

Good Work

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ABSTRACT *Work is on one side a central arena of self-making, self-understanding, and self-development, and on the other a deep threat to our flourishing. My question is: what kind of work is good for human beings, and what kind bad? I first characterise work as necessary productive activity. My answer to my question then develops a perfectionist account of the human good: (1) the good is the full development and expression of human potentials and capacities; (2) this development and expression happens over a lifetime through appropriate practice. Work is thus a problem of human development, and I address that problem by considering three central human capacities: that we are passionate choosers, skilled makers, and social negotiators. For each, I ask: what does this capacity need from our work if it is to develop towards full and flourishing expression? Answering that question leads to a three-part account of good work as requiring: (1) a distinctive kind of pleasure, involving both unselfconscious flow and supervisory self-attention; (2) skill, which I describe via the ideal of craft; and (3) democracy, which I define as a form of life in which each is able to develop and use both expressive and receptive capacities.*

Work is on one side a central arena of self-making, self-understanding, and self-development, and on the other a deep threat to our flourishing. And we inhabitants of modern commercial societies spend large parts of our lives working, by comparison, for example, with hunter-gatherers.¹ Work is therefore a pressing ethical problem for us, about which recent moral and political philosophy has said surprisingly little.

My question is, what kind of work is good for human beings, and what kind bad? What work is to human flourishing as eating your greens and doing thirty minutes of exercise a day is to human health? What work is, in contrast, analogous to fatty food, cigarettes, and too much beer?

This is not the same as various questions we might ask about the right rather than the good.² What kinds of work are righteous work, or just work, or moral work? There may be kinds of work which are good for those who do them, but wrong to undertake — fighting in an unjust war would be an example, if being a soldier can be good work.³ There are certainly kinds of work which are righteous but bad for the person who does them — consider the single mother who keeps at exhausting drudgery to support her children, for example. We need the distinction between good work and righteous work to be able to make sense of the obvious thought that this is a heroic self-sacrifice. An answer to my question does not directly imply anything about what we ought individually or collectively to do: to address that distinct question, we need a theory of the right and of the connection between it and the good. For example, a consequentialist theory on which the right thing to do is impartially to maximise the good; or a virtue theory on which the right is subsumed in the good, because the right action is the one which the

virtuous person would take, and to possess the virtues is to realise the good; or a deontological theory which takes what we owe by right to others to be prior to the good, and which makes questions of justice central.⁴ But I commit to no such theory here. In this article, I am interested in the relation between work and human flourishing. The relation between human flourishing and right action is beyond my scope.

My particular address to the good but not to the right makes a grounding assumption of methodological individualism: I am concerned with what is good and bad for individual human beings. This is clearly not the only important question one might ask about work, and equally clearly the other important questions include what work does to groups, but that distinct question is beyond my scope, simply for reasons of space.

Two further questions which I'm not here asking are the following: (1) about the value of *leisure*;⁵ (2) about the organisation of *society in general* for the purpose of promoting human wellbeing. This article is only about what *work* would ideally be for that purpose.

1. The Problem of Work

I will not offer a definition of work, because I doubt that things with histories can have precise definitions, and expect that the various referents of such a multivalent concept are likely to be connected by family resemblances rather than by meeting necessary and sufficient conditions. But gesturally: by *work* I mean the familiar things we do in fields, factories, offices, schools, shops, building sites, call centres, homes, and so on, to make a life and a living. Examples of work in our commercial society include driving a taxi, selling washing machines, managing a group of software developers, running a till in a supermarket, attaching screens to smartphones on an assembly line, fielding customer complaints in a call centre, and teaching in a school.

We can further specify the domain of work by noting some of its boundaries. (1) Work is *activity*, not rest, idleness, or having nothing to do. (2) Work is *necessary*, not optional or gratuitous or purely playful: it has a connection, perhaps indirect, to our needs rather than just to our desires.⁶ In commercial society, the connection between work and need is usually that we use the money we're paid for working to buy food, shelter, and other necessities. (3) Work is *productive*, not just a consumption activity. This doesn't require that work achieves anything worthwhile — digging ditches and then filling them in again is work, if it's how I avoid starvation — but it does put eating, for example, outside the domain of work.

We may be tempted to add that work is done *for pay* — is organised by a *market* — as distinct from activity organised by reciprocal or redistributive or other non-market arrangements.⁷ But that would be a mistake, because it has the implausible consequences that housewives and hunter-gatherers don't work. We do sometimes talk that way, as when a housewife says that she 'doesn't work', but cleaning, for example, is work even if despised and unpaid work. So we should say, instead, that *commercial society's* central form and symbol of work is work for pay in a market, but that necessary productive activity not so organised is, equally, work. We can call paid activity organised by a labour-market a *job* — so the housewife who 'doesn't work' actually just doesn't have a job, in my terms. I'll further note that most jobs are work; that a lot of, but not all work under capitalism is done in jobs; but that there are jobs which aren't work — sinecures — and forms of work that aren't jobs — the housewife's cleaning work, for example, but also the majority of work done in pre- and non-commercial societies.

We should also reject some economists' analysis of work as displeasing or a disutility.⁸ Whether or not a kind of work is so depends on the particular nature of that work and our engagement with it, and as I shall go on to argue, some work is good for us, not a cost worth incurring only for its balancing benefits. That work is not pure play does not mean that it's never enjoyable or beneficial.

For my purposes here, I also won't adopt the Marxist claim that work is distinct from the necessary productive activity of non-humans — beavers building dams, spiders spinning webs, bees gathering nectar — in that human workers conceive in imagination before we act.⁹ That would be to build in as an assumption what should be subject to our investigation: the *phenomenology* of work.

The domain in which work is found, then, is the domain of necessary productive activity. Work may not fill that domain — some sex might also be inside its borders, for example — but to repeat, my ambition here is not to offer an analysis or definition, but only to specify our focus.¹⁰

My answer to my question will rest on and develop a perfectionist, developmentalist, or 'self-realisationist'¹¹ account of the good: (1) the human good (wellbeing, welfare, utility) is the full development and expression of essential human potentials and capacities, rather than being, for example, pleasure, desire-satisfaction, or life-satisfaction.¹² (2) This development and expression happens over a lifetime through appropriate practice. Humans become better off by the right kinds of repeated action, and worse off by the wrong kinds. What we do shapes who and what we become. We grow, or are stunted or distorted, by acting. So, our practices — institutions, habits, rituals, roles, familiar strategies, social tools — are important and need some critical scrutiny for what they do to us. Do they create the conditions for development? Do they thwart it? Worse, do they misdirect and distort it?

These two commitments are Aristotelian in inspiration, but they also appear with various elaborations in liberal¹³ and Marxist¹⁴ thought, for example, as well as in the continuing Aristotelian tradition.¹⁵ They are obviously contestable, and there is a large literature on the contest.¹⁶ I can't defend this view of wellbeing in any depth here, but I will offer four reasons at least to take it seriously, especially when considering the problem of work. First, we can desire and be pleased by things which are bad for us, from a cigarette to a disastrous marriage. Wellbeing must therefore be objective in the minimal sense that we can be mistaken in our own cases. Second, life can go well or badly for a wide variety of living things, but different treatments are good or bad for different creatures: compare the lives and needs of oak trees, ants, cats, and humans, for example. It's at least *prima facie* plausible to explain these differences as the result of differences in the natures of these creatures, and therefore to connect *good for* with the objective demands of those natures. Third, any plausible perfectionist theory can include many of the insights of its subjectivist competitors. Take the case of hedonism, for example: *pleasure* or some specific *pleasures* are standardly identified as good by extant perfectionist theories; but hedonism can't incorporate the equally plausible identification also made by such theories, that *achievement* or some particular *achievements*, for example *knowledge*, are also part of life's going well.¹⁷ Fourth, and considering work in particular: to ask what is *good work*, as opposed to merely work that is chosen in particular circumstances, or is not unjust, is already to bring some basic perfectionism into play, because it is to ask what work *does to us* and therefore to open its effects on us to critical scrutiny. If the question about good work is at all natural

— and it seems to come easily to anyone in work or looking for work — then we must take perfectionism seriously.

Clearly these are only the beginnings of arguments for perfectionism, and much could be said in reply. But my project in this article is to explore the consequences of this perfectionist take on wellbeing for work.

In this context, we can see work as one of our main arenas of practice towards being flourishing, fully-developed human beings; or as one of the main threats to that development. We therefore need to think about what work does to us: how does it shape us? What practice — or what malpractice — does it demand? More particularly, what *human potentials and capacities* can work develop, or leave fallow, or distort?

Work is a problem of human development, and my plan is to address that problem by considering three central human capacities. For each, I will ask: what does this capacity need from our work if it's to develop towards full and flourishing expression? Answering those questions will lead to a three-part characterisation of *good work*¹⁸ as requiring pleasure, skill, and democracy, in Sections 2–4. Section 5 summarises and concludes.

2. Pleasure

The first capacity I want to pick out is that humans are *passionate choosers*. That is, first, we are *choosers*: we are partly self-directed, we face dilemmas, we pick between options (often, perhaps typically, not themselves chosen). Second, we are *motivated* choice-makers: we are not disembodied intellects, and we don't just rationally balance expected costs and benefits. Rather, our choices hit us in the heart and gut, we yearn towards some things and flinch away from others, we're wounded by loss, and we're torn by incompatible demands. Good work therefore needs to engage our passions: it needs to engage our motivational psychology, and especially to engage our capacity for *pleasure*.

To develop that point about pleasure, I draw on William Morris's distinction of the three pleasures of 'useful work' as opposed to 'useless toil'.¹⁹ Each of the three has implications for the character of good work.

First, there is pleasure in the *product* of work. Good work makes or brings about things we can take pleasure in. A contemptible or repellent product, as when I make cheap rubbish, or add to the confusion and unhappiness of the world rather than reducing it, means that my work is bad. A product in which I have no investment — assembling iPhones when I'll never be able to afford one and have no reason to care about the Apple Corporation, for example — also means that my work is bad. The latter pleasure doesn't require legal ownership of the product, but rather care for it or personal investment in it: a sense that one is producing something one can proudly see oneself in. Ownership is neither necessary nor sufficient for caring. Work which makes pleasing things or brings about pleasing results — a beautiful and useful table, an enjoyable novel, laughing children — is in that respect good work.

Second, there is pleasure in *rest after* work. Good work is not excessive or debilitating, but is enough to feel that my powers have been exercised, and to enjoy a well-earned rest in which they're replenished.

Third, and most importantly here, there is pleasure *in the work itself*. This could be the unselfconscious absorption — being in the zone, without self-separation or half-heartedness — which we can sometimes find in running, making music, or perhaps any vocation:

You need not see what someone is doing
 to know if it is his vocation,
 you have only to watch his eyes:
 a cook mixing a sauce, a surgeon
 making a primary incision,
 a clerk completing a bill of lading,
 wear the same rapt expression,
 forgetting themselves in a function.
 How beautiful it is,
 that eye-on-the-object look.²⁰

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has influentially dubbed this experience *flow*.²¹

I want to suggest, however, that pleasure in the work itself needs to be more than flow. It also needs to have a more complex structure over time. Schematically, there is a repeated pattern: (1) *waking* a particular capacity, as when I hear Beethoven for the first time, in which there is an intense joy of discovery which motivates pursuit.²² These moments of waking are perhaps clearest in child development, where children make leaps in ability through moments of delighted recognition: 'I didn't realise I could go down the slide *head-first!*'. (2) *Deepening* pleasure through developing perception and understanding, as when I get to know Beethoven's late string quartets. Here there is a distinct pleasure of repetition, as I get more out of each listen. (3) *Overcoming obstacles* to understanding and engagement, which, once passed, reveal further vistas, as when I just don't understand what's going on in the Grosse Fugue which originally closed Beethoven's String Quartet 13. Here there is frustration at the obstacle, but also pleasurable expectation of its anticipated overcoming and — I hope, soon — new pleasure in the new depth that overcoming reveals. There is a *cyclical* and *stepwise* or *layered* process of development: gradual deepening, stalling at an obstacle, and then getting past it and into new depths.

It's worth being clear about my disagreement with Csikszentmihalyi here. I do not deny that there is a subjective experience of flow, nor that it is intensely pleasurable, nor even that people who regularly experience it are happier — in the sense that they feel better about, and report more satisfaction with, their lives — than those who do not. I want to make three points: first, that the phenomenology of pleasure in our activity over time is more complex than Csikszentmihalyi sometimes allows, and in particular that there are important pleasures in self-conscious or self-separated non-flow states. Second, that flow alone is not *good* work, even if it is *happy* work: subjective happiness is not wellbeing, even though it may be an important part of human development (this is just to reassert my Aristotelian commitment to self-realisationism about the good). Third, that Csikszentmihalyi makes the quality of work far too dependent on the worker's attitude, and makes far too little of the actual nature of the work. I make the case for that third claim in Section 3.

What I've said so far is incomplete in that my example of the complex pleasures of listening to music is *passive*: it's a matter of consumption not of action, and that will not do as an account of good work. To get towards that, we need also to consider a second capacity.

3. Skill

My second capacity is that humans are *skilled makers*. This is again two points: first, we are *makers*. We're handy, we reach out to shape and use the world for our own purposes. Second, we're *skilled* makers: we get better at a particular kinds of shaping by attempting it, and, as a corollary, we can't get better without these attempts. I can't learn to play the guitar just by reading and watching YouTube videos about it, I have to do it. Summarising both points: we develop skill by using it. Our activity of shaping the world reshapes us by gradual transformation of our bodily and mental abilities.

If we're to develop skill, our activity needs two features. (1) A particular kind of *object* or *matter*, with a complex internal landscape of depth and obstacles: plains to cross, space to explore, mountains and rivers to struggle over, vistas revealing what can be seen but not yet reached. Examples of such matter include music, mathematics, carpentry, philosophy, and medicine. But this complexity on its own isn't enough, because one way of dealing with complex objects is *Taylorism*: dividing up a complex activity into its smallest components and distributing them across different people. This is very efficient for productive purposes — we can make a lot of cars on a line where each worker performs just one operation — but it's not *skill-developing*. Skill-development also requires (2) a particular *relation* to the object, in which: I move from absorption in detail to self-conscious overview of the whole and of my performance in relation to it; I get and respond to feedback from resistance, and can test that resistance with various approaches (what happens if I finger the chord *this* way? machine the fitting *this* way? order the build *this* way?); I problem-*find* as well as problem-*solve*; I have self-direction in response to the object, rather than just applying a predetermined technique or tool to it.²³ That is, in which I am an *autonomous* worker, who rationally forms and acts on my own plans, changes those plans in response to circumstance and to the discovery of my own successes and failures, and forms myself as an integrated personality by doing so.²⁴

One example of a skill-developing activity is learning to *play* a musical instrument (rather than just listening to music): there are depths of possibility and self-expression to be discovered, but also technical and expressive obstacles to overcome; playing both requires and fosters autonomy.

One example of an activity which fails to be skill-developing is spot-welding on a production line, as described by Phil Stallings in an interview with Studs Terkel: 'Repetition is such that if you were to think about the job itself, you'd slowly go out of your mind'.²⁵

Summing up this second capacity, the development of skill requires: (1) a complex object and (2) a self-directed and sometimes self-conscious relation to that object. We can't develop skill on a boring object, or in a Taylorist process.

Summing up my first and second capacities: the human capacity of passionate choice demands pleasure of several kinds in work; the human capacity of skilled making demands skill-developing objects and forms of work. I now want to say, further, that these are two aspects of the same thing: our complex relation — sometimes absorbed in detail, sometimes self-conscious and self-assessing — to complex objects with depth and resistance. That's why the metaphor of complex internal *landscape* appears in my descriptions of both. And our experience of that same thing is — at its best — an experience of pleasurable development: we delight in our own increasing mastery.

That connection between pleasure and skill-development allows me to clarify the point of Section 2, on pleasure: I am not there asserting either a hedonist theory of the good, or an objective list theory which includes pleasure, regardless of its source, as one of its items. I am arguing that in good work, the development of skill *is a pleasure*. I understand pleasure as pleasure *in* something, as having an intrinsic object, not as an undifferentiated positive mental state only contingently caused by events.²⁶

What this means for our problem in this article is that good work will be work which provides the conditions for pleasurable skill-development. It will afford pleasure in the product (rather than a contemptible or repulsive or alienated product), pleasure in the rest after (rather than taking up all our time, using us up), and most importantly complex pleasure in the work itself. It will offer a deep rather than a boring object, and we will have a self-determined and self-conscious rather than a Taylorist relation to that object. We could call this the relation of the *craftsman* or (better, because ungendered) the *maker*. Between them, these conditions add up to the idea that good work would be *work in which we take pleasure in our developing mastery of our world-shaping activity*. In a phrase: good work is craft.

A useful contrast is with a repeated complaint of Studs Terkel's interviewees: that one is a *machine* or a *robot* in work. The experience of being a machine involves one kind of self-division: my parts — hands, mouth, back — do repetitive, non-consciously directed work planned by someone else, while a separated part of me dreamily observes without intervention or evaluation. The difference between good and bad work, between craft work and machine work, is not just a matter of *repetition*: repetition can be fine when it's skill-developing, as when I play the same scale over and over again, and there are distinctive pleasures of repetition. Nor is it just a matter of *dis-unity*: the absorbed unity of flow is intensely pleasurable, but good work involves *supervisory* self-separation, and moves between immediate involvement and critical self-attention and self-evaluation.

Work which is good in this respect, then, would be work like the master stonemason Carl Murray Bates's as described in his interview with Terkel:

It's a pretty good day layin' stone or brick. Not tiring. Anything you like to do isn't tiresome. It's hard work; stone is heavy. At the same time, you get interested in what you're doing and you usually fight the clock the other way. You're not lookin' for quittin' . . . Stone's my life. I daydream all the time, most times it's on stone.²⁷

Contrast this with the labourer Mike Lefevre's bad work:

It's hard to take pride in a bridge you're never gonna cross, in a door you're never gonna open. You're mass-producing things and you're never gonna see the end result of it. [Muses] I worked for a trucker one time. And I got this tiny satisfaction when I loaded a truck. At least I could see the truck depart loaded. In a steel mill, forget it. You don't see where nothing goes. I got chewed out by my foreman once. He said, 'Mike, you're a good worker but you have a bad attitude'. My attitude is that I don't get excited about my job. I do my work but I don't say whoopee-doo. The day I get excited about my job is day I go to a head-shrinker. How are you gonna get excited about pullin' steel? How are you gonna get excited when you're tired and want to sit down?²⁸

Now, we could imagine a benevolent boss providing work more like Bates's and less like LeFevre's: a Lord Leverhulme or Titus Salt or Joseph Rowntree; a Google or Lego; a classical orchestra with an inspiring conductor. Schwartz describes an experiment at a plant opened by the General Foods Corporation in Kansas in 1971:

There, each worker was hired to be part of a small group of persons, each group was made responsible for intellectually demanding functions (e.g., maintaining and repairing machines, quality control operations), and all groups of workers shared in the routine work that was not eliminated by automation . . . All workers were given opportunities to learn to perform all the tasks assigned to their group, [and] no group member was mainly assigned to routine operations.²⁹

That would be pretty good work — much better than a lot of people's work — but it wouldn't be good enough, on account of a third demand on good work, arising from a third human capacity: democracy.

4. Democracy

The third capacity I want to pick out is that humans are *social negotiators*. First, we act *together* — compare snakes, for example, which are asocial. Second, we act together *by negotiating* — compare ants, which act together, but not by trying to explain reasons to, or evoke sympathy in, other ants.

Our social negotiation requires two reciprocal kinds of capacity. On one side there are *expressive* capacities: we give reasons, express passions, describe our situations, give information, teach, mock, take the initiative, and perform. And on the other side there are *receptive* capacities: we hear reasons and incorporate them in deliberation, sympathise, picture others' situations and take up their perspectives, hear information and change our beliefs, learn, get taken down a peg in good humour, go along with an initiative, and act as audience. (These aren't intended to be exhaustive lists.)

One organisational possibility which turns up repeatedly in human history is *hierarchy*, in which the opportunities to exercise and therefore to develop these capacities are distributed across different people. There are givers and there are takers of orders: there is a division of labour in social negotiation. As in the Taylorist workplace, this can be efficient: armies so organised can do astonishing things.³⁰ But it leads to hypertrophy of one set of capacities and atrophy of the other: development is unbalanced on both sides of the division between expressive and receptive capacities, and this is developmentally bad for the individuals who make up the hierarchical community.

Another organisational possibility imagined by some liberals is the society of pure contract, in which everything is arranged by voluntary agreement. The developmental problems with this libertarian utopia are, first, that it assumes that everyone is already an independent adult, and ignores the necessity of receptive capacities, in oneself and in others, to becoming such an adult.³¹ Second, that it would lead to atrophy of the important human capacities to defer to others' greater expertise, to go along with initiative, to fully live out non-voluntary relations such as that between child and parent, and to give up self-command in loving intimacy³².

I want to suggest that a developmentally better possibility than either of these is a social organisation in which everyone practices both kinds of capacity. Everyone is sometimes expressive and sometimes receptive: sometimes takes and sometimes goes with initiative, sometimes talks and sometimes listens, sometimes teaches and sometimes learns, and so on. I want to call this possibility *democracy*, understood as a form of life not as a political decision procedure or as a claim of right about political equality.³³

People in democracies are better off — they get more kinds of developmental practice, and are therefore closer to being fully-developed human beings — than people either at the top or at the bottom of hierarchies, or in contract societies³⁴. For example, we can compare a classical orchestra with group improvisation in jazz, folk, or gamelan music. In the latter, there are chances both to speak and to listen, to lead and to follow, to solo and to accompany, to offer new themes and to continue existing ones.

The developmental significance of democracy has large consequences for all of our shared life, but for work in particular: working for an enlightened boss is not enough. *Good work* is at minimum work in a workplace democracy — John Lewis, the Co-op, Mondragon³⁵ — in which each of us has opportunities to develop both our expressive, authoritative and initiative-taking capacities and our receptive, learning and following capacities. Perhaps, more strongly, it's work in a democratic rather than a competitive capitalist *economy*. Speculatively, we might imagine an economy that's more like music-making than like sport.

One objection to this argument is that it wrongly takes the paradigm of work to be working *in a group*, for example in a factory or office. But some work is solitary: consider the novelist, or the independent day-trader in her home office, or, more extreme, Robert Kull building himself a hut during his year-long experiment in living alone.³⁶ But, in the first place, all of these examples rely on social negotiation to support them in their solitude. The novelist and day-trader didn't build their offices. Even Kull needed the Chilean navy to transport him and his equipment to his hermitage. In the second place, my claim is not that everyone needs social interaction *all of the time*, it's that social interaction is necessary to the development of the expressive and receptive capacities I'm here discussing. I can therefore reply that solitary work is developmentally *bad* for humans to the extent and in the respects that it leads to atrophy of expressive and receptive capacities — although it may have compensatory benefits, for example in the development of attention and receptiveness to one's own inner life and to the non-human world.³⁷

Another objection is that work isn't necessary for the development of the expressive and receptive capacities: we can pursue those parts of flourishing in our lives as democratic citizens and family-members outside work. I have a stipulative response available, that my question here is about what work would ideally be if it were to offer the conditions for full human development, not about how to organise society in general for that purpose. But I can say rather more than that. In the first place, given how much of our time and energy we spend in work, there is a huge opportunity cost in not using work-time as democratic practice. If failing to express either the expressive or the receptive capacities is a serious problem of development, then it's at least unwise to constrain our practice in them to our non-work time. In the second place, the cost may be more than an opportunity cost. Schwartz summarises the empirical and conceptual evidence that lack of development in work actually damages development elsewhere in life. In particular, 'routine jobs cause persons to be less inclined, *in all aspects of their lives*,

to engage in the purposeful striving that is characteristic of autonomous individuals'.³⁸ So, non-democratic work at least leaves fallow, and may distort and stunt, central human capacities. That is both a bad thing about such work, and reason not to leave development of those capacities to our limited non-work time.

5. Summary and Conclusion

I began with two Aristotelian commitments and a problem: questions about the good are questions about human development, and the means of that development is practice; work is one important arena of practice and potential corruption, and therefore needs critical examination. My plan was to offer a description of good work out of three central human capacities, which it promises to develop or threatens to damage and constrain.

My results can be summarised via an example or metaphor of good work which I've already used: group musical improvisation, which exercises our nature in three ways. (1) As passionate choosers, which leads to our developmental need for pleasure in the product, a musical performance; in rest after; and most importantly in the playing itself. This involves flow states, but, as I have argued against Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, it also requires complex, self-conscious pleasures in waking, deepening, and overcoming. (2) As skilled makers, which leads to our need for skill-development: the gradual development of mastery of our world-changing abilities. (3) As social negotiators, which leads to our need for democracy, in my sense of a form of life in which we practice both expressive and receptive skills; in which we all have a voice and an ear and a hand in making our joint activity. We can see good work, at least in microcosm, by going to see the William Parker Quartet.

I have disowned any ambition to address questions of *right*, to show what we should do about good or bad work. I have instead concentrated on the question of what kind of work is developmentally *good* for humans, and left open the question of what that account of the good means for the right. Individual wellbeing is clearly not the only consideration relevant to an all-things-considered judgement about what to do, and especially about what to do collectively with public policy: there are, for example, relevant considerations about the just distribution of work; about what an individual's work does to others rather than to herself; about the contributions of activity outside work to wellbeing; and so on. But what work is good clearly is one important consideration, and was therefore worth the exploration.

One way of reading my argument about good work would be as a *utopia*. The point of utopias is not, usually, to argue directly for particular action. Utopias have other uses, however. One purpose of utopian speculation is to offer an extreme standard for critical comparison: to say out loud what would be desirable, so we can judge what we have by contrast.³⁹ But invoking the idea of utopia also raises the worry that the standard is not merely extreme but *impossible*: that the utopia of good work must, in its nature, remain out of our reach. I'll end, therefore, with an obvious but demanding point: most people's work is nothing like the good work I've described; and perhaps, worse, most people's work couldn't be. That should worry us.

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NOTES

- 1 Marshall Sahlins, 'The original affluent society' in his *Stone Age Economics* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1974), pp. 1–39.
- 2 The canonical statement of this way of cutting up the normative landscape is John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. edn. (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), §6.
- 3 Some support for that possibility can be found in Samuel Clark, 'Under the mountain: Basic training, individuality, and comradeship', *Res Publica* 19 (2013): 67–79.
- 4 The allusion is again to Rawls, of course, but also for example to Brian Barry, *Justice as Impartiality* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), and to T. M. Scanlon, *What We Owe to Each Other* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).
- 5 The classic texts on that question are John Maynard Keynes, 'Economic possibilities for our grandchildren' in his *Essays in Persuasion* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1952), pp. 358–73, and Bertrand Russell, 'In praise of idleness' in his *In Praise of Idleness and Other Essays* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1935), pp. 9–29. See also Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defence of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), chapters 6 and 7.
- 6 For analysis of *need*, see David Wiggins, 'Claims of need' in his *Needs, Values, Truth* (amended 3rd edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 1–57.
- 7 On which see Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation*, 2nd edn. (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1957).
- 8 For discussion, see John W. Budd, *The Thought of Work* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), chapter 5; Christoph Hermann, *Capitalism and the Political Economy of Work Time*, part 1 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015); David A. Spencer, *The Political Economy of Work* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2009).
- 9 '[W]hat distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax' — Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* vol. 1, trans. B. Fowkes (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p. 284. See further Harry Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974), chapter 1.
- 10 Other similar mappings of the domain of work, amounting to less than necessary and sufficient conditions, are offered for example by Al Gini, *My Job My Self: Work and the Creation of the Modern Individual* (London: Routledge, 2001); Russell Muirhead, *Just Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Hugh Thomas, 'Editor's introduction' to *The Oxford Book of Work* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
- 11 I take the latter term from Kai Nielsen, 'Alienation and self-realization', *Philosophy* 48 (1973): 21–33.
- 12 The classic taxonomy of theories of wellbeing is Derek Parfit's distinction into hedonist, desire-satisfaction, and objective list theories, in *Reasons and Persons*, appendix I, corrected edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). It is incomplete, especially in missing out life-satisfaction theories: see for example L. W. Sumner, *Welfare, Happiness, & Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). For a more recent and comprehensive taxonomy, see Daniel M. Haybron, *The Pursuit of Unhappiness: The Elusive Psychology of Well-Being* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), chapter 2.
- 13 Muirhead's *Just Work* op. cit. develops a liberal account of the 'justice of fit', and Samuel Clark, 'Love, poetry, and the good life: Mill's *Autobiography* and perfectionist ethics', *Inquiry* 53 (2010): 565–78, finds a perfectionist theory of the good in John Stuart Mill, for two examples.
- 14 See for example Richard J. Arneson, 'Meaningful work and market socialism', *Ethics* 97 (1987): 517–45; Robin Attfield, 'Work and the human essence', *Journal of Applied Philosophy* 1 (1984): 141–50; Jon Elster, *Making Sense of Marx* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Jon Elster, 'Self-realization in work and politics: The Marxist conception of the good life' in J. Elster & K.O. Moene (eds) *Alternatives to Capitalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 127–58.
- 15 The standard-bearers of the neo-Aristotelian tradition are Martha Nussbaum, for example in 'Human functioning and social justice: In defense of Aristotelian essentialism', *Political Theory* 20 (1992):

- 202–246, and Amartya Sen, for example in *Development as Freedom* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999). See also Robin Attfield, ‘On being human’, *Inquiry* 17 (1974): 175–92; Philippa Foot, *Natural Goodness* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).
- 16 The defining text for the modern debate on wellbeing is James Griffin, *Well-Being: Its Meaning, Measurement, and Moral Importance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). Other significant texts in the field include Nussbaum, Sen, Haybron, and Sumner op. cit.; Fred Feldman, *Pleasure and the Good Life: Concerning the Nature, Varieties, and Plausibility of Hedonism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004); Valerie Tiberius, *The Reflective Life: Living Wisely Within Our Limits* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
 - 17 See for example John Finnis, *Natural Law & Natural Rights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); James Griffin, *Value Judgement: Improving our Ethical Beliefs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Thomas Hurka, *The Best Things in Life: A Guide to What Really Matters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).
 - 18 The term ‘good work’ is used in several different ways, and it’s worth distinguishing my particular technical sense from: (1) the already-noted righteous work. (2) Work that is done well according to the standards of its kind, as for example in Bjørn Christiansen, ‘Good work — how is it recognized by the nurse?’, *Journal of Clinical Nursing*, 17 (2008): 1645–51. (3) Work that keeps the worker happy and healthy, often sold to employers as instrumentally valuable for keeping workers effective at their jobs, as for example in the reports of the UK Good Work Commission, <<http://www.theworkfoundation.com/Research/Workforce-Effectiveness/Good-Work/Good-Work-Commission>>. (4) Idiosyncratic hybrid concepts such as, for example, the definition that good work is ‘work that is both excellent in quality and socially responsible’ adopted by Howard Gardner, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and William Damon in *Good Work: When Excellence and Ethics Meet* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), p. xi.
 - 19 William Morris, ‘Useful work versus useless toil’ in A. L. Morton (ed.) *Political Writings of William Morris* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1973[1885]), pp. 86–108. See also Morris’s *News From Nowhere* ed. David Leopold (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003[1890]) for dramatization of the pleasures of useful work.
 - 20 W. H. Auden, ‘Horae canonicae: 3. Sext’ in *Collected Poems*, ed. E. Mendelson, rev. edn. (London: Faber and Faber, 1991), pp. 629–33, at pp. 629–30.
 - 21 Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimum Experience*, with a new introduction (London: Rider, 2002). Csikszentmihalyi’s account is actually troublingly ambiguous. I here take ‘flow’, for my own contrastive purposes, to refer to his most frequent characterisation of the state: ‘focusing on the activity at hand [and] allowing [ourselves] to be lost in the interaction’ (p. 151), for example. Sometimes, however, Csikszentmihalyi instead describes flow as involving autonomous control over the structure and timing of work, choice of activity, and active problem-finding and problem-solving, as in his account of the Biella weaving community (p. 153). And for purposes of empirical measurement, flow is defined only as activity that is self-reported as involving higher than average degrees of skill-use and challenge (p. 158).
 - 22 I draw here on Samuel Clark, ‘Pleasure as self-discovery’, *Ratio* 25 (2012): 260–76.
 - 23 This description draws on Matthew Crawford, *The Case for Working with Your Hands: Or Why Office Work is Bad for Us and Fixing Things Feels Good* (London: Viking, 2010); C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes*, 50th anniversary edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), chapter 10; Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (London: Allen Lane, 2008).
 - 24 I draw on Adina Schwartz, ‘Meaningful work’, *Ethics* 92 (1982): 634–46, for this characterisation of autonomy. Schwartz makes a strong case that Fordist work fails to foster or respect the general capacity for autonomy in life, as well as the particular autonomy involved in being skilled. For empirical support, see Braverman op. cit.
 - 25 Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day and How They Feel About What They Do*, with a new foreword (New York: The New Press, 2004), p. 160.
 - 26 I here follow Fred Feldman’s account of pleasure as a propositional attitude rather than a feeling: pleasure is taking pleasure in, enjoying, or being pleased by X, analogously to hoping, believing, or fearing that X. See Feldman op. cit., chapter 4. I obviously don’t follow Feldman in his defence of a hedonist account of the good.
 - 27 Terkel op. cit., pp. xlv–xlvii.
 - 28 Terkel op. cit., pp. xxxi–xxxii.
 - 29 Schwartz op. cit., pp. 641–2.
 - 30 Consider the immense organisational performance of the Allied invasion of Europe during World War Two, for one example. See Antony Beevor, *D-Day: The Battle for Normandy* (London: Viking, 2009).

- 31 I draw here on Clark 2012 op. cit., and on Samuel Clark, 'Kicking against the pricks: Anarchist perfectionism and the conditions of independence' in B. Franks & M. Wilson (eds.) *Anarchism and Moral Philosophy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 33–44.
- 32 Critiques of this libertarian utopia are more often framed as arguments about its distributive injustice: see for example Robert Nozick, *Anarchy, State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974) and the large literature responding to it. I intend to add to these critiques, not to reject them.
- 33 This individualist perspective may seem an idiosyncratic take on the idea of democracy. But it has deep roots in the civic humanist or republican tradition, and therefore in one strand of liberalism, in which a central concern is how different forms of civic life develop or stunt citizens, and specifically the educational effects of democratic practice. Major historical names in this tradition include Rousseau, Wollstonecraft, and Mill. In contemporary work, see Samuel Bowles & Herbert Gintis, *Democracy and Capitalism: Property, Community, and the Contradictions of Modern Social Thought* (London: Routledge, 1986); David L. Norton, *Democracy and Moral Development* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); Iris Marion Young, *Inclusion and Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- 34 I intend this developmental defence of a democratic form of life to add to, not to replace or dispute, other kinds of defence of democracy based on: justice, e.g. John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, expanded edn. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); freedom, e.g. Philip Pettit, *Republicanism: A Theory of Freedom & Government* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); opposition to domination and oppression, e.g. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, new edn. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); or the epistemic properties of democratic deliberation, e.g. David M. Estlund, *Democratic Authority: A Philosophical Framework* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
- 35 The possibilities and realities of workplace democracy and worker-owned businesses are explored, for example, in David Schweickart, *After Capitalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002); Jaroslav Vanek (ed.), *Self-Management: Economic Liberation of Man* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1975); Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010), chapter 7.
- 36 Robert Kull, *Solitude: Seeking Wisdom in Extremes* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2008).
- 37 See for example Sara Maitland, *A Book of Silence: A Journey in Pursuit of the Pleasures and Powers of Silence* (London: Granta, 2008).
- 38 Schwartz op. cit., p. 638, my emphasis.
- 39 This critical purpose of utopias is defended in Samuel Clark, *Living Without Domination: The Possibility of an Anarchist Utopia* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007). See also Wright op. cit.