural political theory, according to which a political practice "seek[s] to challenge and transform the existing norms, institutions and practices – perhaps even the regime itself – in the name of an ideal or principle." Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*, 105.

[12] As discussed in Chapter 3, within the work society paid work is not merely an "economic necessity," but also a "social duty," and "an individual moral practice and collective ethical obligation." Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 11.

[13] Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), xlii.

[14] Weeks, *Problem with Work*, 138.

unconditionality, would break with the existing provision of benefits on the basis of means-tests and prior contributions, I also want to consider what continuities might exist between the contemporary welfare state and the basic income. More broadly, how can we characterize the relationship between the basic income and the work society? And although the basic income may lessen the material necessity to engage in paid work, and in this sense expand freedom, what hidden costs to freedom might it impose?

To answer these questions I analyze the basic income as a demand in relation first to unemployment insurance and then to means-tested benefits, thus helping disclose possible continuities and dislocations with the present conjuncture. To be sure, we cannot know with certainty what effects the introduction of a policy like the basic income might have on levels of unemployment, the construction of subjects, and the broader prospects for the expansion of freedom and justice. As Fitzpatrick points out, "*the character, significance and effects of a BI would depend substantially upon the nature of the ideological social environment in which it was implemented.*"[15] But this does not mean that we should steer clear of these questions before we have a fully implemented basic income scheme in place to analyze. On the contrary, analysis of arguments in support of the basic income can reveal possible trajectories of social and political change, which not only enables a more nuanced understanding of the discourse on the basic income, but also helps clarify what is at stake in how we argue for it.[16]

Although Fitzpatrick's analysis of how the basic income relates to different political ideologies (the radical right, welfare collectivism, socialism, feminism, and ecologism) offers key insights, my approach differs from his by focusing more narrowly on how basic income proposals

[15] Fitzpatrick, *Freedom and Security*, 5.

[16] See Carole Pateman, "Democratizing Citizenship: Some Advantages of a Basic Income," in *Redesigning Distribution*, ed. Wright, 102.

situate themselves with respect to the work society. In the pages that follow, I identify two broad sets of arguments for the basic income. The first emphasizes the capacity of the basic income to boost employment, and therefore remains attached to what I shall call the fantasy of the work society. I argue that a basic income motivated by the goal of full employment and introduced within a society still committed to the central value of paid work may offer benefits in terms of distributive justice, but would not in itself alter what Axel Honneth calls the 'achievement principle,' whereby members of contemporary capitalist society receive social esteem on the basis of their economic contributions to society.

Not only do such arguments for the basic income fail to tackle the distortion of social esteem, whereby activities associated with middle-class white men garner the greatest recognition, but they also leave unquestioned a value system which assigns relatively little respect to socially vital but unpaid activities. Furthermore, arguments for the basic income that emphasize its capacity to boost employment and the employability of individuals mark a strong continuity with the existing logic[17] of welfare, in the sense that they mesh with the goals of 'activating' the unemployed as well as enhancing the flexibility of labor markets and individual workers. In this respect, the basic income may not be as 'alternative,' nor deliver the degree of 'freedom from work,' as it first appeared.

As will become apparent through the course of the chapter, however, not all arguments for the basic income display an 'over-investment' in the fantasy of the work society. On the contrary, some proponents display openness to the radical contingency of social relations, particularly the work society, and suggest the basic income as a 'nonreformist reform.' A basic income justified and pursued in these terms harbors the possibility of a deeper social transformation and 'political resignification' than I locate in pro-work society arguments. Yet as I discuss in the final section of

[17] I use the term 'logic' to refer "to the purposes, rules and ontological presuppositions that render a practice or regime possible and intelligible." Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*, 15.

the paper, we cannot assume that even this more radical perspective would deliver an unmitigated expansion of freedom. Rather, drawing on insights from governmentality studies, I suggest that the creation of new spaces for production and cooperation proposed by theorists in this camp could themselves become sites for the exercise of freedom as a 'formula of power.' To be clear, I do not present these arguments as a refutation of the basic income. Rather, my purpose here, much as it was in chapter 2 with respect to flexibility, is to complicate our understanding of the possible effects of the basic income in terms of freedom and to suggest the need for cautious optimism about the spaces of cooperation and exchange that could take the place of paid work.

In sum, despite the simplicity of the basic income as a demand, the following analysis reveals a veiled struggle between its advocates over fundamental social, economic and political questions. While arguments for the basic income couched in terms of the work society may ultimately attract more support than those that look to radical social change, an uncritical stance toward the meaning and value of paid work limits the emancipatory potential of the basic income. In other words, although the basic income pursued within more conservative horizons might enable important material redistribution, only a position open to the radical contingency of the social can tackle injustice and domination rooted in cultural norms that perpetuate the ideology of paid work.

II. Preliminary Notes: Historical Alternatives and the Welfare State

Although the breadth of support that the basic income garners lends an intriguing air to debates about it,[18] here I want to emphasize the strong resonance between the demand and critical theory's project of searching for, and analyzing, historical alternatives. For example, Nancy Fraser

[18] For an excellent overview of the points of agreement between the basic income and a variety of ideologies, see Fitzpatrick, *Freedom and Security*.

treats the basic income as a possible instance of 'nonreformist reform,'[19] Erik Olin Wright classifies it as a socialist reform,[20] while Robert Van der Veen and Philppe Van Parijs argue that it could facilitate the transition to communism from within capitalism, thus bypassing the intermediary stage of socialism.[21] As I discuss below, although claims that the basic income may improve the functioning of capitalist labor markets stand in tension with these more radical aspirations, the basic income nonetheless fulfills the two criteria Marcuse sets for a "historical alternative": it is "within reach" of contemporary society, and it expresses a "real need of the underlying population."[22] Evidence for the satisfaction of the latter condition is painfully easy to adduce in contemporary British and US society, but the second deserves more attention, not least because of what it reveals about debates surrounding the basic income itself.

How can we know whether the basic income is "within reach?"[23] One might be tempted to base an answer on the 'affordability' of the basic income: if it turned out that the basic income was

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[19] Although Fraser suggests that in a "neoliberal regime" the basic income would "subsidize employers of low-wage, temporary labor and possibly depress wages overall," she claims that in a social democracy it could transform the relations between capital and labor and men and women alike. This would qualify as nonreformist reform, then, since despite "leaving intact the deep structure of capitalist property rights," it could "set in motion a trajectory of change in which more radical reforms become practicable over time." Nancy Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation," in Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-philosophical Exchange* (London: Verso, 2003), 78, 79.

[20] Erik Olin Wright, "Basic Income as a Socialist Project" (paper presented at the annual US-BIG Congress, New York, New York, March 4-6, 2005), 3, accessed October 29, 2013, http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/Basic%20Income%20as%20a%20Socialist%20Project.pdf.

[21] Robert Van der Veen and Philippe van Parijs, "A Capitalist Road to Communism," *Theory and Society* 15, no. 5 (1986): 635-655, accessed October 29, 2013, http://www.ssc.wisc.edu/~wright/ERU_files/PVP-cap-road.pdf.

[22] Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, xliii.

[23] In asking whether the basic income is "within reach" I refer to Marcuse's formulation of historical alternatives, but it is a curious coincidence that Philippe Van Parijs claims, in strikingly Marcusean language, that "the idea of a totally unconditional income rekindles the hope that not all

'unaffordable,' this might suggest that, at least for the time being, it does not constitute a bona fide "historical alternative" worthy of the attention of those committed to freedom and social justice. Here, however, it is easy to lose oneself in a thicket of technical details. For example, if one follows Kathi Weeks in stipulating that the basic income should be "sufficient to meet basic needs" and "large enough to ensure that waged work would be less a necessity than a choice,"[24] one must still ascertain what those needs are and how much they might cost to satisfy.

Another way to approach the question of affordability involves calculating the possible size of the basic income based on current social spending. As Fitzpatrick claims, however, even when one adds the revenue foregone due to tax allowances, credits, and contribution rebates to existing social security spending, the resulting basic income would still be insufficient to live on by itself.[25] Moreover, this arrangement might disadvantage those in greatest need of financial support, since they could have received larger transfers under the existing system of means-tested and contributory benefits given that not everyone receives them.[26]

While these considerations suggest that a "sufficient" basic income would require a politically unpopular increase in taxation, this does not necessarily mean that the basic income falls out of reach, for we cannot rule out the possibility that advocates might mobilize adequate support to bring about such a change in the tax system. Moreover, exactly what would constitute a "sufficient" basic income depends largely on the cost of living and on the extent of what Gorz calls

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major steps towards the emancipation of mankind are behind us: another one [the basic income] is within reach." Philippe Van Parijs, "Competing Justifications of Basic Income," in *Arguing for Basic Income: Ethical Foundations for a Radical Reform*, ed. Philippe Van Parijs (London: Verso, 1992), 7.

[24] Weeks, *Problem with work*, 138.

[25] Fitzpatrick, *Freedom and Security*, 38-39.

[26] Ibid, 66.

"non-monetary exchange and self-providing."[27] The point is that, in a highly commoditized society, the level of the basic income would need to be significantly higher to meet basic needs than in one where individuals meet many of those needs through "collective facilities and services."[28] Although, of course, both an increase in taxation and a proliferation of "non-monetary exchange and self-providing" do entail a degree of social change, I shall treat them as "within reach" of contemporary society given that each represents an intensification or radicalization of existing practices and norms rather than the creation of entirely new ones.[29]

To treat the basic income as an 'alternative,' moreover, suggests the need to analyze what exactly it would transform or replace, hence my framing of it as a political demand that addresses the welfare state. For the sake of analytical clarity I take a selective view of the latter, specifically focusing on those benefits that relate most directly to the basic income. For example, since most advocates of the basic income do not propose substituting it for existing 'in-kind' transfers such as education or health care, I will not consider this form of social welfare in the following analysis. Moreover, because the majority of proposals would pay the basic income to those beyond the

[27] Gorz, *Reclaiming Work*, 83.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Here my argument parallels that of Anthony Giddens, when he claims that what some scholars call 'postmodernity' (as discontinuous with modernity) is in fact a period "in which the consequences of modernity are becoming more radicalised and universalised than ever before." Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1990), 3. I also take inspiration from the work of Gibson-Graham, whose project of 'reading the economy for difference' tries "to de-domesticate the household, unpaid labor, and caring practices." J.K. Gibson-Graham, *A Postcapitalist Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 59. While what Gibson-Graham call 'capitalo-centric' discourse tends to marginalize and efface these forms of economic behavior, clearly they exist nonetheless, demonstrating that we should not regard the "non-monetary exchange and self-providing" to which Gorz refers as somehow 'external' to our social formation.

retirement age and would allow them to supplement this income with private or public pensions, employment, and personal savings, I will not consider the case of pensions.[30]

To be sure, the introduction of the basic income in a country without universal health care, such as the United States, would pose a different set of challenges than the same task in, for example, the United Kingdom, with its National Health Service. One might also speculate as to whether the introduction of the basic income could produce the conditions necessary for the creation of a universal health care system, or whether, on the contrary, the absence of the latter suggests an unfavorable socio-political environment for the adoption of the basic income in the first place. Notwithstanding the importance of these issues, however, since the basic income would not replace existing in-kind benefits, we need not consider them in any detail here.

In addition to these considerations, since a key goal of this chapter is to enrich our understanding of the political meaning and value of paid work and to explore whether and how the introduction of the basic income might prove transformative in this regard, it makes both practical and conceptual sense to analyze those benefits most closely related to employment. Thus, I will focus primarily on two types of existing social transfers: contribution-based unemployment insurance and means-tested assistance (most commonly known as 'welfare').[31] While the method of delivery and eligibility requirements of these benefits varies across Britain and the United States (and even among the States), as we will see below, they embody the principle of conditionality – whether

[30] Van Parijs, "Basic Income," 11. As an aside, it is worth noting that the basic income could be seen as a "natural complement" to non-contributory, non-means tested pensions, such as have been adopted in Sweden and the Netherlands, for example.

[31] Due to constraints of space, I do not anaylze the US Earned Income Tax Credits or its British counterpart, the Working Tax Credit. It is worth noting that the basic income would effectively combine this form of fiscal welfare with so-called state welfare, which provides cash transfers. Fitzpatrick, *Freedom and Security*, 25. Moreover, both tax credits and the basic income function as a subsidy to employees, with the crucial distinction that the former is paid only to those in work. Philippe Van Parijs, "A Basic Income for All," in *What's Wrong with A Free Lunch?* ed. Cohen and Rogers, 18.

in terms of a person's past and present performance of work, or on his or her assessed financial need and willingness to work. In this respect they diverge from the basic income, which is unconditional from the point of view of both income and performance of, or willingness to work.[32] Despite this difference, however, in the following sections I will amplify some less audible resonances between the existing schemes of unemployment insurance and welfare, on the one hand, and the basic income, on the other.

III. Laboring under the Work Society: Unemployment Insurance and the Basic Income

In this section I explore the relationship between the basic income and unemployment insurance, with a particular focus on the ideal vision of society that motivates each. To do so, I first offer a general overview of the main social, economic, and political functions of unemployment insurance, leaving until the next section a closer discussion of its more specific features. From the outset, it bears emphasis that unemployment benefits function not merely as a means of ensuring social protection, but also as a mechanism of labor regulation.[33] Taking inspiration from Karl Polanyi, for example, one can theorize unemployment benefits as a response to the social and economic effects of marketization and the 'fictitious commodification' of labor. These threaten not only social reproduction in general, but also the production of human beings capable of selling their labor, who are, of course, vital to the functioning of the market itself.[34] We can therefore understand unemployment insurance (alongside unions, education programs, immigration policies, and in some

[32] Van Parijs, "Basic Income," 11.

[33] Standing, *Beyond the New Paternalism*, 130. For a classic account of the regulation of economic and political behavior by relief programs, see Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Vintage, 1993).

[34] See Nancy Fraser, "Can Society be Commodities All the Way Down? Polanyian Reflections on the Capitalist Crisis," *Fondations Maison des Sciences de l'Homme* 18 (2012): 1-13, accessed October 29, 2013, http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/docs/00/72/50/60/PDF/FMSH-WP-2012-18_Fraser2.pdf.

cases, centralized wage bargaining) as an institutional arrangement designed to coordinate the supply and demand of labor and to mitigate the negative social, economic, and political consequences of temporary imbalances between the two.[35]

Indeed, from the 1930s to the mid-1970s, Keynesian macroeconomic theory provided the dominant explanation of unemployment as a result of disequilibrium between the supply and demand of labor.[36] Moreover, the introduction of national compulsory unemployment insurance schemes from the beginning of the twentieth century reflected the understanding of unemployment as an accident or risk that "affects a given population with a certain probability and inevitability," and in this respect marked a break from "the moralizing, fault-finding" approach to unemployment characteristic of the nineteenth century.[37] Perhaps misleadingly, 'full employment' did not preclude so-called 'frictional' unemployment,[38] which occurred, for example, during "retooling or model-year changeovers,"[39] and was understood as temporary and involuntary, rather than as stemming from the fault or choice of individual workers.

Insofar as unemployment insurance serves to support temporarily jobless workers rather than try to tackle the root causes of unemployment it clearly expresses a reformist tendency. And in

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[35] Fred Block, "Towards a New Understanding of Economic Modernity," in *The Economy as a Polity: The Political Constitution of Contemporary Capitalism*, eds. Christian Joerges, Bo Stråth and Peter Wagner (London: UCL Press, 2005), 8.

[36] Standing, *Beyond the New Paternalism*, 127, 131.

[37] William Walters, *Unemployment and Government: Genealogies of the Social* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 58, 57. For example, occupations covered by the (British) National Insurance Act of 1911 were specifically skilled trades that did not experience high rates of unemployment, and were "deemed property 'insurable,'" 56.

[38] Ibid, 131, 124. Bo Stråth and Peter Wagner, "After Full Employment: Theoretical and Political Implications," in *After Full Employment*, ed. Stråth, 261.

[39] Robert C. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line: Race and the American Welfare State* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 213.

helping normalize short spells of unemployment by providing a measure of income security, the introduction of social insurance in Britain, for example, also militated against attempts by socialists to raise awareness of the political constitution of unemployment as rooted in class interests.[40] This domesticating function of unemployment insurance seems particularly apt to what Nikolas Rose calls the "single matrix of solidarity," which he presents as a hallmark of governing from the "social point of view." Within this matrix, social citizenship gave a "politico-ethical form" to the relation between individuals and the "organically interconnected society."[41] Thus, social insurance functioned as an "identification project," in the sense that it embodied "an image of the socially identified citizen" who "understood [him- or herself] to be a member of a single integrated national society,"[42] albeit in a fashion that excluded women and racial minorities, as I discuss further below. Here, though, I want to dwell on the vision of a "single integrated national society." The Lacanian concept of fantasy proves a fruitful theoretical resource not only for understanding this notion, but also for interpreting support for the basic income.

A useful point of entry is offered by Ceren Özselçuka and Yahya Madra, who argue that the discourse and practice of the "modernist-corporatist vision of economy," including the policy of full employment and the establishment of paternalist welfare states by the New Deal in the US and Labour governments in the UK, was informed by a "fantasy of social order and harmony."[43] According to Jason Glynos, "the logic of fantasy names a narrative structure involving some

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[40] Walters, *Unemployment and Government*, 58-9.

[41] Nikolas Rose, "The Death of the Social? Re-figuring the Territory of Government," *Economy and Society* 25, no. 3 (1996): 333, doi: 10.1080/03085149600000018.

[42] Ibid, 334.

[43] Ceren Özselçuka and Yahya M. Madra, "Enjoyment as an Economic Factor: Reading Marx with Lacan," *Subjectivity* 3, no. 3 (2010): 330, doi: 10.1057/sub.2010.13.

reference to an idealized scenario promising an imaginary fullness or wholeness (the beatific side of fantasy) and, by implication, a disaster scenario (the horrific side of fantasy)."[44] The "idealized scenario" that full employment and the welfare state served to shore up clearly overlaps with the basic tenets of the work society, in which (as I discussed in chapter 3) paid work functions as an economic, ethical, and moral duty of individuals as well as the primary lever of social inclusion.[45] Given that some degree of frictional/involuntary unemployment was expected within the terms of Keynesian economic thought, I suggest that the provision of unemployment insurance did not unsettle that fantasy, especially since, as I discuss in the next section, the design of these schemes would not permit contributor-claimants (permanently) to 'opt out' of work.

The shift away from Keynesian macroeconomics in the mid-1970s, high unemployment, increasingly stringent eligibility requirements, and a "process of implicit disentitlement due to the trend away from regular, full-time employment" have meant, however, that "even in industrialized countries, insurance benefits now reach only a minority of the unemployed."[46] But although these transformations, along with the individualizing effects of flexibility that I discussed in chapter 2, have arguably altered the way in which people think of themselves as members of society, this does not mean that the idealized scenario of the work society – which full employment and the welfare state were intended to shore up – has simply disappeared from the popular imagination.[47] On the

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[44] Jason Glynos, "Ideological Fantasy at Work," *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13, no. 3 (2008): 283, doi: 10.1080/13569310802376961.

[45] Zygmunt Bauman makes almost exactly this claim, but without using the concept of fantasy, when he suggests that full employment was the vision of the ideal society implied by the work ethic in what he calls the 'society of producers.' Bauman, *Work, Consumerism, and the New Poor*, 37.

[46] Standing, *Beyond the New Paternalism*, 156-7.

[47] Glynos argues that the difficulty individuals face in revealing their fantasies in clinical analysis is mirrored in the secret or unofficial nature of social fantasies. This is because "fantasy is

contrary, as I argued in chapter 3, responses to the riots that broke out across England in 2011 reveal the depth of support for the notion that, to quote David Cameron, "work is at the heart of a responsible society."[48]

Furthermore, although the unconditionality of the basic income seems at odds with the very notion of the work society (since it would enable people to choose not to work), advocates of the basic income often cite structural features and limitations of the contemporary labor market as arguments in its favor, thus pointing to a continuity with the logic and function of unemployment insurance. For example, the Basic Income European Citizens' Initiative, a group pressing for a pan-European basic income scheme, claims that by "supporting the reduction and redistribution of working hours," the basic income "will facilitate a new form of full employment."[49] Similarly, according to the Basic Income Earth Network, the most prominent basic income advocacy group, the basic income promises to reconcile two of the central objectives of social and economic policy, namely "poverty relief and full employment."[50] Finally, Claus Offe writes that the "basic income is pointless in functional terms … if conventional policies of pursuing the goals of 'full' employment

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inherently transgressive of the law, of public discourse, not necessarily because of its content (it may, for example, prohibit what the public law permits), but because of its function which, paradoxically, is to sustain the consistency of public discourse." Can one therefore refer to the work society in terms of the logic of fantasy, given the outpouring of support for it by public officials after the 2011 riots, for example? Here it is perhaps helpful to distinguish between an official commitment to the work society, on the one hand, and the fantasmatic content which sustains such a commitment on the other. Glynos suggests that evidence of the fantasy "would be found at the margins of 'public official discourse.'" I would suggest that George Osborne's controversial and, for some of his colleagues, embarrassing remarks about Mick Philpott provide an apt example of this type of marginal discourse. Glynos, "Grip of Ideology," 202, 204.

[48] "PM's speech on the fightback after the riots."

[49] "Annex," 3.

[50] "About Basic Income," Basic Income Earth Network, 2008, accessed May 22, 2013, http://basicincome.org/bien/aboutbasicincome.html.

and equitable distribution can actually deliver on their promises; but the converse is also true."[51] In other words, the basic income can and does draw support from the failure of existing labor market and welfare policies to achieve full employment.

How exactly the basic income might facilitate full employment, however, demands closer scrutiny. For example, Van Parijs acknowledges that given the limitations of tackling unemployment either by pursuing economic growth, or by cutting wages, we must give up on the idea of full employment, if this means "a situation in which virtually everyone who wants a *full-time* job can obtain one that is both affordable for the employer *without any subsidy* and affordable for the worker *without any additional benefit*."[52] But like the Basic Income European Citizens' Initiative, he then goes on to suggest that a reduction in the working week could have a positive effect on unemployment, as long as this is combined with "explicit or implicit subsidies to low-paid jobs," either to employers or to employees. Employer subsidies might include abolishing their social security contributions for lower earnings, while the basic income amounts to an employee subsidy in that it would allow workers to take jobs at lower wages than they could otherwise afford or would be willing to accept.[53] Another means by which advocates of the basic income suggest that it would function as an employment-boosting policy concerns its promise to enhance the flexibility of both the labor market and of workers, and to increase incentives to participate in paid work. Since these claims mark an additional line of continuity with the 'activating' logic of workfare, which encourages the unemployed to become active and enterprising selves, I give more detailed attention to it in section V.

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[51] Offe, "Basic Income and the Labor Contract," 77.

[52] Philippe Van Parijs, "A Basic Income for All," 16-18.

[53] Ibid, 17, 18.

We are now in a better position to grasp the implications of justifying the basic income in terms of the goal of full employment, even where the latter is reconfigured according to the reduction and redistribution of working time. Once again, the post-structural use of Lacan's concept of fantasy proves illuminating, but to see how, it will help to explicate the theory in more detail. In general terms, a Lacanian theory of ideology holds that fantasy mediates "the subject's relation to the norms and ideals governing a social or political practice."[54] Within the 'logics' approach to critical explanation developed by Glynos and Howarth, the fantasmatic logic can thus help account for why certain political demands and practices 'grip' or interpellate subjects.[55] Thus, if we want to understand the 'grip' of the basic income on its supporters, the fantasmatic logic promises an explanation that goes beyond the rational persuasiveness of arguments in favor of it.

For our purposes, it is particularly important to note that, when a subject engages with demands, practices, or norms in a way that is "governed quite stringently by the logic of fantasy," the corresponding "mode of enjoyment" is ideological.[56] How does the notion of ideology relate to fantasy? Recall that fantasy involves an "idealized scenario promising an imaginary fullness or wholeness."[57] Since poststructural social ontology postulates the "impossibility of closure," a subject's mode of enjoyment takes an ideological form to the extent that it maintains the "the

[54] Jason Glynos and Yannis Stavrakakis, "Lacan and Political Subjectivity: Fantasy and Enjoyment in Psychoanalysis and Political Theory," *Subjectivity* 24 (2008): 265, doi: 10.1057/sub.2008.23.

[55] Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*, 107.

[56] Glynos, "Ideological Fantasy at Work," 276. The term 'mode of enjoyment' refers to the Lacanian notion that fantasy "*sustains* the subject as a *desiring* subject, by providing it with a way of enjoying, a mode of *jouissance*. *Jouissance* is the enjoyment a subject experiences in sustaining his or her desire. And since sustaining desire ultimately involves sustaining desire as unsatisfied, this *jouissance* is often experienced as a suffering." Glynos, "Grip of Ideology," 201-202.

[57] Glynos, "Ideological Fantasy at Work," 283.

illusion of closure."[58] As noted in earlier chapters, I use the term ideology not to refer to epistemological misrecognition (as in 'false' consciousness), but to ontological misrecognition, wherein the subject mistakes the contingent as necessary, natural, or essential.[59]

As Glynos and Stavrakakis note, "it is the imaginary promise of recapturing our lost/impossible enjoyment that provides the fantasy support for many of our political projects, social roles, and consumer choices."[60] Indeed, the authors note that "romantic nationalist histories…are frequently based on the supposition of a golden era."[61] When supporters of the basic income invoke full employment as a justification, I suggest that a similar phenomenon reveals itself: the idealized scenario of the work society sustains the grip of the basic income as a practice that promises to 'restore' society to its imaginary fullness of "social order and harmony." This mode of enjoyment is 'ideological' because it ignores what Laclau calls the "impossibility of society," or more precisely, the impossibility of ever decisively eradicating antagonism and politics.[62]

At this point it is worth pausing to consider how, given that ideology is often understood in terms of providing support for the status quo, an ideological mode of enjoyment can motivate calls

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[58] Glynos notes that this postulate of radical contingency corresponds to the Lacanian notion of "lack in the symbolic Other." It is "axiomatic in the sense that it is not susceptible to empirical proof." We can therefore only assess its value "on the basis of its theoretical and analytical productiveness." Glynos, "Grip of Ideology," 195.

[59] The notion of ontological misrecognition forms a key plank of the 'hegemonic' approach to ideology developed by, among others, Ernesto Laclau. Here, ideological critique concerns itself both with "rendering contingency *visible*," and with "how ideology *grips* subjects." Glynos suggests that the hegemonic approach is the "genus of which a Lacanian theory of ideology is a species." Ibid, 191, 192.

[60] Glynos and Stavrakakis, "Lacan and Political Subjectivity," 261.

[61] Ibid, 262.

[62] Simon Critchley and Oliver Marchart, "Introduction," in *Laclau: a Critical Reader*, eds. Simon Critchley and Oliver Marchart (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2004), 4.

for reform. Glynos argues that while the ideological mode of enjoyment, whereby a subject is over-invested in fantasy, can indeed help sustain "existing social norms by keeping contestation at bay," it can also motivate "the drive to replace these social norms with a new set of social norms."[63] Although over-investment in a norm or ideal leaves the subject "insensitive to the contingency of social reality,"[64] it is important to note that "anything which destabilizes or hints at destabilizing a subject's fantasmatic narrative, is experienced as a threat and provokes anxiety."[65] Thus, an "over-investment in fantasies about children's vulnerabilities," for example, could give rise to a political movement demanding more healthy food.[66]

Recalling the earlier analysis of the goal of full employment as motivated by the "fantasy of social order and harmony," I suggest that calls for the basic income made in terms of full employment remain, to use Glynos's terminology, "stuck in the mode of over-investment."[67] As noted above, the provision of unemployment insurance did not threaten the fantasy of social harmony because its recipients had contributed to the system and were seen as only temporarily jobless. The failure of existing policies to ensure full employment, together with the shrinking number of citizens eligible for unemployment insurance (many of whom instead claim means-tested benefits), *does* destabilize that fantasy, by contrast, since they imply a swelling mass of marginalized persons and the unraveling of social ties sustained by paid work.

I do not mean to suggest that those who justify the basic income by appeal to full employment necessarily experience anxiety on an individual level that we could trace directly to

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[63] Glynos, "Ideological Fantasy at Work," 290, 278.

[64] Glynos and Stavrakakis, "Lacan and Political Subjectivity," 265.

[65] Glynos, "Ideological Fantasy at Work," 289.

[66] Ibid 290.

[67] Ibid, 290.

threats to the fantasy of the work society. Yet it does seem plausible to speak of a state of *collective* anxiety with respect to (un)employment, as evidenced by the repetitive public ruminations about, and reforms to the welfare state, as well as fears about the socially disintegrating effects of high levels of joblessness, seen most recently in response to the 2011 English riots. Recall that these concerns were not only expressed by conservative commentators who explicitly evoked the virtues of the work ethic and discipline, but also by those who recognize the exclusionary effects of unemployment. Given that the existing norms and practices are evidently incapable of ensuring full employment, the basic income promises those who are strongly attached to the fantasy of the work society – including and perhaps especially progressives who show concern for the social marginalization of the unemployed – an alternative means to realize it.

This diagnosis is significant because it suggests that, although the basic income violates the principle of contribution enshrined in the social insurance model, like the latter, it can be understood as consonant with the fantasy of the work society. Here I take guidance from Carole Pateman's observation about the consequences of adopting the basic income as opposed to the stakeholder grant, which would be paid in a lump sum instead of on a regular basis. She notes that "because the direction of change depends, among other things, on the reasons why the change is advocated and what it is expected to achieve, the manner in which theoretical case is made for a basic income or a stake is crucial."[68] In like manner, I suggest that motivations for supporting the basic income, in this case, the fantasy of the work society, would have a significant bearing on the "direction of change." What might follow from the establishment of the basic income within an ideological mode of enjoyment?

[68] Pateman, "Democratizing Citizenship," 102.

Philippe Van Parijs makes clear that the purpose of the basic income (in his view) isn't to "discourage as much as possible waged labour or a career-dominated existence, but to do as much as can be done in order to provide everyone with a genuine opportunity to make different choices."[69] Elsewhere, he suggests that "if the motive in combating unemployment is not some form of work fetishism – an obsession with keeping everyone busy – but rather a concern to give every person the possibility of taking up gainful employment in which she can find recognition and accomplishment, then the UBI is to be preferred."[70] These points suggest that when supporters of the basic income appeal to its ability to deliver full (or even just higher levels of) employment, they do so out of an awareness of the key role that paid work plays in the granting of recognition and social esteem. Claus Offe suggests that the libertarian idea that those who live only from their basic income could perform 'freely chosen' activities misses the point that "dominant institutions and values have decimated options for making oneself useful and feeling appreciated *other* than through gainful kinds of activities."[71] While this claim about social recognition is undoubtedly correct and I shall develop it below, it does not consider the significance of arguing for the basic income in terms of its ability to boost employment. I suggest that such arguments do not seek to challenge the existing meaning and value of work, and that they therefore remain "stuck in the mode of over-investment."

Admittedly, a basic income motivated by the goal of full employment and introduced within a society still committed to the central value of paid work might address the unjust and disabling effects of the current distribution of material goods, a possibility which appears particularly attractive from a feminist perspective. Carole Pateman, for example, suggests that "an unconditional basic income, set at a modest but decent subsistence level, would provide women with [economic]

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[69] Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All*, 33-4.

[70] Van Parijs, "A Basic Income for All," 19.

[71] Offe, "Basic Income and the Labor Contract," 65.

independence for the first time in history, and thus be a major step forward to their full social and political participation and full citizenship."[72] Although one could readily translate this claim into Nancy Fraser's norm of 'participatory parity,' Fraser in fact points out that, to avoid simply consolidating a "Mommy track" and thus "reinforcing…the deep structure of gender maldistribution," the basic income would need to be combined with "comparable worth and high-quality, abundant child care."[73] Similarly, *Ingrid Robeyns suggests that, furnished with a basic income, some women may* "work less on the labor market" *given* "the gendered nature of decision-making within families." She further claims that "a basic income would do nothing to change the traditional gender division of labor."[74] As these comments show, the basic income may be a necessary but insufficient condition for bringing about a more just distribution of material goods.

In making this claim, I do not mean to suggest that the unjust distribution of goods exhausts all that is problematic about the (gender) division of labor: issues surrounding decision-making and the cultural value of labor also deserve mention. Thus, just as Nancy Fraser contends that successful welfare reform must involve "struggles for cultural change aimed at revaluing caregiving and the feminine associations that code it,"[75] I suggest that the basic income as a distributive policy would need a corresponding cultural project to tackle the existing grammar of recognition, particularly the principle by which a person receives social esteem on the basis of his or her contributions to society through paid work.

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[72] Carole Pateman, "Democracy, Human Rights and a Basic Income in a Global Era" (paper presented at the Basic Income Earth Network Congress, Dublin, June 20-21, 2008): 8, accessed May 24, 2013, www.basicincome.org/bien/pdf/dublin08/plenary1speaker2pataeman.doc.

[73] Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics," 79.

[74] Ingrid Robeyns, "Is Nancy Fraser's Critique of Theories of Distributive Justice Justified?" *Constellations* 10, no. 4 (2003): 542, doi: 10.1046/j.1351-0487.2003.00352.x.

[75] Fraser, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics," 65.

While one might not object in principle to some connection between social esteem and social contribution, in practice paid work associated with women and people of color receives less social esteem than typically 'male' pursuits, while an even lower regard is held for unpaid work performed in the home or the community.[76] Without a transformation in the meaning and value of paid work, moreover, it is not difficult to imagine the continuing impetus to cultivate employability and self-entrepreneurialism, even if this stemmed less from material necessity than is presently the case. I return to this point in the discussion of the 'activating' logic of workfare. In sum, while one can begin to notice a recurring theme in the somewhat speculative character of these claims, they nonetheless point to ways in which the basic income pursued within the framework of the work society could fall short of hopes for more radical social change.

While arguments for the basic income that appeal to its employment-boosting potential signal an ideological mode of enjoyment, this does not exhaust the range of possible relations to it as a political demand. In contrast to the ideological mode of enjoyment, Glynos presents the ethical mode of enjoyment, "which signals a commitment to recognizing and exploring the possibilities of the new in contingent encounters."[77] As with the ideological mode, an ethical mode of enjoyment may or may not lead to the contestation and transformation of socio-political norms and practices. For example, an ethical mode of enjoyment in relation to the norms governing the food provided at schools means that subjects are "attuned to the contingency and creative potential of social reality,"

[76] See Axel Honneth, "Redistribution as Recognition: A Response to Nancy Fraser," in *Redistribution or Recognition*? by Fraser and Honneth, 141. As I argue elsewhere, however, Honneth's theory pays insufficient attention to race and citizenship status. James A. Chamberlain, "Recognition and Social Justice: What Critical Theory Can Learn From Paid Domestic Laborers in the United States," *New Political Science* 35, no. 2 (2013): 197, doi: 10.1080/07393148.2013.790698.

[77] Glynos, "Ideological Fantasy at Work," 291.

but this may or may not result in a change at the level of the culinary practices themselves.[78] When an "ethical mode of enjoyment" accompanies a "public contestation and transformation of social norms," however, this gives rise to the possibility of "political resignification."[79]

For our purposes, this suggests a continuum of relations to the demand for a basic income, from an 'over-investment' in the fantasy of the work society at one end, to a more radical posture which welcomes the openness and contingency of social relations at the other. In other words, all advocates of the basic income must be willing to abandon the principle of contribution (otherwise the income is not unconditional), but we can range them on a spectrum running from a commitment to the 'work society,' at one end, to advocacy for the 'refusal of work,' at the other. We have already discussed examples of the former position, but what of the ethical mode of enjoyment? I suggest that Kathi Weeks exemplifies the latter position, not only because she explicitly calls for the refusal of work as a movement to reconfigure the social meaning and value of work, but also as she formulates the basic income as "a perspective and a provocation, a pedagogical practice that entails a critical analysis of the present and an imagination of the future."[80]

Similarly, when Gorz dismisses the question of the affordable level of the basic income and instead stresses the cultivation of "non-monetary exchange and self-providing,"[81] it is clear that his relation to the basic income is not in the manner of those who support it out of a commitment to full employment, and that such an approach harbors a greater potential for "political resignification." Finally, the German group Freiheit Statt Vollbeschäftigung (Freedom not Full Employment)

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[78] Ibid, 290.

[79] Ibid, 290, 291.

[80] Weeks, *Problem with work*, 99, 146.

[81] Gorz, *Reclaiming Work*, 83.

explicitly opposes the goal of full employment on the basis, among other reasons, that it "ties up citizens in mind-numbing, undignified work," given that their labor is increasingly redundant due to automation.[82] As I shall argue below, however, even this openness to contingency does not mean the outright elimination of duties to engage in (re)productive and socially useful activities, while the organization of spaces in which to perform such tasks may contain disciplining tendencies that warrant further critical analysis.

IV. Social Citizenship: Unemployment Insurance and the Basic Income

In the previous section we saw that social insurance functioned as an "identification project." Given the acceptance of low levels of temporary unemployment even within a Keynesian economic program that strived for full employment, and bolstered by the view of (industrial) work as a "service and a duty to the nation," unemployment insurance thus came to function as a "badge of the social citizen."[83] This "right of social citizenship" rested on a person's status as a worker, and was in this respect distinct from the stigmatizing mark of public assistance,[84] which we will consider in the next section.

When one notes that "social benefits are rights that attach by virtue of status – the status of citizenship,"[85] the characterization of unemployment insurance as a right of social citizenship seems to imply an unconditionality resembling that of the basic income. Indeed, Tony Fitzpatrick suggests

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[82] Ute Fischer, Stefan Heckel, Axel Jansen, Sascha Liebermann, and Thomas Loer, "Freedom, Not Full Employment," trans. Marc Batko and Axel Jansen. Freiheit statt Vollbeschäftigung, June 24, 2005, accessed May 28, 2013, http://www.freiheitstattvollbeschaeftigung.de/en/theses.

[83] Walters, *Unemployment and Government*, 73.

[84] Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line*, 182.

[85] Joel Handler, *Social Citizenship and Workfare in the United States and Western Europe: The Paradox of Inclusion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

that the unconditional basic income would be a "fundamental right of citizenship."[86] It is worth pointing out, however, that since its inception, unemployment insurance has operated through a series of exclusions, effectively distinguishing the legitimately 'unemployed' who were eligible for benefits from those not working due to sickness, old age, or 'personal causes.'[87] Thus, both the US and British versions of unemployment insurance are far from unconditional, since eligibility depends on having worked for a specified period and/or making a minimum level of contributions through payroll deductions, provisions which Walters notes of the British system were made to guard against "loafers" claiming benefits.[88]

Moreover, the fact that both systems place a limit on how long recipients can draw benefits makes unemployment insurance ill equipped to deal with frequent and long-term joblessness.[89] This, in turn, leaves unemployed persons who fall short of eligibility requirements increasingly reliant on the less socially acceptable means-tested benefits, commonly known as 'welfare.'[90] In other words, as much as social insurance has played a role in constructing the socially integrated national citizen, this identity has been far from universally available or inclusive. As Carole Pateman points out, the 'social citizen' referred, in essence, to the male breadwinner. As she notes, the "Anglo-American social insurance system was constructed on the assumption that wives were not only their husbands'

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[86] Fitzpatrick, *Freedom and Security*, 4.

[87] Walters, *Unemployment and Government*, 61, 63.

[88] Ibid, 63.

[89] Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line*, 180-181, 206, 213. Michael White, *Against Unemployment* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1991), 23.

[90] Fitzpatrick, *Freedom and Security*, 110. Michael White, *Against Unemployment*, 24. In the US, these requirements have restricted access to African Americans, for example, owing to their higher levels and longer durations of unemployment and often precarious position within the labor market. Lieberman, *Shifting the Color Line*, 206.

economic dependents but lesser citizens whose entitlement to benefits depended on their private status, not on their citizenship."[91] When supporters of the basic income refer to it as a right of citizenship, it behooves us to ask, therefore, which subjects it might exclude. I take up this question in the excursus below.

How can a right that one is said to enjoy on the basis of citizenship, such as unemployment insurance, be at the same time conditional on the performance of work? In "Citizenship and Social Class," T.H. Marshall approaches citizenship in terms of civil, political, and social elements. "In early times," as Marshall somewhat vaguely puts it, "these three strands were wound into a single thread," meaning that what we now understand as civil, political, and social rights "were blended because the institutions [connected to them were] were amalgamated." Moreover, in feudal society, enjoyment of rights derived from a person's status, which was "the hallmark of class and the measure of inequality."[92] Not only did the passage to modernity involve the differentiation of these rights and the institutions that provided them, according to Marshall, but there emerged a new understanding of citizenship, which he defines as "a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community."[93]

While there is "no universal principle" determining the specific content of the rights and duties with respect to which "all who possess the status [of citizenship] are equal," Marshall suggests that "societies in which citizenship is a developing institution create an image of an ideal citizenship against which achievement can be measured and towards which aspiration can be directed."[94] The

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[91] Carole Pateman, "Democratizing Citizenship," 111.

[92] T.H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," in *Inequality and Society*, ed. Jeff Manzer and Michael Sauder (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2009), 149.

[93] Ibid.

[94] Ibid, 149-150.

growth and flourishing of the institution of citizenship in Britain since the seventeenth century is thus "an urge towards a fuller measure of equality, an enrichment of the stuff of which the status is made and an increase in the number of those on whom the status is bestowed."[95]

The essential character of a citizenship right, in Marshall's account, is the fact that any "full members of a community" can lay claim to it. While this invocation of 'full membership' implies a corresponding 'incomplete membership,' Marshall does not indicate who would fall into each category and why. In an early section of the essay we learn that social rights include the right to a "modicum of economic welfare and security."[96] Later Marshall qualifies this definition, however, stating that "social rights imply an absolute right to a certain standard of civilisation which is *conditional only on the discharge of the general duties of citizenship*."[97] Again, Marshall is vague on what these duties involve, but as discussed above, within the 'work society' one fundamental duty of citizenship is the pursuit of gainful employment. Presumably, because paid work is widely recognized as constituting a 'general duty' of citizenship, basing eligibility for unemployment insurance on the claimant's past employment history does not introduce additional obligations. Indeed, the right to protections against unemployment was simply one side of the 'citizenship coin'; on the other side was the duty to perform paid work (when able to do so).

Clearly, the introduction of the basic income would constitute a step forward in this process of expanding citizenship, since it rejects the eligibility requirements, and hence the exclusions, of unemployment insurance. Indeed, this forms a key plank of a feminist defense of the basic income, as discussed above. Similarly, Nancy Fraser has recently argued that the Polanyian figure of the

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[95] Ibid, 150.

[96] Ibid, 149.

[97] Ibid, 152, emphasis added.

double movement (referring to the forces of marketization, on the one hand, and social protection, on the other) requires the addition of a "missing third," namely emancipation. She points out that social movements since the 1960s have turned "a withering eye on the cultural norms encoded in social provision" and "unearthed invidious hierarchies and social exclusions."[98] One might argue, then, that the demand for the basic income brings social protection together with emancipation, in opposition to marketization.[99]

To say that the basic income "would introduce the principle of citizenship into the social security system for the first time," not only identifies the exclusionary and discriminatory effects of unemployment insurance, which arise out of the fact that it operates on the basis of desert.[100] Perhaps more radically, treating the basic income as a citizenship right entails a detachment of the duty to engage in paid work from the very definition of citizenship. This is, of course, one of the primary objections to the basic income, which finds expression in the condemnatory phrase "something for nothing," and which already bedevils the provision of existing means-tested benefits. Elizabeth Anderson, for example, worries that the unconditionality of the basic income "promotes freedom without responsibility, and thereby both offends and undermines the ideal of social obligation that undergirds the welfare state."[101] Just because the unconditionality of the basic income conflicts with the underlying principles of the contemporary welfare state does not provide a

[98] Nancy Fraser, "A Triple Movement? Parsing the Politics of Crisis after Polanyi," *New Left Review* 81 (May-June 2013): 127, accessed October 29, 2013, http://newleftreview.org/II/81/nancy-fraser-a-triple-movement.

[99] Although, as I discuss below, the basic income might also improve the functioning of the capitalist labor market.

[100] Fitzpatrick, *Freedom and Security*, 46.

[101] Elizabeth Anderson, "Optional Freedoms," in *What's Wrong with A Free Lunch?* ed. Cohen and Rogers, 72.

normative argument against it, but this criticism does nonetheless draw attention to a deeper problem for the basic income in terms of the sustenance of social solidarity.

For example, Claus Offe argues that, to ensure that the basic income does not become "excessively demanding in moral terms and politically precarious as a consequence," beneficiaries must be seen as capable of doing "something useful 'in return.'"[102] Some authors have been tempted to try to overcome this potential deficit of reciprocity by making receipt of a minimum income dependent on the performance of certain socially useful activities. In *Critique of Economic Reason*, for example, Gorz argues against an unconditional basic income, not out of commitment to the work ethic per se, but "to maintain the indispensible dialectical unity between rights and duties." According to Gorz, the enjoyment of rights without the fulfillment of duties poses a problem at the level of social recognition and inclusion, in the sense that "if [society] asks nothing of me, it rejects me."[103] To address this concern, he therefore proposed that everyone do 20,000 hours of work in their lifetime in exchange for the right to an income.

But it is worth pointing out that once one imposes such requirements, the basic income ceases to qualify as unconditional. Furthermore, Gorz himself would later present compelling arguments *against* making receipt of the basic income conditional on, for example, "work in the third sector of activities which meet needs that cannot be paid for," on the grounds, *inter alia*, that this would lead to the absurd conclusion of "compulsory voluntary work." It would, moreover, draw a potentially limitless list of activities "within the ambit of instrumental reason and administrative standardization."[104] As I discuss below, however, this does not mean that the duty or expectation to

[102] Offe, "Basic Income and the Labor Contract," 63.

[103] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 207.

[104] Gorz, *Reclaiming Work*, 86, 87.

engage in socially useful activities would simply disappear, even assuming a critical stance toward the work society.

Excursus on Social Citizenship, Basic Income, and 'the National Question.'

From the nineteenth century through to the middle of the twentieth, national borders provided the framework for understanding and acting on economic events and relations.[105] In the early twentieth century, political forces in Europe and North America rejected the idea that political economy should provide the sole criteria for governing economic life, and demanded instead that the nation "be governed in the interests of social protection, social justice, social rights and social solidarity."[106] Compulsory social insurance schemes and means-tested benefits administered on the national scale exemplify this type of demand, but so do proposals for the basic income, particularly when these are formulated as a policy to be implemented at the level of the nation-state.

Indeed, according to the Basic Income Earth Network, "In most proposals, the basic income is supposed to be paid, and therefore funded, at the level of a Nation-state."[107] Yet, I argue that, unless the demand for a basic income is expressed in global terms as a universal human right, it risks a lack of sensitivity to matters of transnational justice and remains anchored to an exclusionary logic which gives the lie to its professed unconditionality. As Carole Pateman observes, however, academic arguments for the basic income are rarely couched in terms of human rights, despite the

[105] Rose, "The Death of the Social?", 330. Similarly, in her discussion of Fordism (which spanned "from World War I to the fall of communism"), Nancy Fraser argues that "the social was correlated with a national state." Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice*, 118, 121.

[106] Rose, "The Death of the Social?" 329.

[107] "About Basic Income." Note that the information on this webpage is based on Van Parijs's "Basic Income: A Simple and Powerful Idea of the Twenty-First Century." See p. 9.

fact it would support several key human rights provisions.[108] Whether or not one accepts or approves of the idea of global citizenship is less important than the fact that, to achieve full unconditionality, the basic income would have to be paid out to each and every human being, regardless of their nationality.[109]

To be clear, such a proposal does not conflict with the idea of the basic income as commonly formulated. For example, although Van Parijs begins an essay on the subject with the phrase, "Give all citizens a modest, yet unconditional income," he acknowledges that sub- and supra-national political institutions could also administer the benefit.[110] At the level of the European Union, for example, a campaign is underway to collect one million statements in support of the basic income by January 14, 2014, whereupon the European Commission would examine the initiative and hold a public hearing at the European Parliament.[111] Although the initiative defines the basic income as "universal," in the sense that "every person, irrespective of age, descent, place of residence, profession etc. will be entitled to receive this allocation," it is important to note that this is

[108] Pateman cites Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ("the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family") and Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights ("the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions"). Pateman, "Democracy, Human Rights and a Basic Income in a Global Era," 1.

[109] Another way to alleviate the exclusivity problem might be for every nation-state in the world to introduce its own basic income scheme. In theory, this would ensure universal coverage without the need for international administration. Whatever advantages this might have over a global basic income, access to a particular scheme would likely remain conditional on nationality, particularly if richer countries offered more generous levels of basic income.

[110] Van Parijs, "Basic Income," 7, 9.

[111] "FAQ," European Citizens' Initiative for an Unconditional Basic Income, accessed October 29, 2013, http://basicincome2013.eu/ubi/faq/.

qualified by the fact that it would be "European-wide."[112] Thus, even this proposal fails to live up to true unconditionality since only those inhabiting the European territory would be eligible.

In his earlier (and longer) work, *Real Freedom for All*, Van Parijs argues that the 'for-all' part of 'real-freedom' must refer to everyone in the world, and that the basic income should be paid "at the highest sustainable level for each human being."[113] Like Nancy Fraser, his justification for taking an international approach to justice emphasizes the increasingly *trans*national character of processes that bear on a person's opportunity to live a good life.[114] Indeed, Fraser argues that "the project of social protection can no longer be envisioned in the national frame."[115] But while Van Parijs clearly recognizes the morally arbitrary character of restricting our duties to fellow citizens,[116] he is not alone in failing to stipulate that the basic income *must be* (as opposed to merely 'can be') administered on the global plane to fulfill its promise of unconditionality, as the above references illustrate. In other words, when advocates of the basic income treat proposals for national schemes as unconditional, they take for granted the national frame. While this could stem from legitimate pragmatic concerns, I suggest that it might also bespeak an "illusion of closure" with respect to the social, in contrast with approaches that remain more open to contingency.

One finds a more radical approach to the basic income in *Empire*, in which Hardt and Negri effectively propose to lift all restrictions on immigration with the notion of a "right to global citizenship." They define this right as "the multitude's power to reappropriate control over space

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[112] "Annex," 1.

[113] Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All*, 228.

[114] Fraser, *Scales of Justice*, 14, 13.

[115] Nancy Fraser, "A Triple Movement?" 126.

[116] He points out that "there is no morally non-arbitrary boundary to our equal concern, save the limits of mankind itself." Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All*, 229.

and thus to design the new cartography," and later suggest that this would amount to extending citizenship to everyone.[117] A version of the basic income in these conditions would amount to what they call a "citizenship income, due each as a member of society."[118] But this proposal still falls short of a global basic income, because even if everyone had the right to live wherever they wanted, unless every society in the world offered the basic income, only those willing and able to make potentially long, expensive, and dangerous journeys to those communities that did would have access to it.

Myron Frankman, by contrast, argues for the payment of the basic income as a universal human right, which he claims would deepen international solidarity, much as unemployment insurance has at the domestic scale.[119] In addition, he argues that by eliminating "in one stroke income poverty in the global South," a basic income paid to every person on earth "could eventually create a world in which border controls could be eliminated."[120] Indeed, although the prospect of setting up a global basic income seems even more daunting than establishing a national one, Adam Freeman suggests that ignoring international questions (such as the 'welfare migrant' effect) could hinder the implementation of national basic income schemes.[121]

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[117] Hardt and Negri, *Empire*, 400, 403.

[118] Ibid, 403.

[119] In his argument for the payment of the basic income to "every child, woman and man on this planet," Frankman suggests the need to imagine communities above the nation-state, but falls short of making the connection between the basic income and this process of community building. Myron Frankman, "A Planet-Wide Citizen's Income: an Espousal," *Labour, Capital and Society* 37 (2004): 152, accessed October 29, 2013, http://www.lcs-tcs.com/PDFs/37_12/09-Frankman.pdf.

[120] Ibid, 159.

[121] Adam Freeman, "Five International Questions for the National Basic Income Debates," *Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs*, March 12, 2008, accessed May 28, 2013 http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/ethics_online/0019.html

Based on this brief excursus, we can see that, although nothing in the abstract formulation of the basic income requires national administration, most proposals tend to assume this level of implementation. While the seemingly insuperable practical challenges of setting up and running a global scheme undoubtedly play a part, the fact that nationally limited schemes are nevertheless seen to 'count' as unconditional suggests the uncritical assumption of the national frame and thus the limitations such an approach would face in an increasingly transnational world.

V. Welfare, Social Exclusion and the Basic Income

If the introduction of the basic income would constitute an expansion of social citizenship beyond the exclusionary boundaries of social insurance, the establishment of workfare programs in the 1990s[122] has already transformed the meaning of social citizenship "from status to contract"[123] and thus points to a movement in the opposite direction. Although workfare systems vary in their specific practices, I follow Jamie Peck's distillation of its "essence" down to the "imposition of a range of compulsory programs and mandatory requirements for welfare recipients with a view to *enforcing work while residualizing welfare*."[124] On the face of it, then, whereas the basic income would represent the forward march of social citizenship, its introduction would break sharply from the existing systems of means-tested assistance organized according to workfarist principles. This is not only because these benefits are reserved to those with demonstrable financial need, but also because, since the introduction of workfare policies, eligibility has been made conditional on the performance

[122] Although the term 'workfare' dates back to the 1970s and experiments were conducted with it during the 1980s, the 1990s was the decade that witnessed the passage of key legislation in the US (the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act in 1996) and Britain (the New Deal package of legislation enacted following the Labour party's electoral victory in 1997). See Jamie Peck, *Workfare States* (New York: The Guildford Press, 2001), 1-4.

[123] Handler, *Social Citizenship and Workfare*, 5, 2.

[124] Peck, *Workfare States*, 10.

of certain work-related activities. Although the introduction of the basic income would indeed radically reshape this landscape,[125] in this section I intend to excavate a subterranean continuity with workfare. More specifically, I draw out a set of arguments for the basic income that mesh with the workfarist logic of 'activating' workers and turning them into self-entrepreneurial subjects. As in earlier sections of the paper, therefore, I argue that the degree to which the work society retains hegemony would powerfully shape the effects of the basic income, and in particular, the construction of self-entrepreneurial subjects.

With the shift away from Keynesian economic theory toward 'supply-side' economics since the mid-1970s, unemployment has increasingly been understood as the result of various "rigidities" and "distortions" (such as collective regulations and social protection schemes), and as a reflection of the 'voluntary' behavior of workers and employers.[126] In chapter 2 I analyzed the regime of flexibility as a project to remove rigidity from the labor market, organizations, and even individual workers that was partly motivated by concerns about high levels of unemployment. In that chapter I also explored the role of freedom within the discourse and practices of flexibility, while giving an account of the construction of the 'enterprising self.' Although means-tested benefits pre-date the emergence of the regime of flexibility, the logic of workfare, which lay at the heart of reforms on both sides of the Atlantic during the 1990s, converges in important ways with that of flexibility.

In particular, mounting concerns that existing welfare states were hindering the flexibility of labor markets, enabling a culture of 'dependency,' and thereby causing slow economic growth and high unemployment, as well as fears about the socially disintegrating effects of long-term

[125] Even though some proponents recognize the need to retain some means-tested benefits for people with special needs. See Fitzpatrick, *Freedom and Security*, 39.

[126] Standing, *Beyond the New Paternalism*, 125, 131.

unemployment led to the introduction of new eligibility requirements for means-tested benefits.[127] In Britain, the perception of society as 'fractured' and 'divided' as a result of geographically and socially concentrated unemployment provided the context for the Labour government's workfarist New Deal policies in the mid- to late-1990s.[128] According to Walters, the versatility of the New Deal lay in its ability to draw on both the discourse of 'social exclusion,' which identifies structural factors leading to high unemployment among the young and old, the disabled, and single parents, and the conservative discourse of the 'underclass,' which seeks to explain unemployment in terms of moral and behavioral pathologies.[129]

It is worth noting, moreover, that the label 'underclass' came to the fore during the urban disorder that broke out in the United States in the mid-1960s. At this time, journalists and social scientists gave Gunnar Myrdal's purely descriptive term 'under-class' a racial, behavioral, and above all, pejorative sense.[130] With these new connotations, the 'underclass' could convey the idea of

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[127] Handler, *Social Citizenship*, 2-7. On this point, King notes that "whereas early American work-welfare programs were built, in part, on laws and institutional arrangements transplanted from Britain, modern British work-welfare rests in part on programs whose design is borrowed directly and uncritically from the United States" Desmond King, *Actively Seeking Work? The Politics of Unemployment and Welfare Policy in the United States and Great Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), xi.

[128] Walters, *Unemployment and Government*, 124. In 2011 the Coalition Government replaced earlier programs such as the New Deal with its 'payment for results' Work Programme, a welfare-to-work scheme delivered by "a range of private, public, and voluntary sector organisations." According to the Government, it "combines strong long-term incentives with freedom for service providers to innovate." "The Work Programme," Department for Work and Pensions, 2012, accessed June 28, 2013, http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+/http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/the-work-programme.pdf. I do not consider the details of the Work Programme itself here, since my argument centers on the broader logic of workfare, which the Work Programme also embodies.

[129] Walters, *Unemployment and Government*, 127.

[130] Herbert J. Gans, *The War against the Poor: The Underclass and Antipoverty Policy* (New York: Basic Books, 1995), 27-29.

'dependency,' a condition which, despite disagreeing about its causes, members of the political left and right could find common cause on the need to tackle.[131]

The broader discourse of social exclusion may place the "poverty and disadvantage of the so-called excluded … outside society," thus enabling "an overly homogeneous and consensus image of society"[132] – and here, once again, one is reminded of the "illusion of closure" and the "fantasy of social order and harmony" discussed above – but it is important to note that the 'underclass' was not thereby simply ignored. On the contrary, welfare reform targeted members of this group, by tying the receipt of unemployment benefits to active job-seeking and a range of schemes to improve their employability as a means of tackling the problem of their social exclusion. As Nikolas Rose notes, in the welfare reform enacted in Britain and the US, "problems of the excluded, of the underclass, are to be resolved by a kind of moral rearmament." Marking a shift away from the understanding of frictional unemployment as the involuntary predicament of responsible workers caught in the maelstrom of macroeconomic forces, this approach "presupposes that poverty is no longer a question of inequality among 'social' classes," but that full inclusion in the community requires the "moral reformation" and "ethical reconstruction"[133] of excluded individuals.

Here the parallel between support for the conditionality of welfare programs (both in terms of economic means and the requirement to take part in jobseeking and training) and opposition to the unconditionality of the basic income comes into sharper focus. Enthusiasm for the disciplining effects of work have not only played a leading role in welfare reform, they have also provided fodder for arguments against the basic income. For example, William Galston suggests that proponents of

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[131] Fraser and Gordon, "Genealogy of 'Dependency,'" 121.

[132] Ruth Levitas, *The Inclusive Society? Social Exclusion and New Labour* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 7.

[133] Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 266.

the basic income have overlooked the "positive dimensions of work," particularly its ability to organize our lives and give "structure and meaning to what can otherwise become a formless and purposeless existence."[134] Of course, if work does in fact play these salutary roles, one might ask why the introduction of a basic income would radically diminish incentives to engage in it.[135]

Similarly, versions of the discourse of 'social exclusion' and 'dependency' find expression within both welfare and basic income debates. For example, despite remaining critical of the 1996 Welfare Reform Act in the United States, Nobel prize-winning economist Robert Solow argues that "the total or partial replacement of unearned welfare benefits by earned wages" would make welfare recipients and tax payers alike "feel better" – the former because they would be "exhibiting self-reliance," and the latter "not merely because less is demanded of their limited altruism but also because they can see that their altruism is not being exploited."[136] As Amy Gutmann puts it, the aim of this "fair version of workfare" is to make mutual dependency replace complete dependency, for the former is the "normal condition of citizens in a liberal democracy."[137] These concerns echo Gorz's earlier opposition to the basic income, which was grounded on a commitment to ensuring each citizen's right "to 'earn their living'" and "not to be dependent for their subsistence on the goodwill of economic decision-makers," rights which Gorz argued were necessary to avoid a "splitting of society into one section who are by rights permanent workers and another which is

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[134] Galston, "What About Reciprocity?" 31.

[135] Here I modify slightly Dominique Meda's response to the 'incentive' objection, discussed by Gorz, in *Reclaiming Work*, 98. A paternalist might argue that only once we have been forced to work do we learn to appreciate these benefits, but since I am not assessing the merits of the various arguments here I simply note this as a possible response.

[136] Robert M. Solow, "Guess Who Likes Workfare," in *Work and Welfare*, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 5.

[137] Amy Gutmann, "Introduction," in *Work and Welfare*, ed. Gutmann, x.

excluded."[138] The notion that social harmony and order require the maintenance of the "indispensible dialectical unity between rights and duties"[139] thus clearly converges with the discourse of social exclusion that appeared in the context of welfare reform.

Aside from the challenges of securing full employment that previous sections of this chapter have highlighted, it is far from clear that existing workfare programs have succeeded in their goal of including marginalized members of society through the imposition of new eligibility requirements. On the contrary, as one element of neoliberal poverty management, welfare reform has arguably worsened the marginalization of poor people by "ignoring the distributive inequalities that shape markets."[140] Similarly, Rose argues that workfare programs have produced "a sector of the laboring population that is casualized, unprotected against risk, insecure and desocialized."[141] In short, decades after the introduction of workfare policies, many of the concerns that provided their initial impetus persist, as seen in responses to the 2011 English riots analyzed in chapter 3 and in the case of Mick Philpott, discussed above. Within this context, advocates of the basic income from a variety of political perspectives suggest that it may provide an effective instrument to increase the rate of employment. In the terms of the earlier discussion, I suggest that these arguments display an ideological mode of enjoyment, in the sense that they treat the basic income as a policy tool to restore society to its former wholeness, rather than welcoming radical change.

For example, advocates of the basic income claim that its unconditionality (both in terms of willingness to work and financial means) may help undermine both the unemployment trap

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[138] Gorz, *Critique of Economic Reason*, 205.

[139] Ibid, 207.

[140] M. David Forrest, "Consensus and Crisis: Representing the Poor in the Post-Civil Rights Era," *New Political Science* 35, no. 1 (2013): 20, doi: 10.1080/07393148.2012.754667.

[141] Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 267.

(whereby employment is disincentivized by a fall in income as a result of accepting a job), and the poverty trap (where the structure of tax and benefits results in falling net income even as gross income rises).[142] In addition, it is claimed that some individuals may be *more* not less likely to participate in paid work given the "exit option that the basic income provides."[143] Related to this, advocates suggest that the basic income would reduce "the risks associated with moving between jobs and occupations," while also making it "easier for people to take work sabbaticals in order to upgrade their skills."[144] Finally, some argue that the basic income promises to "enable wages to fall to their market-clearing levels" because unlike the current system, which "consists largely of *replacements* for lost earnings and/or a loss of earning-power, the unconditional nature of BI means that it is a *floor* for wages."[145] In other words, rather than offering benefits that allow people to "price themselves out of the market" thus pushing up labor costs, the basic income would effectively subsidize the market for low-paid jobs.[146] This in turn would make the economy more efficient and flexible, thus increasing employment and growth.[147]

In briefly reviewing these claims I should make clear that what calls our attention is not their empirical or theoretical validity. To be sure, it is difficult, if not impossible, to know in advance what the precise impact of a basic income scheme would be on the unemployment rate. But even if one

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[142] Charles M. A. Clark and Catherine Kavanagh, "Basic Income, Inequality and Unemployment: Rethinking the Linkage between Work and Welfare," *Journal of Economic Issues* 30, no. 2 (1996): 401, http://www.jstor.org/stable/4452238.

[143] Offe, "Basic Income and the Labor Contract," 73.

[144] Fitzpatrick, *Freedom and Security*, 113.

[145] Ibid, 84.

[146] Ibid, 84-5.

[147] Clark and Kavanagh, "Basic Income, Inequality and Unemployment," 401.

could reach a definitive conclusion as to the merits of these arguments, I want to highlight the fact that the basic income attracts support on the basis of claims about its putatively employment-boosting capacity. These points thus provide further evidence for my earlier argument about the ideological mode of enjoyment in relation to the work society. While the basic income can be part of a more radical agenda of social change, as in the later work of Gorz and Weeks for example, a commitment to it on the basis of its ability to enhance opportunities and incentives to work suggests a continuity with earlier attempts to tackle unemployment and the social ills it allegedly produces, albeit via a route which travels in the opposite direction to the heightened conditionality of benefits eligibility.[148]

To reiterate, the unconditionality of the basic income stands in opposition to what Claus Offe calls "administrative 'activation,'" whereby the unemployed person is integrated "into the labor market by means of negative administrative and economic sanctions."[149] But, as suggested above, without altering the grammar of social recognition and contesting the meaning and value of paid work, one might expect a continuation of pressures to cultivate one's employability and to become effectively self-enterprising. Although workfare currently involves a coercive element, these programs also treat the unemployed as "clients" as a means of securing their "commitment" and avoiding the appearance of an "external authority" imposing its schemes on the "recalcitrant

[148] In emphasizing the various ways in which the basic income would remove disincentives to work, one might also interpret the arguments reviewed in the preceding paragraph as resting on the assumption that everyone wants to work and that those who do not are unfortunate victims of ill-conceived labor market and macro-economic policies. Whatever the validity of this assumption, however, note that it does not undermine my interpretation of these arguments as expressing an ideological mode of enjoyment, since they nonetheless present the basic income as that which will 'restore' society to its imaginary fullness (based on the putative universal appeal and value of work) by removing the obstacles or disincentives to work.

[149] Offe, "Basic Income and the Labor Contract," 73.

individual."[150] For example, one of the four purposes of the US Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program includes the promotion of "job preparation"[151] while in the UK the coalition government established the Work Programme in 2011 to create a "structure that treats people as individuals" and to "tailor the right support to the individual needs of each claimant."[152] In this way, the contemporary government of unemployment interpellates the individual as "an active agent in their own economic governance through the capitalization of their own existence,"[153] such that he or she is effectively governed as a "*self-employee*."[154] Given the active role of the subject, it might even be appropriate to refer to these practices as instances of "ethical self-formation," which in Mitchell Dean's terminology "concerns practices, techniques and rationalities concerning the regulation of the self by the self, and by means of which individuals seek to question, form, know, decipher and act on themselves."[155]

Just because the basic income would, by definition, be paid regardless of the activities a person engaged in, I suggest that this would not necessarily spell the end of governmental self-

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[150] Walters, *Unemployment and Government*, 140.

[151] "About TANF," Office of Family Assistance, accessed October 30, 2013, http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/programs/tanf/about.

[152] "Helping people to find and stay in work," Department for Work and Pensions and HM Treasury, August 8 2013, accessed September 24 2013, https://www.gov.uk/government/policies/helping-people-to-find-and-stay-in-work/supporting-pages/managing-the-work-programme.

[153] Rose, "The Death of the Social?" 339.

[154] Walters, *Unemployment and Government*, 138. As discussed in Chapter 2, the ethic of self-entrepreneurialism features prominently in the identity of the 'flexible' worker. It becomes clear, then, that workfare programs and 'active labor market policies' that aim to enhance not only the skills, but also the motivation and job-seeking abilities of the unemployed (p. 138) aim to transform the latter into subjects capable of surviving and even prospering in a flexible labor market.

[155] Mitchell Dean, "Governing the Unemployed Self in an Active Society," *Economy and Society* 24, no. 4 (1995): 563, doi: 10.1080/03085149500000025.

formation, in which "authorities and agencies seek to shape the conduct, aspirations, needs, desires and capacities of specified political and social categories, to enlist them in particular strategies and to seek definite goals."[156] Once again, the effect of the basic income on self-formation would depend to a large extent on the perseverance of the work society.

While the introduction of an unconditional basic income would dismantle administrative (or governmental) 'activation,' Offe welcomes the fact that it would 'activate' people "in the sense of creating space for doubtlessly 'useful' (though not marketed) voluntary activities in the family, the community, civil society organizations, and educational systems."[157] Whether such spaces would 'spring up' of their own accord or require more intentional orchestration we cannot know in advance. But Gorz suggests that to avoid being undermined and discredited, the basic income should be pursued alongside efforts not only to combine "the redistribution of work with the individual and collective control over time," but also to encourage "new socialities to blossom, and new modes of cooperation and exchange, through which social bonds and social cohesion will be created beyond the wage-relation." In fact, he claims that each of these policies "assumes its true meaning only when combined with, and supported by, the other."[158] In the next section, I consider the stakes for freedom when the basic income aligns with this more radical position with respect to the work society.

VI. Freedom and the Basic Income as a Radical Demand

We can make a first pass at this question by considering Van der Veen and Van Parijs's early article in which they claim the basic income could facilitate a transition to communism from within

[156] Ibid. It is important to point out, however, the distinction between the two modes of self-formation "cannot be an absolute one."

[157] Offe, "Basic Income and the Labor Contract," 73.

[158] Gorz, *Reclaiming Work*, 80.

capitalism. Here the authors consider four principles that could guide basic income policy: 1) the maximization of economic growth, provided the basic income remains above a minimum level; 2) the maximization of the "absolute level of the universal grant" (which they label the Rawlsian principle); 3) the maximization of the basic income, *relative to total taxable income* (the so-called Marxian principle); and 4) the maximization of equality.[159] For our purposes, the Marxian principle is most relevant, since this aims to raise the tax rate to the maximum possible level (without it resulting in a fall in the absolute level of the basic income), so as to expand the 'realm of freedom' through a reduction in working time and improvement in the quality of work. In other words, this principle implies the greatest separation from the terms of the work society since the explicit goal is to reduce the amount of necessary labor time to a minimum.

In keeping with Gorz's proposals noted above this "may mean that an increasing part of society's wealth is produced outside the formal sector, in the form of self-production, mutual help, volunteer work, etc." The authors point out that the benefits of this production may not be evenly distributed, and that compared with Rawlsian or 'growth oriented' principles for guiding basic income policy, it may not lead to the highest quality of free time. But they suggest that, "if what really matters to us – as it arguably did to Marx – is the expansion of freedom, the abolition of alienation, we need not be bothered by the persistence of substantial inequalities, because everyone's fundamental needs are covered anyway."[160]

It is easy to see how the basic income, guided by this principle, would indeed provide greater freedom *from* work than most subjects currently enjoy. But what basis is there for optimism about the broader emancipatory possibilities that the basic income might open up? In *Real Freedom for All*,

[159] Robert Van der Veen and Philippe van Parijs, "A Capitalist Road to Communism," 647.

[160] Ibid, 651.

Van Parijs presents the basic income as policy that would help maximize 'real-freedom-for-all.' Indeed, he makes the grand claim that "real-freedom-for-all…is all there is to social justice."[161] Whereas formal freedom involves a structure of rights which includes the notion of self-ownership, Van Parijs presents real freedom as supplementing this conception of formal freedom with the requirement that "each person has the greatest possible opportunity to do whatever she might want to do."[162] Again, it is hard to deny that the basic income would foster 'real freedom' so defined, but it is also important to note that Van Parijs recognizes that it is necessarily a "matter of degree," and that the "ideal of a free society must therefore be expressed as a society whose members are maximally free…rather than simply free."[163] This stipulation both avoids the clumsy interpretation of freedom as an ideal that can be achieved 'once and for all,' while in a related manner, recognizes the contingent and potentially limitless character of a person's wishes.[164]

Of course, in practical terms, much would depend on the level of basic income as to the degree of real freedom it could underwrite, but Van Parijs's conceptualization of real freedom as distinct from formal freedom nonetheless provides an important corrective to the shortcomings of the latter, known to Western philosophy at least since Marx's critique of liberal rights. Although I do not dispute the capacity for an adequate basic income to deliver substantial freedom *from* paid work and *to* pursue alternative activities (or none), my earlier discussion of social recognition suggested that one should not expect the basic income alone to transform the achievement principle, whereby subjects receive social esteem based on their contributions to society in the form of paid work. Here

[161] Van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All*, 5.

[162] Ibid, 25.

[163] Ibid, 23.

[164] Indeed, building on the earlier discussion of Lacan's theory of the subject as fundamentally desiring, since desire can never be definitively satisfied it would be illusory to define freedom in absolute terms.

I want to consider the prospects of freedom when the basic income accompanies a shift in the meaning and value of paid work.

To do so, I introduce a reading of freedom that is orthogonal to both formal and 'real' freedom as a way of teasing out further possible implications of the basic income. In particular, I signal how the basic income might become entangled with freedom beyond the more obvious expansion of material opportunities discussed above. The following is not intended as a definitive balance-sheet of the merits of the basic income. In fact, not only does the preceding discussion suggest the absurdity of such an endeavor in the abstract, but I hope to show that the basic income stands in an ambivalent relation with freedom, such that no simple conclusions offer themselves.

To conduct this analysis, I draw once again on the body of scholarship known as governmentality studies, which has taken inspiration from the writings of Michel Foucault. In particular, I propose to explore the implications for the basic income of Foucault's claim that "power is exercised over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free." In this view, far from power and freedom being "mutually exclusive," freedom is the precondition and support for the exercise of power, in that "freedom must exist for power to be exerted," and that "without the possibility of recalcitrance, power would be equivalent to a physical determination." Thus, "at the very heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom."[165]

Nikolas Rose helpfully expands on these claims in his distinction between "freedom as a formula of power," which is "instantiated in government," and "freedom as a formula of resistance," which is "deployed in contestation."[166] Similarly, James Tully suggests that "political

[165] Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," *Critical Inquiry* 8, no. 4 (1982): 790, doi: 10.1086/448181.

[166] Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 65.

philosophy as a critical activity" should analyze not only "practices of governance" but also "practices of freedom of the governed that are put in practice in response."[167] To the extent that it is not merely proposed as a policy tool to restore full employment or increase economic efficiency, it seems appropriate to understand the *demand* for a basic income in terms of a practice of freedom as resistance and contestation. But in this section I am more interested in exploring what might happen *following the introduction* of a basic income and the cultivation of spaces in which members of society 'can' engage in voluntary activities.

Of course, as I have stressed throughout this paper, the defining feature of the basic income is its unconditionality, which means that recipients would be free to do what they choose (perhaps subject to not committing serious crimes) without fear of losing their basic income. Yet despite, or perhaps *because* of this freedom, I want to suggest that the basic income could function as yet another 'practice of government.' In line with Foucault's claims noted above, Mitchell Dean points out that the 'free subject' of liberal government is free as a "self-governing actor replete with a repertoire of choice," but also subjected, "through the promotion and calculated regulation of spaces in which choice is to be exercised."[168] If we take seriously the proposals of authors like Offe and Gorz that the introduction of the basic income should or would accompany efforts to cultivate institutions and opportunities for cooperative production and exchange, it becomes all the clearer that the increase in 'real freedom' that the basic income offers does not necessarily come 'for free' if these spaces becomes sites of freedom as a formula of power.

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[167] James Tully, "Political Philosophy as a Critical Activity," *Political Theory* 30, No. 4 (2002): 539, doi: 10.1177/0090591702304005.

[168] Dean, "Governing the Unemployed Self," 562.

To reiterate, participation in these activities cannot become mandatory without violating the unconditionality of the basic income. But Gorz nevertheless suggests that a 'multi-activity society' (as distinct from the work society) will require the organization of "social time and space…to indicate the *general expectation* that everybody will engage in a range of different activities and modes of membership of the society."[169] Note here that the term 'general expectation' represents a relaxation of Gorz's previously stricter position with respect to rights and duties that I discussed above, but also of Marshall's invocation of the 'general duties' of citizenship. Despite the fact that an 'expectation' commands less moral force than a 'duty,' though, one can easily grasp how such general expectations could nonetheless take shape as 'relations of power,' understood as the range of practices used to "guide and direct" subjects "to learn how to conduct themselves in regular and predictable ways."[170]

Of course, whether expectations to participate in a socially useful manner would survive the introduction of a basic income, and if so, with what force, remains a matter of speculation. Moreover, I do not mean to deny that such expectations would perform an important function in providing the motivation and inculcating the requisite sensibilities and skills to engage in activities that help tie members of the community to one another and support life in common. But my purpose here is not to evaluate the moral legitimacy or functional benefits of these 'general expectations.' Instead, I wish to draw attention to the possible close relation between them and 'freedom as a formula of power.' Foucault points out that "to live in society is to live in such a way that action upon other actions is possible – in fact ongoing. A society without power relations can only be an abstraction." But as he goes on to suggest, this "is not to say either that those which are established are necessary or, in any case, that power constitutes a fatality at the heart of societies,

[169] Gorz, *Reclaiming Work*, 78. Emphasis added.

[170] Tully, "Political Philosophy," 539.

such that it cannot be undermined."[171] According to Foucault, then, a "permanent political task inherent in all social existence" involves analyzing and "bringing into question" power relations as well as the "agonism" between them and the "intransitivity of freedom."[172] Based on Foucault's recommendations for the analysis of power relations, we can say that who exercises this power over whom, in what manner, and for what ends, for example, would have a crucial bearing on the assessment one could make of the claim that the basic income would 'expand freedom.'

Short of banalities about the need to preserve autonomy and democratic participation, I can suggest no remedies to this eventuality. But while these insights disclose ways in which the introduction of the basic income may represent less of a boon for freedom than one might have thought, it also presents the possibility for the expansion of freedom. It is important to note that "because an intersubjective relation of power or governance is always exercised over an agent who is recognised and treated as a partner who is free, from the perspective of the governed, the exercise of power always opens up a diverse field of potential ways of thinking and acting in response."[173] As Foucault puts it, "there is no relationship of power without the means of escape or possible flight."[174]

Although it perhaps appears to contradict my earlier point, the unconditionality of the basic income might also enhance the capacity of subjects to engage in various practices of freedom as resistance, escape, or flight. Supporters of the basic income often make this argument in terms of the increased leverage workers would have over employers and the increase in the quality of working conditions that might ensue. But beyond the realm of paid work, the basic income would afford

[171] Foucault, "Power and the Subject," 791.

[172] Ibid, 791-2.

[173] Tully, "Political Philosophy," 540.

[174] Foucault, "Power and the Subject," 794.

women the financial security and independence both to act as full citizens (as Pateman points out), but also to contest, or if necessary leave, unhealthy relationships. Finally, the enhanced capacity to engage in acts of resistance granted by the basic income could even find expression in the spaces of voluntary cooperative production that I discussed above as possible sites of 'freedom as a formula of power.' This brief foray into governmentality studies, then, has served to highlight the ambiguous character of the impact the basic income might have on subjects' freedom. While freedom as resistance could find itself fortified by the basic income, so too could practices of governance that deploy freedom as 'formula of power.'

VII. Conclusions

In the concluding passages of *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber offers a chilling assessment of his society's attachment to paid work: "The Puritan wanted to work in a calling; we are forced to do so." In other words, whereas the Puritan's subjection of life to the dictates of work could at least be justified by appeal to an understanding of work as a religious duty, the early twentieth century worker found his or her life merely determined by the "tremendous cosmos of the economic order."[175] Weber ponders the future of the "iron cage" in which his contemporaries dwelled, and eschewing predictions, suggests that "No one knows who will live in [it] in the future, or whether at the end of this tremendous development, entirely new prophets will arise, or there will be a great rebirth of old ideas and ideals, or, if neither, mechanized petrification."[176]

If the notion of paying every member of society (or perhaps more correctly, of humanity) an income regardless of their economic contributions seems to suggest a cracking of the iron cage's bars, the preceding analysis has suggested the need for an alternative metaphor. Indeed, we have

[175] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 123.

[176] Ibid, 124.

seen that some supporters of the basic income seek to justify it on the grounds that it would *further* the related goals of full employment, labor market flexibility, and tackling welfare 'dependency,' all with the implicit purpose of restoring the work society to its former glory.

True, the unconditionality of the basic income would seem to allow individuals to treat work once again as a "light cloak" (to paraphrase Weber's discussion of Baxter), but my key contention is that this may be true only if its introduction accompanies a reconfiguration of the meaning and value of work itself. For although questions of distribution and recognition clearly overlap, I have argued that merely providing people with an income without conditions does nothing to challenge the existing grammar of recognition in relation to paid activities, or to tackle the marginalization and loss of social respect of those who do not engage in paid work at all. To be clear, I have not argued against a moral duty to 'contribute to society,' nor have I claimed that social esteem should be disconnected from such contributions. Rather, I have suggested that when arguments for the basic income tout its ability to restore the work society, there is no reason to expect a disruption either of social pressures and rewards to engage in paid work, or of the relegation of unpaid activities – whatever their social contribution – and those who perform them to a lower social position.

Although I share Weber's wariness of making predictions, like him I have tried to sketch possible trajectories of social and political change. Thus, it is possible that the implementation of the basic income might in fact release us from the iron cage of work, if the terms of the work society itself came under sufficient scrutiny and criticism. As I have shown, while the basic income *per se* cannot perform this task, some supporters of it, from the later Gorz to Kathi Weeks, do add this ingredient to their work. Yet drawing on a Foucauldian reading of freedom, I have argued that, even in this more propitious soil, we should not assume some final attainment of freedom.

Indeed, to do so would be to succumb to an ontological misrecognition similar to an over-investment in the fantasy of work – that all antagonisms could definitively be reconciled, all

imbalances of power removed, and all members of society at last could rest in freedom and justice. Instead, the fundamental contingency of the social suggests a variety of deployments of freedom, from the governmental to the ethical, and of course, with many shades in between. This observation does not amount to a case against the basic income. Rather, it points to the problematic claim that the basic income would simply expand freedom, and suggests the need to remain cautiously optimistic about the spaces of cooperation and exchange that could take the place of paid work and monetized economic relations.

To return to the questions with which I began this chapter, while the basic income surely qualifies as an "historical alternative" in the sense that it would indeed alleviate "man's struggle for existence," this is perhaps to set too low of a bar, especially as we have seen that the basic income could represent just another strategy with which capitalist society can "deliver the goods." This chapter has thus tried to elevate a submerged struggle over the meaning and purpose of the basic income itself, a struggle which is inextricably linked with the work society. Those critical of the latter should therefore make extremely cautious alliances with basic income supporters who see it as a means to restore the work society.

Conclusion

This dissertation has explored the perhaps surprising articulation of freedom and paid work in contemporary British and US society. It should be clear by now that I do not believe that through paid work we reach the apotheosis of freedom! On the contrary, the cajoling, direction, surveillance, and abuse of our bodies and minds that we experience as central to paid work – not to mention the fact that most of us will never have a genuine choice about whether to work in the first place – raise significant concerns about some or all features of the contemporary organization and experience of paid work, whether one adopts a liberal, republican, Marxist, feminist, libertarian or other perspective. But as I have shown throughout this dissertation, we should not conceive of the practical and material operations of freedom as necessarily and at all times opposed to paid work.

Indeed, I have argued that a narrow and highly individualistic account of freedom, combined with an embrace of the figure of the entrepreneur as the pinnacle of liberty, help sustain the moral imperative to engage in paid work by identifying active adjustment to the market as an act of freedom. In a related fashion, those who do not work represent a threat to well-regulated liberty in the popular imaginary, such that social disorders like the riots that broke out in Britain in 2011 induce a chorus of support for the personal and social benefits of employment. Moreover, the regime of flexibility promises, and sometimes provides, autonomy to choose the time and place of one's work in a manner that reduces friction with other activities and desires. Similarly, retirement – as a period of freedom from work – offers deferred gratification in exchange for the sacrifices that work demands in the present.

In analyzing work in relation to freedom, then, this dissertation offers what I call a critical theory of contemporary work and freedom.[1] Although I have not jettisoned critique understood in

[1] Here I take particular inspiration Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation* and Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière*, 124.

terms of judging empirical reality against normative principles, I have worked towards another, albeit complementary, set of goals. In particular, the chapters of this dissertation have both denaturalized the norms and structures of paid work and revealed the role of freedom in securing our allegiance to them. More broadly, the dissertation has explored how the meaning and value of paid work upholds the present social formation, and highlighted sites of instability and possible social and political change. Rather than merely summarize the main arguments of each chapter, here I want to draw out some of the main instances of denaturalization, before explaining in what sense I consider the dissertation a work of critical theory, and concluding with a set of broader reflections and questions.

In chapter 2, I showed that the emergence of the regime of flexibility responded to a continuing problematization of the labor market in terms of rigidities, and that contrary to the rhetoric of deregulation, has taken shape on the basis of regulations that radically curtail the collective power and protection of workers.[2] Moreover, this chapter both developed a portrait of the flexible worker as a subject characterized by self-entrepreneurialism and devotion to the demands of employers; and it denaturalized this figure, showing that these attributes do not reflect an 'inner essence' or natural features of the human person, but instead form in response to the individualized, precarious, and competitive labor market, an institution which is, of course, itself not natural but politically constituted. Finally, I traced the ideological embrace of the entrepreneur back to the work of Friedrich Hayek analyzed in chapter 1, where I suggested that this figure exemplifies the pursuit of vocation and freedom as self-realization within the environment of competitive capitalism.

Continuing in this vein of denaturalization, chapter 3 treated responses to the UK riots that emphasized the personal and social benefits of paid work as articulations of the ideology of work. In mapping the contours of these discourses as elements of ideology, this did not mean that I

[2] This chapter can therefore be understood as offering a genealogy of government, which as Nikolas Rose puts it, seeks "to reconstruct the problematizations to which programmes, strategies, tactics posed themselves as a solution." Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 58.

considered their claims to be empirically false. For example, it is doubtless the case that paid work helps integrate people into the community, as the ideology of work insists. By naming these discourses as ideological, I therefore highlighted the fact that they reflect contingent rather than natural or necessary features of society, including the fact that non-paid but nonetheless socially useful activities typically garner little social approval. Moreover, these discourses clearly help stabilize and legitimize the capitalist wage relation. Finally, the exaltation of work in the aftermath of the riots, as well as the public fascination with figures such as Mick Philpott discussed in chapter 4, reveal a collective anxiety about the fragility of the ideology of work that once again underscores its contingency.

In chapter 3 I also argued that by contesting the government's view of the acceptable relation between work and life, and by implication freedom, the public sector workers who went on strike in 2011 denaturalized and politicized the ideology of work, and that this may pave the way for more radical critiques of work in the future. Finally, in chapter 4 I used the concept of fantasy to map contrasting orientations to the demand for a basic income. In particular, I showed that some arguments are motivated by an attachment to the fantasy of the work society, and I used this insight to argue that a basic income justified in these terms would leave largely intact the existing meaning and value of work and hence the hierarchy and exclusions that it currently facilitates. This chapter therefore defamiliarized (if not denaturalized) the basic income as a demand, which, contrary to appearances, is not necessarily oppositional to the ideology of work.

It should be apparent by now that the dissertation addresses less what work and freedom 'are' than what they 'do,' and more specifically, what they 'do together' in contemporary society.[3]

[3] For example, Nancy Hirschmann points out that much of the theoretical work on freedom takes a "semantic" approach, which involves trying to disentangle freedom from other values, such as justice and equality. Hirschmann, *The Subject of Liberty*, 3-4. Similarly, any attempt to define the

Taken as a whole, my project therefore complements the work of authors like Wendy Brown and Nikolas Rose, who attend to the local, historical, and in particular, material characteristics and effects of freedom.[4] Although chapter 1 closely examined the work of a specific thinker, and might seem to deviate from my stated interest in the practical deployments of freedom in a given context, I situated Hayek's work within the broader terrain of neoliberalism as a political-philosophical attempt to reformulate classical liberalism and its various arts of government to produce and maintain a society organized around the free market.

While one must avoid mistaking Hayek's philosophy for a description of reality, and although his account of freedom clearly did not succeed in displacing all others, it nonetheless constitutes an important component of the now dominant neoliberal ideology. Understanding ideology as the "concepts and languages of practical thought which stabilize a particular form of power and domination,"[5] I thus offered a reading of Hayek to show how freedom helps stabilize the wage relation in contemporary society. In particular, I argued that Hayek's defanging of negative liberty and embrace of the entrepreneur helps nourish the notion that, when we work we are acting as free subjects. Such a view complements the implications that circulated in the aftermath of the 2011 UK riots that those who do not work (or are presumed not to work) are enemies of "well-regulated liberty."

Building on this materialist analysis of freedom, chapters 2 and 3 offered an account of the instantiation of freedom in relation to work, focusing on flexibility and retirement respectively.

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meaning of 'work,' whether in terms of how the term is or should be used, would qualify as semantic.

[4] Rose, for example, proposes a "genealogy of freedom" that would track the various ways in which "the values of freedom have been made real within practices for the government of conduct." Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 10.

[5] Hall, "The Problem of Ideology," 29.

Flexible working practices and retirement 'inject' a dose of freedom into the wage relation that many workers hold dear, and in this sense they help dissipate potential resistance to both the structural coercion and the moral imperative to engage in paid work. If I have a degree of control over where and when I work, and if in principle this makes it easier to manage conflicting responsibilities and interests, then work might feel less dominating and burdensome than if I had to spend regular office hours at a specific location under the constant supervision of a boss. Similarly, the idea that I can look forward to a break from work – whether at the end of the day, week, month, or year, or when I reach the age of 'retirement' – provides no small compensation for whatever hardships I must endure in the present. As I suggested in chapter 3, resistance to the government's pensions reforms displays a deeply held attachment to retirement as just such a period of freedom from work. By refusing to compromise or concede, the government may have done more damage than it realized to the ideology of work as it reduced this compensation in both monetary and temporal terms.

Earlier I mentioned that I understand the dissertation to be a work of critical theory, and here I want to articulate how and why I believe this to be the case. In the preceding discussion I have emphasized how the dissertation has both denaturalized the norms and structures of work and explored the material incarnations of freedom in relation to employment. But it is worth asking, what is the goal of these inquiries? Consider that when we succumb to thinking of processes and arrangements as 'natural' they acquire an aura of inevitability and an effective shield against critical assessment. After all, why consider the justice or desirability of something that cannot be otherwise? And why expend precious time and energy trying to oppose it? To *de*naturalize a practice or set of arrangements, therefore, means to open them up to precisely the scrutiny from which they ordinarily enjoy protection.

As I understand it, there are two benefits of doing so. The first concerns what I would like to call an ethic of authenticity, which assumes that being aware of, and taking responsibility for the

consequences of our actions, whether individual or collective, is ethically preferable to a life of willful ignorance and the denial of our responsibility.[6] Moreover, grasping the contingency of that which appears necessary and natural constitutes what Nikolas Rose calls "an ethical work upon ourselves," in the sense that it enables us to understand that "there have been and will be other ways of understanding and acting upon ourselves."[7] In heightening awareness of the contingency of our fundamental beliefs about work and how we should organize it, as well as the role of freedom in shaping and legitimating it, I thus hope to spur reflection and informed judgment, or as Hannah Arendt puts it, "to think what we are doing."[8]

Indeed, by dissolving the protective membrane around previously 'unquestionable' practices and values, denaturalization invites judgment of them. At one end of a spectrum, the author can simply encourage the reader to engage in such a practice after having read the text; at the other, he or she can attempt to persuade the reader of the rightness of a particular set of judgments in an explicitly argumentative style.[9] Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic* on the one hand, and Hannah Arendt's *Human Condition* on the other, provide examples of these approaches. As the preceding discussion suggests, this dissertation occupies a position somewhere between the two poles: While the

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[6] Here I take inspiration from various thinkers, including Socrates, Jean-Paul Sartre, and poststructuralist thinkers like Glynos and Howarth. See Socrates's "Apology," in Plato, *The Trial and Death of Socrates*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett, 2000), 39. Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," 1946, trans. Philip Mairet, accessed October 8, 2013, http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/sartre/works/exist/sartre.htm. And Glynos and Howarth, who distinguish between the "*ideological* and *ethical* dimensions of social reality [which] capture the way subjects are either complicit in concealing the radical contingency of social relations (the ideological), or are attentive to its constitutive power (the ethical)." Glynos and Howarth, *Logics of Critical Explanation*, 14.

[7] Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, 59.

[8] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 5.

[9] Again, Sam Chambers's distinction between a "critical theory of X" and a "critique of X" seems relevant here.

individual chapters do not work up a comprehensive account of freedom with which to judge the organization and experience of work, they do not abandon the task of critique.

For example, in exploring the extent to which flexibility can be said to deliver its promise of freedom in contemporary society, I adopted a form of immanent critique that evaluates the given social reality against the values that circulate within it.[10] But it will be recalled that I did not claim to find a 'hidden meaning' of flexibility – that the 'appearance' of flexibility as freedom masks its 'truth' of domination, for example.[11] Instead, I acknowledged the genuine empowerment that flexibility offers while at the same time highlighting the subtle domination that it enables. In this sense, I read the regime of flexibility both as helping secure our consent to the wage relation, but also, like the basic income, as offering what Marcuse calls an "historical alternative" that could alleviate "man's struggle for existence."[12] To realize this potential, I suggested that we need both a basic guaranteed income to tackle the economic insecurity engendered by the regime of flexibility, but also a reconfiguration of the meaning of work to mitigate the devaluation of non-monetary activities that might otherwise flourish under flexibility.

My approach to the demand for a basic income in some senses paralleled this argument: While I identified it as a policy that could usher in an unprecedented degree of freedom in relation to – or even *from* work – I also suggested that this emancipatory potential might be significantly

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[10] For an impressive and compelling attempt to renew the Frankfurt School agenda, see Axel Honneth, "Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: On the Idea of 'Critique' in the Frankfurt School," in Axel Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, trans. James Ingram et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

[11] Here I refer to what Sam Chambers calls the logic of inversion, which he sees in play in much critical theory. Chambers, *The Lessons of Rancière*, 126. In Rancière's view, for example, Marx's *1844 Manuscripts* exemplify the logic of inversion in the sense that, as Chambers puts it, "Critique would amount to revealing the essence of human alienation hidden by the appearance of the freedom of contract and work under the terms of a capitalist system," 130.

[12] Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man*, xlii.

blocked by arguments that appeal to the capacity of the basic income to boost employment. In other words, while the basic income provided at an adequate level would offer benefits in terms of distributive justice, only by abandoning arguments for it in terms of employment could we expect it to challenge the existing grammar of recognition in relation to paid activities, or to tackle the marginalization and loss of social respect of those who do not work. Once again, this insight points to the need for a reconfiguration of the meaning and value of work as a central feature of our lives.

It will be noticed, however, that while I have emphasized the contingency of various norms and structures of work, and have suggested ways in which the meaning and value of work 'blocks' the realization of possibilities for greater freedom 'latent' within the social formation, I have not developed an argument directly *against* paid work. Nevertheless, in the Introduction, in chapter 4 and at various other points throughout the dissertation as a whole, I have identified three main problems with contemporary work: the fact that the social esteem a person earns through his or her work is often disproportionate to the contribution it makes to society, as is particularly evident in work performed traditionally and predominantly by women and people of color; the disrespect and sometimes invisibility of those who cannot or will not perform paid work, even though many nonetheless perform socially vital unpaid functions such as community service and care work; and the time and energy that paid work diverts from other activities, whether these make a contribution to the lives of others or not.

To this list of concerns about employment one should add the exploitation of workers, particularly those in the global south whose cheap labor comes at the cost of parlous working conditions and which enables not only the proliferation of disposable and thus environmentally irresponsible commodities but also the accumulation of unprecedented sums of wealth for the global bourgeoisie. This observation prompts the broader question: How much of our work produces genuinely useful and enriching commodities, whether they take the form of tangible items

or experiences? And how much time could we free up by abandoning our unsustainable pursuit of 'growth' at all costs, and instead devising ways to meet our needs and desires through practices of (re)production that are less dependent upon commodities?

In raising these concerns I do not deny the obvious reality that maintaining biological life, let alone a 'good' life, requires the exercise of our physical and intellectual abilities in the form of work, or that the creation and preservation of social bonds places some expectation on all members of the community to contribute to this collective endeavor in some way. Moreover, I do not dispute the claim that, in contemporary society, paid work provides various personal and social benefits, from the satisfaction of completing a task that meets the needs or desires of others, to the structure and sense of purpose that work gives many lives, my own included.

But however fulfilling the tasks we perform within paid work, and however much we can adjust social rewards to more fairly reflect the contributions that particular jobs make to society, in writing this dissertation I have been guided by a belief that there is 'more to life than work.' At regular intervals I have been aware of the tension between this belief and my own commitment to work – *this* work. How can I maintain the position that we should devote less of ourselves to paid work while throwing myself almost single-mindedly into the completion of this dissertation? True, the doctoral degree is neither a paid job nor strictly a professional degree, but nor is it a romantic act of reading and writing pursued for its own sake: the decline of tenure in the US academic labor market, together with the intense competition to win one of the few available positions, place enormous pressure to perform at a high level on any doctoral student who aspires to a stable job in the academy.

Perhaps a more ethically consistent approach on my part would have involved scaling back my professional ambitions and throwing myself into a range of other activities at the same time. After all, rich and healthy lives call for ample doses of various kinds of play and creativity; care for

others and the environment that is motivated by genuine concern rather than the need and desire for monetary gain; and education that cultivates our sensibilities rather than merely enhancing our employability.[13] And my own experience when I have been able to strike a better balance between my academic endeavors and these other pursuits supports this contention.

But it would be a misinterpretation of my arguments to put pressure on individuals, including myself, to forego job security and the satisfactions they derive from paid work in favor of non-paid activities. Without addressing economic insecurity and the culture of work at its root, the practice of this sort of 'anti-work' ethic would remain the preserve of the independently wealthy, and perhaps of those without 'dependents' who can flourish in conditions of contingency without imposing costs, whether economic or psychological, on others. Instead of taking this kind of individualistic approach, we need to reflect collectively on the meaning and value of work in our lives, and to consider what political, economic, and cultural changes are needed to bring about greater freedom and justice. Indeed, this is one of the principal virtues of the basic guaranteed income.

While I have not argued for an end to paid work, then, it is my hope that the chapters of this dissertation help us better understand not only that the norms and structures of work are contestable, but that transforming them would deliver greater freedom for all. In chapter 4 I drew on the work of Gorz and others who suggest that the introduction of the basic income could and should accompany the growth of alternative arrangements for (re)production and exchange. In this

[13] Here I draw on Bertrand Russell's famous 1935 essay "In Praise of Idleness." Bertrand Russell, *In Praise of Idleness and Other Essays* (London: Routledge, 2004). Even Hayek recognizes the important role played by the "man of independent means" in "supporting aims which the mechanism of the market cannot adequately take care of." These include culture, fine arts, education, research, the preservation of nature and history, and "the propagation of new ideas in politics, morals, and religion." Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty*, 125. But while Russell calls for the reduction of working time to four hours per day, Hayek accepts that "most people must earn their income," but insists that this "does not make it less desirable that some should not have to do so, that a few be able to pursue aims which the rest do not appreciate." Ibid, 127.

sense, it is worth noting the conceptual and political affinity between the autonomist Marxist refusal of work and the idea of the commons.[14] Indeed, if we think of the commons as involving "social networks of mutual aid, solidarity, and practices of human exchange that are not reduced to the market form,"[15] then it becomes clear how important the commons are to the task of reducing the hold of paid work on our lives. Indeed, it is possible, perhaps necessary, to theorize the political construction of the material conditions that perpetuate wage labor as an ongoing form of enclosure.[16]

For example, rather than fund a basic income payable to all on the basis of the earth's natural resources, these goods are privatized and those excluded from the wealth they provide must seek their livelihood through paid work.[17] Similarly, the boundaries of the welfare state, offering a common refuge from the battering winds of the competitive market are drawn increasingly

[14] Massimo De Angelis, "Introduction," *The Commoner* 11 (2006): 1, accessed October 18, 2013, http://www.commoner.org.uk/index.php?p=24.

[15] Massimo De Angelis, "Reflections on Alternatives, Commons, Communities or Building a New World from the Bottom Up," *The Commoner* 6 (2003): 1, accessed October 18, 2013, http://www.commoner.org.uk/deangelis06.pdf. See also Alex Jeffrey, Colin McFarlane, and Alex Vasudevan, "Rethinking enclosure: space, subjectivity and the commons," *Antipode* 44, no. 4 (2012): 1249, doi: 10.1111/j.1467-8330.2011.00954.x.

[16] "Through enclosures … objects rule subjects, deeds command the doing, and the doing of human activity is channelled into forms that are compatible with the priority of capital's accumulation." Massimo De Angelis, "Separating the Doing and the Deed: Capital and the Continuous Character of Enclosures," *Historical Materialism* 12, no.2 (2004): 64, doi: 10.1163/1569206041551609.

[17] Thomas Paine was among the first to propose a social dividend funded by ground-rent paid to all adult members of the community, but the idea is also present in the contemporary Alaska Permanent Fund. See Simon Birnbaum and Karl Widerquist (eds), "About Basic Income," accessed October 21, 2013, http://www.basicincome.org/bien/aboutbasicincome.html#history.

narrowly, forcing individuals once more into the eye of the storm.[18] And as I have suggested at various points in the preceding chapters, non-commoditized forms of social provisioning become harder to sustain under the time crunch of paid work and given the low social esteem that attaches to unpaid activities. That we achieve inclusion in contemporary society on the basis of paid labor reveals a perverse foundation of that 'community,' therefore, since paid labor itself is founded on an originary and ongoing act of enclosure and separation from past, present, and possible forms of cooperative production and exchange.

Yet even if the practical task of challenging the preeminence of paid work needs to accompany various forms of 'commoning,' we must beware the ethical dangers of promoting a view of community or the commons as a social whole, in which individuals finally achieve a degree of mutual understanding that ensures perpetual harmony and order. For example, attempts to realize 'authentic' community bear the horrific imprint of twentieth century totalitarianism,[19] and in the present conjuncture motivate a politics shot through with fear and resentment of any and all 'others,' whether immigrants, racial and sexual minorities, or the unemployed. We therefore need to envision community in a way that remains open and inclusive without losing a sense of duty to others. I cannot offer a solution to this challenge, but submit that Roberto Esposito's work on community may prove fruitful for future research.

In Esposito's view, the term *munus*, at the root of 'community,' includes not only the notion of duty, but also that of the gift. On this account, a "circuit of mutual gift-giving" sustains

[18] De Angelis defines 'social commons' as "commons that have been erected as a result of past social movements and later formalised by institutional practices." De Angelis, "Separating the Doing and the Deed," 80.

[19] Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Conor, trans. Peter Conor, Lisa Garbus, Michael Holland, and Simona Sawhney (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 3, 12.

community.[20] The obligation that unites members of the community appears "in the sense that we say 'I owe *you* something,' but not 'you owe *me* something.'"[21] This subtle shift may help reduce suspicion and resentment towards others perceived as making an insufficient contribution to the community through paid work, while it could also motivate efforts to ensure everyone has the opportunity and support to offer their own unique and valuable 'gifts,' whether or not these involve gainful employment. Finally, although the gift is paired with duty in Esposito's account, it retains a sense of freedom on the part of the giver. Reconfiguring the duty to work in these terms suggests the possibility of reaching a new condition of freedom.

[20] Roberto Esposito, *Communitas: The Origin and Destiny of Community*, trans. Timothy Campbell (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2010), 7.

[21] Ibid, 6.

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