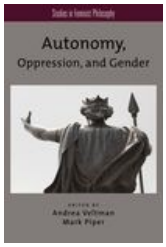

Autonomy, Oppression, and Gender

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https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199969104.001.0001

Published: 2014 **Online ISBN:** 9780190225711 **Print ISBN:** 9780199969104

CHAPTER

13 Autonomy and Oppression at Work

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https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199969104.003.0013 Pages 280–300

Published: August 2014

Abstract

This chapter focuses attention to the impact of work on autonomy and self-respect. Drawing on empirical and philosophical literatures on work and well-being, the chapter argues that working extensively at eudemonistically meaningless work undermines autonomy and self-respect and that promoting autonomous agency entails respecting the agency and skills people exercise at work. The chapter distinguishes three ways autonomy relates to work: an initial autonomous choice of employment; an achievement of autonomy as economic independence through work; and an exercise of autonomous agency in work itself. The chapter also examines experiences of dehumanization at work and invokes principles of eudemonistic ethics and Kantian ethics to support the social provision of opportunities for eudemonistically meaningful work and to oppose forms of labor in which people are treated as appendages of machines or as expendable cheap human resources.

Keywords: autonomy, oppression, work, labor, meaningful work, self-respect, agency, skills, dehumanization, eudemonistic ethics

Subject: Social and Political Philosophy, Moral Philosophy, Feminist Philosophy

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A central aspect of autonomy, highlighted not only by feminist accounts of relational autonomy but also by other accounts of personal autonomy, is the exercise of reflective and agential capacities that develop in social and interpersonal contexts. Whereas theorists of relational autonomy often emphasize that capacities necessary for autonomy develop on account of our relationality, including our initial dependency on parents or other caregivers, theorists of autonomy rarely explore work as a social context that can support or stifle the development and exercise of autonomous capacities. In this paper I turn attention to the impact of work on autonomy and on related goods of self-respect and self-worth, which are required for full personal autonomy on some accounts. Drawing on empirical and philosophical literatures on work and well-being, I first draw together a case that eudemonistically meaningless work undermines autonomy and self-respect. By eudemonistically meaningless work, I mean work that does not develop or exercise human capabilities, permit independent judgment, integrate conception and execution, or otherwise facilitate expressions of agency.[1] These forms of work are not necessarily meaningless altogether, but working extensively at

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p. 281 eudemonistically ↳ meaningless work stifles the flourishing of a worker and, in particular, diminishes her drive toward self-determination and her sense of self-worth.[2]

I submit that eudemonistically meaningless work should be counted among other autonomy subverting social influences, which on feminist accounts range broadly from internalized oppressive norms to entanglements in abusive personal relationships to practices of childrearing that thwart development of autonomous skills. Although eudemonistically meaningless work is not alone in subverting personal autonomy, it merits particular attention in light of the impact that work has on a person, even outside the workplace. Work molds a person and stands to impart a cluster of moral and personal goods and virtues that are integral in a good life, including self-respect, honor, dignity, pride and intellectual development; work is also a primary avenue through which people achieve recognition for the exercise of skills, make contributions in communities, and achieve a sense of purpose and personal identity, among other goods.[3] With respect to autonomy and freedom, not only does an erosion of autonomous agency in work stand to damage skills and proclivities needed for full personal autonomy, as I focus on here, but escaping meaningless work also bears an intuitive association with achieving freedom. As E. F. Schumacher observes in *Good Work* of wanting to avoid the rat race, to not be enslaved by machines and bureaucracies, to avoid becoming a moron, a robot, a commuter or a fragment of a person, to do one's own thing, to deal with people, to respect that people, nature and beauty and wholeness matter and to care about what matters—these strivings are simultaneously a longing for freedom and a longing for an escape from work without meaning.[4]

Work also merits attention from feminist philosophers for whom oppression is a quintessential topic of interest and for whom an ideal of autonomy can serve as "a normative standpoint for critically assessing oppressive social conditions that suppress or prevent the emergence of autonomy."[5] Appreciating the ways
p. 282 women often lack autonomy in relation to work illuminates key elements ↳ of the oppression of women, particularly given the preponderance of time that oppressed women spend at work. A woman whose days (and nights—often enough) are spent slaving in a factory assembly line, a sweatshop, or a Foxconn plant may suffer several faces of oppression, but her oppression as a worker is paramount in her life and transcends mere exploitation as an underpaid employee. Her work may be oppressive first in respects of being heteronomous: she may enter work under conditions of constraint; her work may bear no part of reflectively held life goals; and she may not even have the freedom of bodily movement at work.[6] Her work may also fail to permit a meaningful measure of economic independence or to help her support herself or her family, which she identifies as the very purpose of her working. And her work may undermine her autonomy furthermore in the respect that her employer requires that she only mechanically follow goals set by others, in the precise manner in which others determine—a lack of autonomy in work that yet further erodes her well-being.

A central issue for those who value autonomy is that aspects of autonomous agency remain a privilege for those fortunate to work in enlightened workplaces that value employee decision making and promote the development of employee skills. Many current workplace management structures treat adult workers as though they lack competency to exercise intelligence, skill, and autonomous capacities, thus relieving employees of the need to make decisions, design goals, or determine methods by which to accomplish goals at work. Such ugly skepticism about the abilities of working people is a hallmark of the fairly influential principles of scientific management forwarded by Fredrick Taylor,[7] which stand in a basic tension with modes of working life that support autonomous development and self-realization. The Tayloristic assumption that employees enter workplaces with settled levels of intelligence and ability also merits rejection in light of more recent empirical literatures on work and well-being, which I discuss further herein and which indicate that work itself affects the development of a range of capabilities, including capabilities for self-direction, which can be nurtured or stifled by working conditions.

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p. 283 In essence, a commitment on the part of a community to promoting human flourishing and autonomous agency entails a commitment to respecting the agency and dignity of people at work and a commitment to organizing work so that people can exercise agency and skills in occupational life. This goal does not necessarily entail Marxism, but it does entail opposing Taylorism and oppressive forms of work in which employers take dim views of the decision-making abilities of workers, in which workers consequently have scant opportunities to exercise thought, skill or judgment on the job, in which workers become effectively reduced from human agents into tools or appendages of machines, or in which workers are treated as cheap, expendable, interchangeable resources. Structuring working life around a goal of developing and exercising human capabilities harmonizes with a number of basic ethical principles and traditions, including eudemonistic ethical traditions originating with Aristotle and continuing with John Stuart Mill, which emphasize developing human capabilities as part of achieving happiness or flourishing. Outside of eudemonistic traditions, the Dalai Lama, for instance, expresses a principle of prioritizing people over profit with his typical simplistic elegance, writing that in modern life "human beings act like machines whose function is to make money. This is absolutely wrong. The purpose of making money is the happiness of humankind, not the other way round. Humans are not for money, money is for humans."[8]

In looking here at autonomy and work, I connect the development and exercise of human capabilities in work not only with eudemonistic ethics but also with the principle of humanity formulation of Kant's categorical imperative, which, as some scholars emphasize, requires treating the humanity in a person as an end and never as a mere means.[9] The imperative of never using humanity as a mere means is typically taken to mean that we should never violate the autonomy of rational human beings. But, as Thomas Hill observes, the imperative to treat humanity *in* a person as an end is more than a quaint way of saying that we must respect people or respect the ability of people to make their own choices concerning their lives.[10] Rather, in
p. 284 referencing the humanity in a person, the imperative means that we must treat the rational ↳ and autonomous *capabilities* of persons as ends. As Kant himself writes in *Groundwork for a Metaphysics of Morals*, "There are in humanity [Menschheit] capacities for greater perfection which form part of nature's purpose for humanity in our person." Failing to develop these capacities is not compatible with treating humanity as an end in itself; thus, there is a duty to develop one's talents.[11]

In the context of working life, this interpretation of the categorical imperative is nothing short of revolutionary, for it entails not merely that we have a duty to respect an individual's choice of employment but also that the development of human capabilities should be a goal of the provision of work. That is, if work were structured to treat the humanity in a person as an end and never as a mere means, then it would not be morally permissible to treat people as objects, machines, or appendages of machines, and diminishing the rational, autonomous and agential capabilities of a person for the sake of profit, productivity or efficiency would also run outside the bounds of the ethical. On the account I forward here, it is fundamentally a matter of ethics, and in particular a matter of respecting people as autonomous beings, to treat workers with dignity and to promote modes of working life that provide opportunities for people to flourish, develop agential capacities, and reinforce self-respect. I begin with some key distinctions concerning autonomy and work, pulling together a case that laboring extensively at eudemonistically meaningless work undermines workers' autonomous abilities and self-respect.

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1. Work, Autonomy, and Self-respect

In considering elements of autonomy in relation to work, let us make a basic distinction at the start among autonomously chosen work, achieving autonomy as economic independence through work, and exercising autonomous agency in work. In the literature on work, some thinkers focus on the first concept, characterizing autonomous work as work that is freely entered into, or as work that is chosen because its end product constitutes a major life goal.[12] On this view, if someone reflectively determines that her personal well-being includes educating the young, creating art, or promoting health in her community, then choosing to teach, paint, or provide health care constitutes autonomous work. By contrast, heteronomous work has been characterized as work whose end ↳ product has not been chosen as a major goal; heteronomous work is work that one is constrained to perform for any number of reasons that do not stem from one's own personal goals, such as needing money for other life goals, satisfying others' expectations, or even following God's directive.[13] As John White observes, most work done in the world is heteronomous. People work because they must, and what most people do at work does not meet reflectively held personal life goals. In Section 2, I return to the concept of autonomously chosen work in addressing the notion—which I find dubious—that an autonomous choice to enter an agency-depriving occupation lends moral credence to the working arrangement.

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Particularly for those whose work lacks internal rewards or whose work in itself is not a personal life goal, the hope of earning a livelihood or providing for a family provides purpose to work and a point to what one endures on the job. Although earning an income does not itself entail full economic independence, an income and associated benefits can provide a measure of independence and a source of pride, self-respect, and dignity. These virtues issue from work both in the respect that work represents a social contribution and in the respect that work enables a person to avoid relying on others, which places her under the will of others whose goodwill could potentially cease at any time. Among others, Paul Gomberg notes that lacking recognition as an economic contributor undermines personal dignity and self-esteem and that in the United States this moral and psychological pain has not been distributed equally across races: "In the United States for the past 50 years, black people have suffered twice the rate of unemployment as whites. The scars of this assault on people's dignity are deep in many neighborhoods."[14]

The concept of autonomy as economic independence is entangled with notions of autonomy no longer fashionable, as feminist philosophers have duly critiqued conceptions of autonomy as independence as drawn from male biographies and bound up with socially atomistic conceptions of human beings. Some also observe that an ideal of autonomy as economic self-reliance is manipulated in political rhetoric and used to justify denying welfare assistance to poor women, whose need to raise young children renders ideals of independence and self-sufficiency unattainable. Lorraine Code writes that "in the politics and rhetorics of social welfare…an assumed equality of access to social goods, that requires no advocacy, underwrites the belief that failure to achieve autonomy is a social sin.… Reliance on social services slides rhetorically into a weakness, a dependence on social advocacy that, paradoxically, invites—and receives—judgments of moral turpitude."[15] Insofar as a regulative ↳ ideal of autonomy as economic independence or self-sufficiency expresses a political ideology that is simultaneously oppressive and unattainable, the feminist thinker may be inclined to simply shelve the notion in a dustbin of dated ideas or to work to supplant the concept of self-sufficiency with one of supportive interdependence.

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I will not spend much time here on the concept of autonomy as economic independence, but I would pause to note, first, that we should observe a distinction between personal autonomy and economic autonomy:[16] some feminist philosophers see economic autonomy as a dimension of personal autonomy that women have good reason to seek,[17] although others lay emphasis on morally problematic implications of a social ethos of financial independence.[18] I would also emphasize that in the present time, in which Wal-Mart, the most powerful corporation on the planet has been likened to a profiteering monster, it is not irrelevant to the

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oppression of workers that they toil at jobs that do not enable financial independence. At the same time that a purpose of work—deeply felt as such among many everyday people—is to achieve a measure of financial independence to support oneself and one's family, one of the major scandals of our time is that many employees of profitable corporations cannot manage a living above poverty lines. Some Wal-Mart employees require public assistance to survive,[19] and women work full-time in garment factories, assembly lines, call centers, and fast food operations and other restaurants, among other places, yet still cannot adequately feed their children because of low wages and diminishing benefits that exploit workers as human
p. 287 resources ↳ in the most degrading sense of the term; that is, workers become tools of profit for others.[20] So it is not the case that a social sin of failing to achieve self-reliant independence falls on women or men who fail to work enough but rather that a social sin falls on corporations that net enormous profits and that can afford to pay adequate wages and benefits but instead place profit ahead of people. Finally, if the notion of autonomy as economic independence remains dated and problematic, it also remains perversely relevant in illuminating an appreciable dimension of oppression in relation to work—one distinct from autonomous work as freely chosen and from autonomous agency in work itself.

For a picture of work that permits neither economic autonomy nor autonomous agency in work, the reader may consider the work portrayed in *Fast Food Women*, in which filmmaker Anne Lewis records women employees whose nearly every move behind the counter and in the kitchen is predetermined by management, including the number of times a skillet is shook and the number of times pieces of chicken are rolled in batter. At KFC, the function of the female employee is to count to seven as she shakes a skillet and to count to ten as she rolls chicken in batter, on the assumption that it is best for quality control, and ultimately for company profit, that fast food women be relieved of the need to think or make judgments about cooking.[21] Managers of a Druthers restaurant in Whitesburg, Kentucky, comment in the film that the work is not the sort that a married man would seek out, in part because it does not pay a living wage and carries no benefits. Rather, the work is suitable for a woman who will derive a sense of accomplishment from completing a job while following orders and whose father or husband perhaps has good pay and benefits through his coal-mining occupation or other work.[22]

p. 288 ## Autonomous Agency in Work

Work can also support or stifle autonomous agency in the respect that work itself permits opportunities for conceiving and carrying out projects, making decisions, exercising judgment, taking responsibility for decisions, forming goals, planning methods by which to accomplish goals, adjusting goals and methods in light of experience, and other aspects of autonomous agency. This aspect of autonomous agency in work is crucial to consider for a few reasons. First, empirical literatures on work and well-being indicate that the intrinsic features of work (i.e., what happens in work itself) have a more profound effect on worker well-being than the extrinsic features of work, such as wages, job security, and equality of opportunity for positions.[23] Opportunities within work to exercise abilities, learn new skills, take initiative, and make independent judgments have more influence on mental health and happiness than extrinsic aspects of work for the reason that, as James Bernard Murphy summarizes, "personal happiness and well-being are produced more by what people do than by what they possess: above a certain minimum income, differences in the enjoyment of work are more important than differences in income for overall happiness."[24] In examining the impact of full-time unskilled, routine occupations on mental health, Arthur Kornhauser writes in a classic study that "conditions of work and accompanying modes of life at lower skill levels do, in fact, impose more severe deprivations, frustrations and feelings of hopelessness....Workers in better positions experience a greater degree of fulfillment of their wants and enjoy correspondingly greater feelings of satisfaction, adequacy, and self-regard."[25]

Second, as indicated in empirical and philosophical literatures on the impact of work on the person, a lack of opportunities for autonomous agency within work undermines the personal autonomy of workers *even off*

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the job. In a study identified as marking the beginning of the contemporary study of industrial-organizational psychology,[26] Kornhauser examines mental health among workers in the Detroit automobile
p. 289 industry, finding that ↳ individuals working extensively at routine production jobs tend to have poor mental health and, in particular, diminished drives toward accomplishing self-determined life goals. Kornhauser finds that this diminishing of personal autonomy occurs with respect not only to personal work or career goals but also to nonworking life:

> The general level of purposive striving and active orientation to life is relatively low among factory men and lower in the routine production groups than among those doing more skilled and varied work.... Factory employment, especially in routine production tasks, does give evidence of extinguishing workers' ambition, initiative, and purposeful direction toward life goals.
>
> Our own results present repeated illustrations; the unsatisfactory mental health of working people consists in no small measure of their dwarfed desires and deadened initiative, reduction of their goals and restriction of their efforts to a point where life is relatively empty and only half meaningful.[27]

In contrast with those whose jobs require skill and involve a variety of tasks and responsibilities—who have the highest mental health scores—factory workers whose jobs are automated, regimented, and repetitive tend to experience a debilitating grind, lower self-esteem and weakened personal ambition and initiative, among other mental health problems.[28] Insofar as extensive employment in routine unskilled work undermines purposeful direction toward life goals, not to mention deadening initiative and dwarfing desires, such work undermines an important aspect of autonomous agency. As Marina Oshana characterizes a basic intuition about autonomous personhood, "the autonomous person formulates certain goals as relevant to the direction of her life, and is able to pursue these goals and make them effective in action."[29] Kornhauser notes that it is not only factory workers who suffer from diminished drives to accomplish personal goals, as many types of jobs can damage workers psychologically and as mental health has many roots, ranging from personal background and upbringing to present life circumstances. But the evidence of his study shows genuine effects of job conditions on mental health, particularly with respect to opportunities to for workers to exercise skill and abilities on the job.[30]

p. 290 Additionally, in longitudinal studies of workers in a variety of occupations conducted over ten years, Melvin Kohn and Carmi Schooler show that dimensions of work not only reflect but also affect the personalities and intellectual abilities of workers, effectively overturning assumptions that personalities and abilities of workers emerge in final form before careers begin or that workers remain psychologically unaffected by what happens at work.[31] According to Kohn and Schooler, a reciprocal relationship between work and personality pertains both to levels of intelligence and to aspects of autonomous agency, including initiative and self-direction:

> In industrial society, where occupation is central to men's lives, occupational experiences that facilitate or deter the exercise of self-direction come to permeate men's views, not only of work and of their role in work, but also of the world and of self.... The conditions of occupational life at lower social-stratification levels...foster a narrowly circumscribed conception of self and society, and promote the valuation of conformity to authority. Conditions of work that foster thought and initiative tend to enlarge men's conceptions of reality; conditions of constraint tend to narrow them.[32]

In brief, complex work that permits self-direction fosters intellectual flexibility and autonomous self-conceptions among workers, whereas work that is routine, that is closely supervised, and that does not permit exercise of skill, intelligence, or self-direction encourages both conformity to authority and narrow conceptions of self among workers. Forms of work at lower social stratification levels often preclude

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autonomy in work in the respect that workers pursue goals determined by others, in ways that others deem appropriate, where often, as Adina Schwartz adds, "even the order in which [workers] perform operations, the pace at which they work, and the particular bodily movements they employ are largely determined by others' decisions."[33]

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Work and Self-respect

But why might a lack of autonomy in work foster a lack of autonomy in the worker herself? Some philosophers writing on work appeal here to connections among work, identity, and self-respect. For instance, in arguing that liberal political philosophers and recognition theorists owe greater attention to work, Beate Roessler highlights that work bears upon practical identity: work "has an influence on how we live, on who we are, and how we see ourselves."[34] Work affects our relations with others and with ourselves, and in light of the impact of work on identity it can hardly be pretended that "we can switch easily between different roles and forget…the sort of work we have been doing for hours. In a social context in which work dominates people's lives and plays a central role in identity formation, it is implausible to think that alienated work would have no impact on a person's self-conception and her relations with others in other spheres of life, and that she could simply choose, without cost, to undertake alienated work in order to autonomously pursue other interests."[35]

Some also argue that a lack of autonomy in work can undermine personal autonomy by undermining the self-respect or self-worth of employees. When workplaces preempt employee decision making, script employee attitudes, determine the precise ordering and pace of workplace operations, monitor employee activities, and subject employees to "close, intrusive supervision and constant correction (or the threat of it)," Richard Lippke writes, workplaces become inimical to "individuals developing and maintaining a sense of themselves as worthy of autonomy."[36] By contrast, workplace practices that convey trust for employees and that give employees latitude to make decisions—which entails giving employees a chance to make mistakes or do wrong—convey that employees are worthy of autonomy. And "encouraging an individual to believe he is *worthy* of autonomy may be, in the end, the most effective way of protecting his autonomy."[37]

Along similar lines, John Rawls notes that meaningful work provides a key source of self-respect, writing more than once in his later works that "the lack of…the opportunity for meaningful work and occupation is destructive…of citizens' self-respect" and suggesting for this reason that society serve as an employer of
p. 292 last resort.[38] Self-respect derives partly from the esteem of others ↳ and, in particular, from the judgments of our associates concerning the worth of our activities: "unless our endeavors are appreciated by our associates it is impossible for us to maintain the conviction that they are worthwhile."[39] Although in *A Theory of Justice* Rawls suggests that nonworking social life can provide social esteem for worthy endeavors, in turn providing a social basis of self-respect,[40] he shifts in *The Law of the Peoples* and in the introduction to the paperback edition of *Political Liberalism* to suggest that, in particular, opportunities for meaningful work are needed to provide a social basis for citizens' self-respect. As Jeffrey Moriarty interprets this shift, Rawls comes to reject an assumption at play in *A Theory of Justice* that meaningful work provides but one avenue for a social basis of self-respect, which presumably could be achieved in leisure activities for those whose work fails to provide a sense of self-worth; at the time of his later works Rawls instead believes that "we cannot merely hope that if people cannot find meaningful work, they can get self-respect from other activities, such as chess or softball."[41]

To be sure, work is not the only avenue by which a person can achieve self-respect, enjoy the exercise of realized capacities, or experience autonomous self-expression. It is possible that some people may acquire these basic goods in leisure activities, although the empirical literature indicates that such a possibility is slim: people tend to "apply the habit developed at work to their leisure: mindless work leads to mindless leisure whereas challenging work leads to challenging leisure."[42] But in any case a mere possibility that a

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person can live a richly autonomous life without eudemonistically meaningful work is hardly sufficient ground for an argument concerning questions of work and social justice, which beckon us to consider what social structures are likely to produce or encourage in human persons. The possibility—advanced by White—that rich self-centered fainéants can live autonomously and find personal fulfillment in a round of leisure
p. 293 activities avails very little in my mind.[43] ↳ A life lived meaningfully in relation to others involves work, whether within or outside the home, and for most of us it is work that absorbs a predominance of productive energies and permits key opportunities for others' recognition and esteem, without which self-respect is liable to collapse.[44] For the reason that, as Rawls suggests, work provides an important source of social esteem that serves as a social basis of self-respect, those who perform work that does not merit esteem—such as work that is viewed as dirty, disgusting, or degraded—can in turn develop a sense of themselves as degraded and lowly people. Michael Walzer writes in conveying the work of sociologist Stewart E. Perry, "When a garbage-man feels stigmatized by the work he does…the stigma shows in his eyes. He enters 'into collusion with us to avoid contaminating us with his lowly self.' He looks away; and we do too. 'Our eyes do not meet. He becomes a non-person.'"[45]

2. The Dehumanization of Eudemonistically Meaningless Work

A lack of autonomous agency in work undermines the flourishing of a worker in yet another crucial respect, namely, that work is often experienced as dehumanizing when it fails to permit development or exercise of autonomous capabilities or skills, or expression of individual agency or identities. This experience occurs particularly—but not exclusively—in forms of automated, mechanized, or regimented work, which depletes the humanity of a person by making the person feel like an automated thing. At issue here is the Tayloristic outsourcing of thinking and skill that a person would otherwise put into working, thereby determining that workers will not act like thinking, skill-exercising human beings while on the job and thereby that workers are not valued as special and irreplaceable people but rather that people can be treated as interchangeable cheap human resources.[46]

p. 294 Some readers will see this point as Marxist since Marx critiques industrial forms of work as mutilating human persons into fragments and calls on the potential of work to offer a person an objectification of his individual humanness in the world. But the previous point would be better catalogued as a Kantian critique of Taylorism, and it is important to observe that the basic idea that work bereft of individual agency dehumanizes the person derives from a variety of intellectual traditions,[47] and one does not need to be schooled in Marxism to appreciate it. When Studs Terkel interviewed workers for his tome *Working*, he compiled a collection of experiences of dehumanization in jobs that diminish or restrict the potential of workers to conceive, plan, imagine, solve problems, or otherwise think creatively or constructively or move about freely at work:

> "I'm a machine," says the spot-welder. "I'm caged," says the bank teller, and echoes the hotel clerk. "I'm a mule," says the steelworker. "A monkey can do what I do," says the receptionist. "I'm less than a farm implement," says the migrant worker. "I'm an object," says the high fashion model. Blue collar and white call upon the identical phrase: "I'm a robot."[48]

I would argue that what is fundamentally at play here is not merely that workers are discontented, as Terkel himself suggests, but rather also that as a human activity working has a basic ambiguity of agency and utility, insofar as work simultaneously allows one to conceive and carry out projects, thus exercising agency, as well as to feel useful in serving needs and desires, thus exercising utility. When elements of human agency and freedom are taken from work, work degenerates from a meaningful experience of feeling oneself useful through an engagement of one's mind or body in the world, into an experience of feeling like a cog in a machine, or like a robot, an animal, or an implement.

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Work can feel meaningless for several reasons—including a futile outcome, an apparent lack of purpose, or a failure to engage an individual's talents, intellectual capabilities, or artisan skills—but among the several facets of meaningless work, dehumanization and degradation stand out in undermining a meaningful experience of work. This dehumanization issues partly from a proliferation of automation in working life, which requires not that an employee act as a person exercising human capabilities but only that she use her
p. 295 voice, her hands, or her legs, as determined by a system.[49] But dehumanization and ↳ degradation also occur outside of repetitive automated work in work in which people act or serve as implements, parts or objects, as when women are used in prostitution or pornographic films and other media, and when women or men serve as towel holders, toiletry dispensers,[50] or signposts. The employment of *people* to stand on street corners with signs reading "hot and ready" to attract consumers into pizza parlors (which is a standard marketing strategy of Little Caesar's in the area in which I live) does not cohere with human dignity. This kind of employment reduces the worker to functioning as a thing, makes a mockery of the human capacities of a person, and fails to permit virtues associated with work, such as honor or pride, on account of a lack of agency required for the work.

Some may argue that characterizing oppressed workers as tools is mistaken and overlooks an indelible element of autonomous agency exercised in an individual's choice to enter a particular employment. To be sure, choice of employment does represent a basic dimension of autonomy in relation to work and, more broadly, reflectively made choices figure prominently in many accounts of autonomy. But even if we often have reason to respect individual choices, we also have reason to be skeptical when appeals to the value of individual choice serve to justify the distribution of limited goods in competitive social and economic environments. In particular, we have reason to be skeptical of attempts to justify someone's working at an oppressive job by appeal to the fact of her having chosen to work at such a position. As a philosophical or rhetorical maneuver intended to sanctify an employment relationship, an appeal to individual choice or consent appears dubious if systemic inequalities limit available opportunities in the first place, and this maneuver flounders when the forms of work in question are inherently unchoiceworthy, such that a certain amount of coercion must be present to force workers with few or no alternatives into such occupations.[51]

p. 296 As Gomberg notes in criticizing Ronald Dworkin, asserting that a person occupies a social position as a result of past choices primarily serves an ideological purpose as "a moral sanctification of a social order," but there is a basic error in transferring moral concepts of praiseworthiness or blameworthiness into social contexts in which basic goods exist in limited supply.[52] As Gomberg has it, in a competitive economic system in which employment is a limited good, the functioning of state bureaucracies that handle unemployment depends on a large percentage of the unemployed living in a state of discouragement. In such a context, rhetoric to the effect that those who are unemployed choose to avoid the unemployment line —and thus have only themselves to blame for their condition—provides an appearance of justification of the state of things but obscures social forces, institutions and policies that cause a certain percentage of unemployment in the first place.[53]

Some readers may reach here for a stock distinction made in the context of Kantian ethics, wherein it is commonly noted that it is not wrong to treat a person as a means (as happens in work of all sorts) but wrong to treat him as a mere means, which disrespects his capabilities as an autonomous, rational agent, who as such must make his own decisions free from manipulation and coercion. In illuminating this notion, some ethicists quickly clarify that it is not morally objectionable, for example, to use a plumber to fix a broken pipe drain, as long as the plumber understands the situation and chooses, from his own will, to participate in the employment.[54] This clarification and illustration is, in fact, crafty in avoiding pervasive moral ambiguity, insofar as the worker in this example is one who uses intelligence and agency while on the job, making decisions and judgments in the context of exercising competency as a craftsman. The plumber who is employed freely and fairly and who exercises developed skills to solve problems, to install materials, or to make repairs is not exploited as a tool in the manner in which a factory hand or a sweatshop worker are

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oppressed as relatively expendable, interchangeable tools of production.[55] Even if all were to exercise
p. 297 agency in an initial choice of ↳ employment, not all exercise agency in employment, and not all are equally exploited. And focusing on an exercise of autonomous agency in an initial choice of employment obscures ways work can itself undermine or enhance autonomous agency.

To be clear then, it is not the fact of being utilized as an instrument of production that is itself at issue. Being instrumental in producing, serving, creating, and fabricating lies in the nature of working—a fact also revealed through meditation on the meaning of *employment*—wherein one often finds satisfaction in making oneself useful, being purposeful, or being a means of achieving something of value. Rather, it is being used extensively as a tool, an implement, an object or a body, wherein a person is not also simultaneously expressing agency, which is dehumanizing. It is also dehumanizing to be treated as an expendable resource or to toil in a system as a nonthinking tool of production for several hours a day, which after time damages the body and mind and depletes intelligence and other human capabilities. When the working day is limited and one has opportunities to flourish outside of eudemonistically meaningless work, perhaps being a tool of production at work need not be felt as altogether dehumanizing. However, there are some for whom oppressive work effectively predominates life, as when one labors at eudemonistically meaningless work for sixteen hours a day, whether at one job or two, and here a person is likely to feel depleted of humanity or human vitality, and effectively transformed into a means for others. Oppression at work clearly comes in degrees.

It is also interesting to consider, as I mentioned above, that some interpreters of Kant argue that in giving an imperative to treat humanity as an end an never as a mere means, Kant himself lays emphasis on respecting the humanity in persons, that is, on respecting the rational and autonomous abilities within persons. Thomas Hill observes Kant repeating that respecting people as ends requires treating "the humanity in a person" as an end and never as a mere means.[56] The familiar dictum of treating persons as ends represents an abbreviation of treating humanity in persons as ends, Hill argues, and for Kant humanity represents a characteristic of persons, whose distinguishing features include the rational capabilities of setting ends and forming goals. In interpreting the principle of humanity formulation of the categorical
p. 298 imperative, Allen Wood also writes that the basic issue for Kant is that we disrespect ↳ humanity in placing things of lesser value ahead of our rational nature, which constitutes our humanity and which is an end in itself.[57]

What would it require of a human community to treat the humanity in a person as an end? In the context of work, it would entail that a goal of work be the development or exercise of the rational, autonomous, and agential capabilities of a person and that diminishing these gifts as a means for achieving economic values of profit or productivity or increasing efficiency is outside moral bounds. That is, the full realization of a moral imperative to treat the humanity in a person as a end would entail a revolution in modern economic life, which as presently structured often demands not that work serve the end of developing and exercising human capabilities but that "the worker adapt himself to the needs of the work—which means, of course, primarily to the needs of the machine."[58] It may be hard to fathom such a moral departure from present economic realities. But, as we know, implementing the categorical imperative can entail such radical transformations in human practices that, in a specific historical moment in which people are enveloped and enculturated in immoralities, meeting moral demands can appear bewilderingly near impossible. As Wood writes, the formula of using humanity as an end and never only as a means "is rather like the Sermon on the Mount...whose demands require such a radical departure from our customary practices and accepted attitudes toward ourselves and others that we are at first perplexed when we try to apply them."[59]

Some may see this call for ethical transformation in economic life as simply tantamount to rejecting capitalism and calling for communism or Marxism in its stead. In response, I note that Marx provides one rich source of criticism of meaningless work in capitalist economies, but pigeonholing criticism of meaningless work as Marxist overlooks a few facts. First, it overlooks the convergence of a plurality of

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philosophical and religious traditions around the importance of work in realizing part of the human good. Second, this pigeonholing overlooks the possibility for meaningful work in the context of capitalist employment relationships. The question of whether capitalism contains an inherent proclivity toward depriving people of autonomous agency depends partly on the ethical values paired with it and partly on whether the pursuit of profitability, productivity and efficiency is pure and unbridled, or limited and tempered by a respect for autonomy and other human values. Third, identifying meaningful work with communism overlooks the variegated realities of alienated labor under communist conditions: as James Bernard Murphy observes, in both capitalism and in communism "the worker is often treated as a mere
p. 299 instrument, a factor of production, rather than as the subject of his ↳ or her work.... When Charlie Chaplin satirized the mindless monotony of the assembly line in *Modern Times* (1936), he was denounced in the United States as an enemy of capitalism and in Russia as an enemy of socialism—and in a sense he was guilty on both counts."[60] In essence, promoting modes of working life that provide opportunities for people to flourish reaches beyond traditional bifurcations between capitalism and communism, implanting ethics at the seat of economic life and requiring respect for the exercise of agency in working life.

If it is bewildering to imagine economics structured around a goal of human development, I think it is also edifying to consider the bounds of moral progress that workplaces have already achieved in some quarters of the world in the twenty-first century. Consider, for instance, that it is now commonplace to maintain as workplace ideals—and to instantiate in practice in varying measures—rational and fair hiring processes, nondiscriminatory and harassment-free workplace environments, equitable wages and freedom from threats, and abuse and profanity while on the job. According to historian Stanford Jacoby, not one of these ideals was in place in the United States over a century ago, when the dominant mode of the production of commodities was the factory system, in which foremen used close supervision, abuse, profanity, and threats to motivate faster and harder work and in which work was highly insecure, very poorly paid, fraught with pay inequities and ethnic discrimination, and not uncommonly secured through nepotism, favoritism, and bribery.[61] Some of us live in a workplace utopia in comparison with the factories of the late 1800s, at which time it would have been difficult to see possibilities for the sort of change that is now a becoming reality, and it should not therefore be said in thinking about working life as we know it that work just is what it is. Appreciating moral progress in working life highlights abilities of human communities to transcend and reinvent workplace structures and leads us toward a position of open-mindedness in
p. 300 entertaining long-range ↳ possibilities for transforming elements of working life that stifle autonomous development or undermine human dignity.

Elsewhere, I further explore work and human flourishing, addressing additional ethical, social, and political implications of the formative influence of work on people.[62] In bringing this chapter to a close, I highlight that workplace structures and practices are not invariable elements of a natural order but rather change over time, and an understanding of the impact of work on autonomous development and self-realization can guide transformations of workplace goals and structures so that working can become more meaningful, or at least less oppressive, for more people. I also underscore in closing that an initial autonomous choice of occupation by no means exhausts the intersections between autonomy and work, and focusing only on autonomous choice of occupation constrains perceptions of ways Tayloristic forms of work undermine the development and exercise of autonomous capacities. Given that autonomous capacities are developed, or stifled, within social contexts including work, a democratic commitment to supporting the development and exercise of people's autonomous capacities entails an opposition to eudemonistically meaningless forms of work, which stifle worker autonomy and well-being.

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Acknowledgments

I would especially like to thank Mark Piper and Erin Tarver for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. This paper has also been enriched by discussions at the Relational Autonomy Workshop organized by Natalie Stoljar and Catriona Mackenzie, held in Montreal in September 2012, and at the conference on Work and Human Development organized by Nick Smith and Jean-Philippe Deranty, held in Sydney in September 2011.

Notes

1 Some of the literature on meaningful work focuses on eudemonistic dimensions of meaningful work, that is, on the potential of work to contribute to human flourishing by developing or exercising capabilities or skills, by fostering independent judgment in performance of tasks, or by integrating conception and execution for a feeling of personal satisfaction at work. See, e.g., James Bernard Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor: Aristotelian Themes in Economic Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993); Adrian Walsh, "Meaningful Work as a Distributive Good," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* 32 (1994): 233–250 10.1111/j.2041-6962.1994.tb00713.x . In a monograph I am now working on, provisionally titled *Meaningful Work*, I argue that meaningful work has several dimensions, and eudemonistic dimensions of meaningful work are integral but not exhaustive in an account of what makes work meaningful. In addition to being eudemonistically meaningful, work can be meaningful in serving a purpose, creating something of enduring value, reflecting personal life goals or values, or integrating otherwise disparate elements of a worker's life. Developing or exercising human capabilities in eudemonistically meaningful work exhibits agency, but as I understand it agency extends beyond developing or exercising human capabilities to encompass, for instance, expressions of values, principled commitments, character, personality, creativity, or individuality; agency at work stands in contrast with observation, passivity, merely following orders, or feeling like a cog.

2 In *Meaningful Work*, I am broadly interested in work in its relation to human flourishing, which requires the realization of human capabilities and the possession of a plurality of goods. My focus here is work in relation to autonomous agency, which I understand to be a component of human flourishing. For a good discussion of the components of human flourishing, see Douglas Rasmussen, "Human Flourishing and Human Nature," in *Human Flourishing*, edited by Ellen Frankel Paul, Fred D. Miller, Jr., and Jeffrey Paul (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 10.1017/CBO9780511570704 , especially 1–21.

3 For a fuller list of goods that attach to work, see Andrea Veltman, "Is Meaningful Work Available to All People?" in *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, forthcoming. Consider also what one occupational psychiatrist writes: "It is possible that no single activity defines adulthood more specifically than work. To a large extent work influences how and where an individual lives, it affects social contacts and family activities, and it provides a title, role, and environment that shape and reinforce an individual's identity." Nick Kates, Barrie Greiff, M.D., and Duane Hagen, M.D., *The Psychosocial Impact of Job Loss* (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Press, 1990), 185. See also the work of Al Gini, such as A. Gini and T. Sullivan, "Work: The Process and the Person," *Journal of Business Ethics* 6 (1987): 649–655 10.1007/BF00705781 .

4 E. F. Schumacher, *Good Work* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979), 50.

5 Marilyn Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003) 10.1093/0195138503.001.0001 , 19.

6 Consider, e.g., what Ruth Cavendish, *Women on the Line* (London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1982), writes about her experience working in a car parts factory in England: on the assembly line "we couldn't do the things you would normally not think twice about, like blowing your nose or flicking hair out of your eyes; that cost valuable seconds—it wasn't included in the layout so no time was allowed for it. In any case, your hands were usually full" (41). "The women ran the line, but we were also just appendages to it. The discipline was imposed automatically....We just slotted in, like cogs in a wheel. Every movement we made and every second of our time was controlled by the line..." (107).

7 Taylorism is the idea that workplace managers increase efficiency, productivity, predictability, worker accountability, and control over working processes by extracting knowledge and skills from workers, subsequently reducing worker skill and knowledge to simple and discrete formulate so that production can be performed by "men who are of smaller caliber and attainments and who are therefore cheaper than those required under the old system." F. W. Taylor, *Shop Management* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1912), 105.

8 His Holiness the Dalai Lama, *How to Practice the Way to a Meaningful Life*, translated and edited by Jeffrey Hopkins (New

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York: Atria Books, 2002), 35. From the Catholic tradition, Pope Leo XIII gives a similar thought in writing that "it is shameful and inhuman, however, to use men as things for gain and to put no more value on them than what they are worth in muscle and energy." John Budd, *The Thought of Work* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 59.

9 Thomas Hill, *Dignity and Practical Reason in Kant's Moral Theory* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 38–46.

10 As Hill, *Dignity and Practical Reason*, 39, writes, "A review of Kant's repeated use of 'humanity in a person' in *The Metaphysics of Morals* and elsewhere strongly suggests that, contrary to the usual reading, Kant thought of humanity as a characteristic, or set of characteristics, of persons.... Humanity is contrasted with our animality; and it is said to be something entrusted to us for preservation.... Its distinguishing feature is said to be 'the power to set ends.'"

11 Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals,* translated by H. J. Paton (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 97–98; 97– Hill, *Dignity and Practical Reason*, 40.

12 John White, *Education and the End of Work: A New Philosophy of Work and Learning* (London: Cassell 1997), 48, defines autonomous work as "a form of activity whose end-product is chosen as a major goal of an autonomous agent"; cf. 5–10. A condensed version of the argument of this book appears in White, "Education, Work and Well-being," *Journal of Philosophy of Education* 31:2 (1997): 233–247 10.1111/1467-9752.00053 .

13 White, "Education, Work and Well-being," 234.

14 Paul Gomberg, *How to Make Opportunity Equal: Race and Contributive Justice* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007) 10.1002/9780470692431 , 70.

15 Lorraine Code, "The Perversion of Autonomy and the Subjection of Women: Discourses of Social Advocacy at Century's End," in *Relational Autonomy: Feminist Perspectives on Autonomy, Agency and the Social Self*, edited by Catriona Mackenzie and Natalie Stoljar (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 194.

16 Diana Meyers, *Self, Society and Personal Choice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 12, distinguishes personal autonomy from economic autonomy, where the latter represents an ideal of financial self-sufficiency that people seek to prevent "the possibility that others might gain power over them through their needs. If one can take care of oneself, one is beholden to no one—neither to the state nor to any other individual. Thus, one is at liberty to live as one chooses." Friedman, *Autonomy, Gender, Politics*, 47–49, also writes that, although there is a "superficial resemblance" between philosophical conceptions of personal autonomy and conceptions of independence and self-sufficiency in popular understanding, personal autonomy and financial independence are distinct notions. On her account, financial independence is related to personal autonomy as a condition that can promote the realization of autonomy, but "financial independence is no constitutive part of autonomy," nor is it causally sufficient for it.

17 Marina Oshana, *Personal Autonomy in Society* (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2006), 87, identifies financial self-sufficiency as one of several social-relational properties of autonomy, arguing that a level of economic autonomy that enables a person to be independent of others is a requirement of personal autonomy. Simone de Beauvoir similarly acknowledges economic independence as a component of women's liberation.

18 See Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen K. Feder (eds.), *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002), particularly Iris Marion Young, "Autonomy, Welfare Reform and Meaningful Work," 40–60.

19 As given in social commentary such as Robert Greenwald (dir. and prod.), *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price* (Brave New Films, 2005).

20 Consider here the work of journalists such as Barbara Ehrenreich, *Nickel and Dimed: On (Not) Getting By in America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2001).

21 When interviewed in Anne Lewis, *Fast Food Women* (Appalshop Film, 1991), Barbara Garson contrasts the skill and flair exhibited in the work of a short order cook in a local diner of the 1950s with the Tayloristic principles of the late twentieth-century fast food industry—which essentially extract skills and knowledge from an original cohort of workers and transfers them into machines, systems, programs, and sets of rules for new employees, so that workers who are cheaper and more expendable need only follow beeps and buzzers, pull knobs, and turn cranks or perform other insignificant and mechanical movements of limbs. The short-order cook might whistle at work or swear at work but in any case exhibited a personality while at work; even if his or her work were largely routine, its details and execution were not predetermined and regimented by management. Similarly, in giving a portrait of his mother as a waitress, Mike Rose, *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004), chap. 1, suggests that waitressing permits skill, flair, and judgment, as waitresses develop and rely on complex memory and navigation skills and create order amid lunchtime chaos. But in the chain restaurant of the twenty-first century, even flare itself can become regimented when the dialogue and attitudes used for taking customer orders becomes scripted and when waiters and waitresses are asked by management to select a dozen pins and buttons to wear at work to exhibit "flair."

22 Lewis, *Fast Food Women*.

23 Murphy, *Moral Economy of Labor*, 2.

24 Murphy, *Moral Economy of Labor*, 4. According to recent empirical studies on income and happiness, in the contemporary United States $75, 000 is the level of income above which increases in income cease to correlate with increased

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experiences of happiness. Below $75, 000 (which is still quite high relative to what many workers earn), "a lack of money brings both emotional misery and low life evaluation," according to Princeton University professors Angus Deaton and Daniel Kahneman. See D. Kahneman and A. Deaton, "High Income Improves Evaluation of Life but not Well-Being," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 107:39: 16489–16493.

25 Arthur Kornhauser, *Mental Health of the Industrial Worker: A Detroit Study* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965) 269.

26 As characterized by M. J. Zickar, "Remembering Arthur Kornhauser: Industrial Psychology's Advocate for Worker Well-Being," *Journal of Applied Psychology* 88:2: 363–369 10.1037/0021-9010.88.2.363 ; M. Tausig and R. Fenwick, *Mental Health in Social Context* (New York: Springer, 2011), 3.

27 Kornhauser, *Mental Health of the Industrial Worker*, 252, 269–270.

28 Kornhauser, *Mental Health of the Industrial Worker*, 266–268.

29 Marina Oshana, "Personal Autonomy in Society," *Journal of Social Philosophy* 29:1 (Spring 1998): 82 10.1111/j.1467-9833.1998.tb00098.x .

30 As Kornhauser, *Mental Health of the Industrial Worker,* writes, "Many interrelated characteristics of jobs contribute jointly to the comparatively high or low average mental health of occupational groups.... By far the most influential attribute is the opportunity the work offers—or fails to offer—for use of the worker's abilities and for associated feelings of interest, sense of accomplishment, personal growth and self-respect" (263).

31 Melvin Kohn and Carmi Schooler, *Work and Personality* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1983), esp. 103.

32 Kohn and Schooler, *Work and Personality*, 33. Rather than using the term *autonomous agency*, Kohn and Schooler use the concept of *self-direction*, looking at occupational self-direction in relation to several facets of workers' personalities and social positions. Although the central concepts and topics of Kohn and Schooler's work do not fit squarely into the philosophical literature on autonomy, I believe there is enough conceptual overlap that the work of Kohn and Schooler bears relevance to certain questions that concern philosophers of autonomy.

33 Adina Schwartz, "Meaningful Work," *Ethics* 92 (1982): 634 10.1086/292380 . I am indebted to Schwartz particularly for her work in drawing together a case that work bears a formative influence on the worker. As I discuss at length in my book on meaningful work, however, I disagree with Schwartz on the role that the state should play in creating opportunities for meaningful work. Schwartz argues that we should ask for government measures to effect rearrangements in industrial employment and to enforce a moral imperative that no one should be employed in purely routine occupations that stunt autonomous development. See, e.g., Schwartz, "Meaningful Work, 645. In contrast, I argue that the formative thesis need not entail that we call upon the state to minimize meaningless work or promote meaningful work, and I examine other ways social institutions can promote meaningful work.

34 Beate Roessler, "Meaningful Work: Arguments from Autonomy," *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20:1 (2012): 82 10.1111/j.1467-9760.2011.00408.x .

35 Roessler, "Meaningful Work," 83.

36 Richard Lippke, "Work, Privacy and Autonomy," *Public Affairs Quarterly* 3:2 (April 1989): 44.

37 Lippke, "Work, Privacy and Autonomy," 43.

38 John Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, paperback edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), lix. Rawls repeats the idea in *Law of the Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 50. See also Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 440ff. On the importance of self-respect and self-worth for autonomy, see, e.g., Paul Benson, "Free Agency and Self-Worth," *Journal of Philosophy* 91 (1994): 650–668 10.2307/2940760 ; Joel Anderson and Axel Honneth, "Autonomy, Vulnerability, Recognition and Justice," in *Autonomy and the Challenges to Liberalism: New Essays*, edited by John Christman and Joel Anderson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 10.1017/CBO9780511610325 .

39 Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 440, cf. 544.

40 Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, 442.

41 Moriarty, "Rawls, Self-Respect, and the Opportunity for Meaningful Work," *Social Theory and Practice* 35:3 (July 2009): 450 10.5840/soctheorpract200935325 .

42 Murphy, *Moral Economy of Labor*, 4. Likewise, Kornhauser, *Mental Health of the Industrial Autoworker*, 267, notes that the leisure activities of factory workers in routine jobs tend to be narrow and routine, with little indication of self-development and self-expression or devotion to larger social purposes: "many appear to be groping for meaningful ways to fill their spare time but with little conception of the possibilities and with inadequate preparation or stimulation."

43 White, "Education, Work and Well-being," 241. On the whole, White advances an argument against writers like myself that autonomously chosen work is not a central element of the good life; he believes the possibility of living well without autonomous work should be reflected in social policy, which should "encourage a wide variety of ways of life in which autonomous work might—or might not—find a place" (241).

44 An integral connection between work and self-respect is argued for in a number of empirical and philosophical literatures.

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Moriarty, "Rawls, Self-Respect, and the Opportunity for Meaningful Work," 457n30, compiles a helpful list of literatures.

45 Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1983), 165. Walzer is here giving a point made by Stewart E. Perry, *San Francisco Scavengers: Dirty Work and the Pride of Ownership* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 7.

46 For but one example, consider the words of a former McDonald's griddle man interviewed in Barbara Garson, *The Electronic Sweatshop* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), 17, 20: "'They called us the Green Machine, ' says Jason Pratt, recently retired McDonalds' griddle man, "'cause the crew had green uniforms then. And that's what it is, a machine. You don't have to know how to cook, you don't have to know how to think. There's a procedure for everything and you just follow the procedures.... You follow the beepers, you follow the buzzers and you turn your meat as fast as you can. It's like I told you, to work at McDonald's you don't need a face, you don't need a brain. You need to have two hands and two legs and move 'em as fast as you can. That's the whole system. I wouldn't go back there again for anything.'" For a classic critique of dehumanizing aspects of automated and unskilled work in the twentieth century, see Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 25th anniv. ed. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998).

47 Consider the arguments of Adriano Tilgher, *Homo Faber: Work through the Ages* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1930); Schumacher, *Good Work*; or Pope John Paul II, *Laboren exercens*, Encyclical Letter, 1981.09.14.

48 Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2004 [1972]), xi–xii.

49 Even as automation creates jobs that are hardly set up for the exercise of individual worker ingenuity, pockets of ingenuity, creativity, and accomplishment can nevertheless emerge even in the context of performing automated work. Factory workers interviewed in Barbara Garson, *All the Livelong Day: The Meaning and Demeaning of Routine Work* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), ix–xvi, report on varied creative maneuvers they intersperse throughout the workday to achieve moments of ingenuity and feelings of purposefulness and fulfillment, such as allowing work to pile up to experience a few minutes of purposeful exertion in catching up, which creates opportunities for minor goals and fulfillments. But upsurges of worker creativity and purposeful exertion amid conditions of "speed, heat, humiliation, [and] monotony" likely demonstrates not that working on an assembly line provides meaning or fulfillment but, rather, that the human need for exercising agency, for reaching goals, for displaying some measure of individuality, and for feeling that one accomplishes a task creatively are basic enough in human well-being that workers find opportunities for these needs even on an assembly line.

50 As in the job of a washroom attendant, whose function is to wait on people in restrooms and to dispense towels and toiletries. One washroom attendant employed for fifteen years at the Chicago Palmer House, Louis Hayward, describes the physical work of waiting on men in restrooms as "an automatic thing....It doesn't require any thought. It's almost a reflex action. I set my toilet articles up, towels—and I'm ready." Terkel, *Working*, 106. In its social function, he believes his work serves to bolster the egos of bathroom visitors: when a man visits the restroom and receives an acknowledgment from the attendant, "it builds his ego up a little bit.... I'm building him up" (107).

51 The point is suggested by Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 165, who writes of jobs that are hard in the sense of being "harsh, unpleasant, cruel, difficult to endure" that they are like prison sentences in that people do not look for them and would not choose them if they face minimally attractive alternatives: "This kind of work is a negative good, and it commonly carries other negative goods in its train: poverty, insecurity, ill health, physical danger, dishonor and degradation. And yet it is socially necessary work; it needs to be done, and that means someone must be found to do it."

52 Gomberg, *How to Make Opportunity Equal*, 23.

53 Gomberg, *How to Make Opportunity Equal*, 23–24.

54 As in the widely used ethics textbook James Rachels and Stuart Rachels, *The Elements of Moral Philosophy*, 7th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2012), 138–139.

55 For a discourse on the intelligence and agency required for nonroutinized manual work, see Matthew Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin Press, 2009); Mike Rose, *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker* (New York: Penguin Books, 2004). For Crawford, the satisfactions of useful work accrue particularly to skilled practitioners of manual arts, like carpentry, plumbing, and motorcycle and car repair. Since these forms of work are necessarily situated in a particular context, they are inherently resistant to forms of external managerial or corporate control that undermine human agency and make work vulnerable to dehumanization and degradation. Building and fixing are embedded in a community in which the individual worker remains responsible for his or her own work and in which excellence at work comes with the exercise of judgment, the making of a social contribution, the feeling of pride in one's work, and the transformation of objective reality by one's own hands. Nonroutinized manual work demands intelligence; "the physical circumstances of the jobs performed by carpenters, plumbers and auto mechanics vary too much for them to be executed by idiots. One feels like a [person], not like a cog in a machine" (52–53).

56 Hill, *Dignity and Practical Reason*, 38–46, 10.

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57 Allen Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999) 10.1017/CBO9781139173254 , 143.

58 Schumacher, *Good Work*, 3.

59 Wood, *Kant's Ethical Thought*, 139.

60 Murphy, *Moral Economy of Labor*, 3–4. The prologue to Murphy, *Moral Economy of Labor* provides important clarification on the relationship between Taylorism and communism. Murphy notes, for instance, that "the detailed fragmentation of skilled labor into monotonous routine that once symbolized the horrors of capitalism became the basis of Soviet industry from Vladimir Lenin through Leonid Brezhnev. Indeed, Taylorism was more pervasive in Soviet Russia than it ever was in the United States" (3). Further, Murphy observes that the similar quality of the experience of work for the worker in both capitalist and socialist systems "leads apologists for both systems to emphasize distribution and exchange rather than the dignity of work. For example, one leading Marxist theoretician, John Roemer, says that if we were to focus on the labor process we would be forced to the bizarre conclusion that socialist countries exploit workers just as much as do capitalist countries" (3). See also Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*.

61 Jacoby "The Way It Was: Factory Labor before 1915," in *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions, and the Transformation of Work in the 20th Century*, rev. ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

62 Veltman, *Meaningful Work*, manuscript.

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