Article

PSC

Philosophy and Social Criticism
2015, Vol. 41(7) 725–747

DOI: 10.1177/0191453714556692
psc.sagepub.com
SAGE

Is meaningful work available to all people?

Andrea Veltman
James Madison University, Harrisonburg, VA, USA

Abstract

In light of the impact of work on human flourishing, an intractable problem for political theorists concerns the distribution of meaningful work in a community of moral equals. This article reviews a number of partial solutions that a well-ordered society could draw upon to provide equality of opportunity for eudemonistically meaningful work and to minimize the impact of bad work upon those who perform it. Even in view of these solutions, however, it is not likely that opportunities for meaningful work can be guaranteed for all people, which carries an implication that, even in well-ordered societies, it is likely that not all people will flourish. The author argues that the limitedness of meaningful work is not a reason to reject the normative claim that meaningful work is integral in flourishing, nor is it a reason against working to transform social and political institutions to increase opportunities for meaningful work.

Keywords

Equality, flourishing, labor, utopianism, meaningful work

In light of the impact of work on human well-being, some political philosophers have argued that meaningful or fulfilling work is a basic good promoted in a just society. It is common among philosophers to turn to Karl Marx for the seed of this idea, but the idea, in fact, harmonizes with a plurality of philosophical and religious traditions and is by no means limited to Marx or Marxists. John Rawls, for instance, says in his later works that a well-ordered society provides opportunities for meaningful work, as meaningful work provides a basis for citizens' self-respect.[1] More recently, in *Just Work*, Russell Muirhead posits that fulfilling work is work that harmonizes or fits with our individual goals, values, or good development, and that unfulfilling work that fits with

Corresponding author:
Andrea Veltman, Associate Professor of Philosophy, James Madison University, MSC 8006, Harrisonburg, VA 22807, USA.
Email: veltmaal@jmu.edu

nobody's goals and values would be limited, or reduced to a minimum, in a democratic community of equals.[2] In *How to Make Opportunity Equal*, Paul Gomberg argues for a stronger claim that respecting human equality requires overturning social divisions of labor in which some people labor only at routine occupations while others develop complex abilities and make impactful social contributions through work.[3] In her classic article 'Meaningful Work', Adina Schwartz argues in a similar vein for a democratic redesigning of workplaces to minimize divisions between decision-makers and laborers, which undermine the autonomous capabilities of those who primarily execute others' decisions or perform only repetitive, routine tasks.[4] And these authors are not alone in highlighting the influence of work on elements of well-being and in examining implications for social and political institutions.[5]

At the core of a social or political argument for the provision of opportunities for meaningful work is a normative claim that meaningful work is integral in human well-being. In this article, I provide support for this normative claim, but I would also like to explore a question that arises by implication: in a just society, is meaningful work available for all people? This question arises particularly in the context of democratic political thought, in which identifying a good as basic to human well-being invites inquiry as to its equitable or universal distribution. The question of whether meaningful work is available for all people is not exactly new; in some form it has been at the seat of utopian social theory for centuries, and it appears entangled with proposals from egalitarian political philosophers that communities share or rotate less meaningful forms of work, which hold promise of making more meaningful work available for more people. This article is partly a meditation on the merits and limits of rotating routine work, which has been defended by Gomberg and others and which, I argue here, provides a partial solution to problems that arise in conjunction with work and well-being. On the whole, I seek to reach a frank assessment of the possibilities of providing meaningful work in well-ordered communities, rather than simply prescribing what should be done to achieve equitable distributions of meaningful work.

The question of whether meaningful work is available to everyone, when asked in the context of philosophical literatures that examine the impact of the quality of work upon the worker, appeals implicitly to what I would call eudemonistically meaningful work, or work that contributes to human happiness or flourishing by developing or exercising agency, skills, or capabilities, especially insofar as this exercise meets with recognition and esteem. As in the thought of Aristotle, the concept of eudemonia designates an objective sense of happiness in which an individual thrives on account of possessing a plurality of goods and on account of developing and exercising human capabilities and virtues. Since work is a primary avenue for the development and exercise of human capabilities and skills, and since work instills virtues such as honor, pride, dignity and self-respect, eudemonistically meaningful work contributes substantially to human flourishing. By contrast, working extensively at eudemonistically meaningless work stifles the flourishing of a worker and, in particular, diminishes her or his cognitive capabilities, her drive toward self-determination and his sense of self-worth.[6] Thus an intractable problem for political philosophers concerns who will perform this work in a community of moral equals in which, from an objective point of view, the flourishing of any one person has the same importance as that of any other person.

To gain a sense of what is at stake in this problem, the reader might consider, for example, what it is like to be a city sanitation worker (or a 'garbage man') in light of the fact that the basic good of self-respect derives partly from the esteem of others and, in particular, from the judgements of our peers concerning the worth of our working activities.[7] In a social context in which sanitation work does not merit much esteem, sanitation workers lack a major source of self-respect and can, in turn, develop a sense of themselves as lowly, degraded people. As 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."'[8] In her recent book *Picking Up*, anthropologist Robin Nagel, who spent time cleaning up behind a New York City garbage truck, also testifies to the social invisibility and social inequality of sanitation workers, who are regularly depicted in popular culture as undatable, half-literate, unkempt, stinky individuals whose jobs nobody aspires to hold.[9] The cultural denigration of sanitation workers, whose work is absolutely necessary to social functioning, undermines the platitude that all people are equal, and yet simply proclaiming that social esteem ought to flow to sanitation workers does not remedy the social, psychological and physical hazards of sanitation work.

Sanitation work has meaning in virtue of being socially important, and, for that matter, many forms of work are genuinely useful and therein have elements of meaningfulness. In this way, elements of meaningful work are available to many people,[10] and work that is not robustly eudemonistically meaningful is not necessarily meaningless altogether; meaningful work is a multi-faceted concept, and unskilled routine work can bear meaning not only in serving purposes but also in providing a source of honor or pride and in positioning a worker as a contributor to a community.[11] But the rub is that not all work that is purposeful, or even socially necessary, is eudemonistically meaningful in supporting human flourishing; in light of this fact the question arises, who should do the work that is necessary for social functioning but that undermines the well-being of the worker?

At the start of this inquiry, it is also important to appreciate that eudemonistically meaningful work is not coextensive with white-collar work, nor with what one might call mental work, as opposed to manual labor. As Matthew Crawford highlights in *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, mental work can be draining and dispiriting, and manual work can demand intelligence, exercise agency and skill, and bring a worker satisfaction. 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 resist 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 judgement, 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.[12] But like other theorists of work, Crawford draws eudemonistically relevant distinctions between skilled and unskilled work, routine and non-routine work, and work that integrates conception and execution, rather than separating conception from execution. And the dark side of celebrating the psychic nourishment of

skilled work that integrates thinking and doing is acknowledging, as 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.'[13]

As I review here, there are ultimately a number of partial solutions that a well-ordered society could draw upon to minimize the impact of bad work upon those who perform it and to provide opportunities for grounding self-worth and self-development through meaningful work. But even in view of these solutions, I believe we must acknowledge that it is not likely that opportunities for meaningful work can be guaranteed for all citizens, which carries an implication that, even in well-ordered societies, it is likely that not all people will flourish. Some thinkers will find this implication deeply troubling. Perhaps it is. But I argue in response that the limitedness of meaningful work is not a reason to reject the normative claim that meaningful work is integral in well-being, nor is it a reason against working to transform social and political institutions so as to increase opportunities for meaningful work. If we have reason to avoid utopian dreams of a world in which all people are self-actualized, we also have reason for measured optimism, when we look at the transformation of working institutions over the long term. In what follows, I look first in section I at the limited availability of eudemonistically meaningful work and at proposals to rotate forms of work that are not eudemonistically meaningful. Subsequently, in section II, I explore the implications of the fact that rotating work represents only a partial solution to problems of work and well-being, namely, even in a well-ordered community, not all people will flourish. Lastly, in section III, I argue that value pluralism – the belief that people draw value and fulfillment from a variety of activities, none of which merits any special priority in a liberal polity – does not represent a solution to problems of work and well-being.

I On the limited availability of eudemonistically meaningful work

Outside of utopias, eudemonistically meaningful work appears a limited good, and its limited availability arises ultimately, in part, from a need on the part of human communities to have some people perform work that bears extrinsic value and social purpose but that is, in itself, routine, wearisome, stultifying, disgusting, dangerous, demeaning, or otherwise unpleasant.[14] If one is inclined to hope that an ideal well-ordered society will transform or eliminate undesirable forms of work, Russell Muirhead reminds one that 'in some cases, no amount of fiddling with the conditions of work makes the work more interesting, elevating, challenging or varied. The wars that sometimes need to be fought, the messes cleaned, the fuel mined, the food picked – all point to the likelihood that some work will be endemically dangerous, dirty, physically demanding and intellectually deadening.'[15] If wars must be fought, messes cleaned, fuel mined, food picked and so on with garbage hauled, diapers changed and toilets sanitized, then someone must perform this work, and, in communities with which we are familiar, the need for someone to

perform extensive work generates social divisions of labor, wherein if one is a garbage collector or a fuel miner, then one is not a carpenter, an architect, or a book author.

Granting that there is a need for work that is not robustly eudemonistically meaningful there is nevertheless a range of ways that communities and businesses can potentially organize labor, and a range of ways to assign, acknowledge and remunerate less meaningful work. One of the guiding arguments of James Bernard Murphy's *Moral Economy of Labor* is that social divisions of labor result from a constellation of moral and political choices, as communities have considerable flexibility in assigning tasks to persons, such that the assignment of persons to tasks 'is always fraught with meaning'.[16] Describing the division of labor in a pin factory, Adam Smith assumes that a division of tasks naturally results in a corresponding division of workers (one man to draw a wire, another to straighten it, another to cut it, and so forth), but Murphy emphasizes a distinction between a technical division of labor – in which processes of working are divided into steps – and a social division of labor that assigns discrete tasks to different workers, arguing that the former does not necessarily entail the latter. It is possible that one worker can efficiently tackle a number of discrete tasks, albeit there are limits to what one person can do.[17]

Murphy also appeals to empirical studies of experiments in job design that show that a variety of social divisions of labor is equally commensurate with efficiency and productivity and that, in light of the importance of worker morale for productivity, increasingly detailed divisions of labor reach a point of diminishing returns in efficiency. A primary reason for these diminishing returns is that the degradation of labor undermines worker morale, which undermines productivity and which leads some firms to experiment with 'job enlargement', in which workers rotate from task to task, and 'job enrichment', in which workers take responsibility for projects from conception to execution.[18] These experiments in job design are relevant to questions of the availability of eudemonistically meaningful work, for they highlight possibilities for organizing work in ways that enhance meaningfulness, and they teach us to set aside assumptions that efficiency and productivity require social divisions of labor in which each task demands its own worker. The question of whether meaningful work is available for all people is, indeed, partly empirical but partly philosophical, and it arises primarily out of literatures in social and political thought that address the importance of work for human well-being.[19] Let us turn then to examine some of the morally imaginative proposals concerning social divisions of labor.

I: A

First, as a response to problems of unfulfilling work, few social philosophers suggest that human communities can someday cease assigning people to perform such work, but the idea that advancements in technology will someday allow machines and robots to perform the worst occupations is an old utopian dream.[20] It is, in fact, a dream now revitalized by 21st-century developments in robotics, which promise that in a new industrial revolution, robots will toil in factories, laboratories, food industries and other service sectors, freeing people for more meaningful work or for the pursuit of other human ambitions.[21] Replacing workers with machines would produce unparalleled cost-savings for

companies, but profit-maximizing capitalists are not alone in welcoming a revolution in robot workers: the hope that work not fit for human beings will be done by machines is also an element of some classic conceptions of socialism. Oscar Wilde, for instance, writes in *The Soul of Man under Socialism*:

> All unintellectual labor, all monotonous, dull labor, all labor that deals with dreadful things, and involves unpleasant conditions, must be done by machinery. Machinery must work for us in coal mines and do all sanitary services, and be the stoker of steamers, and clean the streets, and run messages on wet days and do anything that is tedious or distressing.[22]

The proposal that machines should perform dreadful or unpleasant work may be motivated by a sound insight that work that wears out a person is most fit for a non-person to perform, and, moreover, it has increasing potential for measured success in eliminating a portion of human drudgery. But such a proposal is unrealistic as a complete solution to the problem of unfulfilling work: as Hannah Arendt notes in *The Human Condition* in discussing the fundamental limitations of technology in easing the burdens of maintaining life, hundreds of gadgets in the kitchen and a dozen robots in the cellar cannot fully replace the labor of human beings: someone must operate these technologies, which are not always time-saving and which cannot perform all drudgeries.[23]

I: B

As an alternative to the dream in which no person need perform the worst work, an array of egalitarian social philosophers has entertained suggestions to rotate or share the least desirable forms of work, in order that no one need perform such work as an occupation and, instead, all confront an opportunity to pursue meaningful work. In contemplating this idea, the philosophical mind often turns immediately to Karl Marx, who famously suggests in *The German Ideology* that a communist state will regulate production so that no citizen labors exclusively at a single sphere of activity, in order that self-realization will be possible for all:

> As soon as the distribution of labor comes into being, each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape. He is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood; while in a communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming [exclusively] hunter, fisherman, shepherd, or critic.[24]

Marx's vision of a society without occupational divisions of labor is commonly dismissed as utopian fancy, for a moment of reflection is thought to reveal an utter impracticality or wrongheadedness, but in revised form part of his core idea of rotating work, as well as his critique of oppressive divisions of labor, continues to live on in the writings of contemporary egalitarian philosophers of work, some of whom bring forward egalitarian criticisms and proposals some distance away from *The German Ideology*. At the end of

Justice and the Politics of Difference, Iris Marion Young critiques hierarchical divisions of labor – in which some people acquire authority to conceive, plan and exercise skills in work while others primarily follow orders and perform routine or automated tasks – as unjust and illegitimate in the context of a community of morally equal persons.[25] Like other political theorists who follow her, Young clarifies that a critique of hierarchical divisions of labor is not a critique of occupational specialization: specialization resulting in individual mastery of special knowledge, skill, or techniques is not only socially advantageous but also, as Murphy adds, the very foundation for craftsworker dignity and pride.[26]

More recently, in *How to Make Opportunity Equal*, Paul Gomberg argues that achieving a genuine equality of opportunity requires abolishing social divisions of labor wherein some people perform only routine work while others contribute mastery of complex abilities in forms of work that garner social esteem. This division of labor, he argues, diminishes human potential, fuels racism and undermines self-esteem and intellectual development among those whose work is routine. In contrast to routine work, complex work forms part of what makes a good human life, for contributing to a community through work that demonstrates mastered complex abilities elicits prestige and esteem, as 'mastery of complexity makes us aware of our own abilities and draws admiration from others', whereas life-occupations of routine work tend to damage self-development and self-esteem.[27] Insofar as a community remains founded on divisions of routine and complex labor, some members have 'lives of disadvantage, lives of mind-numbing labor, social inferiority, and diminished social esteem. That much is necessary in societies that separate routine from complex labor and create mass unemployment.'[28]

In addition to the points made by Gomberg, Muirhead highlights a number of advantages in sharing work that lacks internal benefit, although he acknowledges in his final analysis that sharing such work is more easily accomplished in a household than in a larger society.[29] He puts across quite well that if proposals to share bad work lack universal feasibility, they do not lack an ethical rationale:

> Some bad work is necessary and useful, but insisting that only a few carry the burden of this work makes those workers the instruments of others … [Sharing bad work] would express that society as a whole values not only the task but also those who perform it. There is a tendency to wish away the bad work we make necessary, and to turn away from those who do such jobs. To engage them as human beings is to risk recognizing the violence that the work – work necessary for our own convenience – does to the development of others. Sharing work, even in a symbolic way, helps guard against our tendency to render those who do the worst work socially invisible.[30]

Insofar as some of the least choice-worthy occupations are dangerous, damaging to the body or mind, destructive of life-vitality or degrading of the human character, it may be fair to say that those who shoulder this work become instruments for the flourishing of others, in the respect that these workers do not flourish themselves on account of the work they perform but make it possible that others can flourish. The point here calls to mind characterizations of coal-miners – whose work can hardly be shared among all people—as citizens in service of the nation, not fundamentally unlike conscripted soldiers or others whose work is inherently dangerous yet socially necessary.[31]

The rationale for sharing bad work put across by Muirhead reflects a long-standing concern on the part of social critics with the effects of work upon workers and with the resulting stratification of workers into different types of people. John Ruskin, whose views on labor are not always straightforward but always beautifully expressed, observes in *The Crown of Wild Olive* that

> Rough work, honorable or not, takes the life out of us; and the man who has been heaving clay out of a ditch all day, or driving an express train against the north wind all night ... that man is not the same at the end of the day, or night, as one who has been sitting in a quiet room, with everything comfortable about him, reading books, or classing butterflies, or painting pictures ...[32]

When only some shoulder the burden of human drudgery, others have the freedom from exhaustion necessary to live cultivated and pleasant lives, and those who are worn out on account of work necessary for our comfort and civilization have little life or vitality left for eudemonistic activities. The resulting creation of a tiered and unequal human community – in which, Ruskin adds, it is of little use to talk to the worker about the honorableness of manual work – undermines the modern articles of faith that all people are equal and that no one is meant to be anyone else's slave. Sharing the worst forms of work not only precludes us from turning away from such work but also fosters social equality, if workers can escape the destructive character of the worst work when such work is rotated.

I dwell on the moral merits of rotating work, but in fact both moral and prudential reasons appear to motivate practices of rotating or sharing certain forms of work in some households and other organizations including communal societies, businesses, hospitals, factories. As Kazou Koike notes, many Japanese firms practise job rotation, among other methods of work organization that draw on the knowledge and skill of all employees, with results of innovative success as well as efficiency.[33] The practice of job rotation is also accepted as a training method in some businesses and non-profit organizations in the United States, as moving employees through different jobs within a department, or across departments in an organization, develops a range of skills, knowledge and personal contacts that prepares promising employees for management positions.[34] Job rotation has also been practised among the people who are called Shakers, who praise manual work both for teaching humility and for supporting the collective welfare of a community; as described by Edward Andrews, a person in a Shaker community specializes in at least one trade, such as tailoring or nursing, but assists as needed in a range of additional tasks throughout the community.[35] In these instances and others, I believe we see that, particularly among some small- to moderate-sized communities united around shared purposes, sharing or rotating certain forms of work appears feasible and supported by a variety of rationales.

I: C

Proposals to share routine work in larger societies run up against a litany of objections and obstacles, as critics appeal to values of efficiency and productivity, as well as to a need to respect occupational choice and diverse occupational proclivities, among other

issues. I will spare the reader a rehearsal of all the objections and responses that can be made in conjunction with a proposal like that of Gomberg: it may suffice to say the proposal has moral merit, and I believe it can survive several of the objections leveled against it, depending on what one ultimately values.[36] But however meritorious, a proposal to share routine labor has fundamental limitations on account of (1) the sheer impracticality of sharing work within a larger society and (2) the fact that not all routine, dirty, dangerous, grueling, or oppressive work is of a sort that can be rotated. A number of authors, including Russell Muirhead and Andrew Sayer, make roughly the first point, regarding the impracticality of sharing work in a broader society: Muirhead writes that 'when it comes to many sorts of work it is simply impractical to share the burden. Were we to share the garbage collection, the care of the sick, the carting and storage of hazardous waste, the mining, the hauling and driving, we can be pretty sure that most of this work would not be done very well.'[37] Even though Gomberg clarifies that a proposal to share work should not be taken as suggesting that people perform work without requisite training and competency, the issue of *how* it could be feasible to share work in a larger society should not be hand-waved away with a clarification that the proposal is utopian, such that a blueprint for action is inappropriate, particularly not in a work entitled *How to Make Opportunity Equal*.

I would also add to a counterpoint like that of Muirhead that, even if the issue of the impracticality of rotating occupations in a large community could be overcome, sharing routine work stills falls short of a complete solution to the problem of providing equal opportunity for flourishing for all people, for not all oppressive work is readily mastered and thus rotatable. Routine work like basic cleaning and cooking (which are fairly rotatable jobs in small communities) occupies the focus of Gomberg's proposal, but these forms of work represent only a subset of a broader class of work whose distribution is a problem in a community concerned with the flourishing of everyone: this broader class of work includes not only (1) routine, dirty, dangerous, grueling, or oppressive work that is easily mastered by people of basic abilities but also (2) routine, dirty, dangerous, grueling, or oppressive work that requires specialized skill, knowledge, or training for competent performance, like soldiering, mining, or working on deep sea oil rigs or on constructing bridges or tall buildings, and (3) work that separates a worker from his or her family or community, thus undermining personal relationships that are also necessary for human flourishing.[38] Some may retort that work like mining, carting hazardous waste, or working on deep sea oil rigs will be among the first to go in the revolution that ushers in a sustainable egalitarian community, but the problem of bad work then shifts in its particulars; the fact of occupations that undermine human flourishing, and that are not easily mastered and thus rotatable, does not appear avoidable. Complex systems that sustain modern societies require skilled workers whose labor is not always safe, pleasant, rewarding, or convenient for supporting the achievement of goods that are integral in personal flourishing.[39]

Sharing or rotating bad work thus represents at most a partial solution, among other partial solutions, to the problem wherein some people work at occupations that undermine flourishing. When feasible, sharing bad work can be commendable in bringing a community closer to ideals of human flourishing and equality, for bad work is less oppressive for those who merely take a turn at it, and sharing bad work prevents some

from flourishing at the expense of others. But it is not a comprehensive solution, even when paired with other measures, including reducing the amounts of stultifying work that people must perform, such as by out-sourcing such work to machines, cleaning up after oneself rather than leaving one's dirt for others to pick up, amply remunerating less meaningful work, acknowledging the value of work that is important but that does not support flourishing, increasing opportunities for occupational mobility and skill training, or limiting the working day.[40] Not only is it the case that some bad work is socially important but not sharable, but it is also quite possible that even in a just community in which some of the worst work rotates, and in which some of the worst occupations are done by machines, and in which those who do the worst work have limited working days, not every person will flourish. Some of the worst occupations (e.g. septic tank technicians) may require considerable skill and extensive training, as well as extensive hours, and thus some people may not flourish themselves, in order to support the flourishing of others.

II That not all people flourish

Although, collectively, the solutions mentioned above could take a community remarkably far in pursuing social justice, it appears unlikely that a community can *ensure* that everyone will flourish: structural transformations and fundamental shifts in dominant social values could make meaningful work available to many people, but meaningful work cannot be guaranteed to everyone, and it is almost certainly not available to everyone outside of utopias. On the one hand, there is, in essence, a dark side in discussions of human flourishing, in which not everyone flourishes, and sometimes some flourish at the expense of others. It is natural to turn away from this dark side and, in a sense, both flights into utopian working arrangements and arguments to the effect that all work has dignity are attempts to turn away from the ugliness wherein some lack good work and suffer for the comfort or flourishing of others. But I believe this dark side must be acknowledged and, further, the fact that not every person has or can have meaningful work does not undermine an argument that meaningful work is integral in human flourishing, as I argue in what follows. Yet it is also important to see that the fact that not all people will flourish, because not all can have meaningful work, is not a reason to avoid social and economic transformations that will bring flourishing and meaningful work into reach for more people. As Andrew Sayer aptly says of Gomberg's proposal to rotate routine work, 'while there is some force in the objection [concerning feasibility], it does not justify maintaining the unequal social division of labor where it is feasible to reduce it'.[41]

Whereas a number of writers on work and the good life begin from the premise that justice demands that we share the good life – a premise which leads some to propose that we share the worst forms of work[42] – I would emphasize that justice can demand only that we try to bring opportunities for the good life within the reach of more people, and that the human condition never contained a promise that everyone will flourish. As a result, it is not a deficiency of a normative theory of the good that not everyone flourishes, or that the good life is not possible for all people. The purpose of a theory of human flourishing is to illuminate what it means to live a good human life, and such

a theory can serve as a foundation for individual choice-making and social change; this theory is inherently prescriptive and should be unbounded by present (and by presently foreseeable) social distributions of goods. Since a theory of human flourishing – far from attempting to explain why all people lead good lives – serves to explain what is required to lead a good life, a lack of flourishing among all people is not a reason to reject a theory of human flourishing, but rather a reason to change how we live, or a reason to view some as unfortunate or deficient on account of lacking basic human goods.

Some will find it unsettling to believe that not everyone flourishes: whereas some believe that justice demands that we share the good life, others may believe that God or the universe would not usher into existence people who lead meaningless or unhappy lives. From either view, one may ask, 'How can meaningful work be a central component of human flourishing if it is not available to all people?' The implication that not everyone flourishes, if not everyone has meaningful work, may appear a genuine problem for the normative thesis that meaningful work is integral in living well, as the thesis may therein appear elitist or undemocratic. In response to those who find it unsettling or unacceptable to believe that not everyone flourishes because not everyone has meaningful work, I would first note that the flourishing or good life is not available to all people, regardless of the particular components that one includes as part of flourishing. A common conception of the good life might include wealth, power, luxuries, or fame, but these goods are not available to all people, as some people's lives are poor, powerless, lacking in amenities and relatively unrecognized. If one favors a more modest conception of the good life, in which living well requires, minimally, enough money to live comfortably and enough joy to make life worthwhile, again the good life is not within reach for all people, as, sadly, many people live in wretched poverty or suffer through joyless depressed lives. Alternatively, a religious conception of the good life may include service to God and love of one's neighbors among the components of the human good, but not all people serve God or genuinely love their neighbors, and therein not every person achieves the human good. Alternatively again, one may believe, as do some of my university undergraduate students, that sex is a necessary component of living well, whatever else philosophers would like to include on a list of goods important for living well. But when one considers in this light a friend who is without a sex life, who is, perhaps, ugly, unsociable, or otherwise unblessed by the gods, one again comes to the belief not that all people flourish but that, on the contrary, one's friend is unfortunate for lacking a basic human good.

To regard a theory of human flourishing as undemocratic because not all people flourish appears to rest on a misunderstanding of the purpose of philosophical accounts of human flourishing, which are inherently normative enterprises. A normative analysis may serve on some occasions to justify existing social arrangements and individual life-choices, but ethics is concerned foremost with how we ought to live, and only tangentially with social or psychological rationales for existing arrangements and life-choices. As elements of ethics, accounts of flourishing serve first to illuminate human ideals; secondarily, they can also serve as foundations for advocating social change. An egalitarian or democratic impulse, which I would favor, is to change social arrangements so that basic human goods become available for more people, but libertarian, aristocratic, oligarchic, or meritocratic social theorists may not favor altering social or

economic arrangements to make fully flourishing lives within the reach of more people. In any case, since questions of distributing basic human goods are separate from questions of what the human good *is*, it is not a shortcoming of an account of human flourishing that basic goods are not available for all people, for the requirements of human flourishing can illuminate what goods *ought* to be available for more people. Of course, ethical accounts of the human good not uncommonly run together with social and political concerns about distributions of goods; in fact, this convergence is particularly evident in philosophical and political literatures on work. Even among writers who are less utopian in thinking about distributions of work, we still observe a considerable tendency toward equalizing distributions of fulfilling work, once work is recognized as a human good; some authors also seem to think of work as a good only insofar as it can be distributed fairly.

In brief, part of the purpose of a theory of human flourishing is to illuminate a need for change in individual lives and social structures, and to this end we should explore solutions to problems that undermine human flourishing; however, the fact remains that, even if social structures can change to bring flourishing within reach for more people, in societies as we know them eudemonistically meaningful work is not available to all people, and thus not all people fully flourish. Outside of utopian dreams, and outside of religious appeals for delayed ecstasy, there is perhaps no ultimate remedy to this dark side of work and flourishing, wherein some people do not have meaningful work and do not flourish. At this juncture, some may turn to value pluralism, which I discuss below. But I should like to acknowledge, first, that asserting that a person does not flourish is not tantamount to asserting her or his life lacks value: there is no inconsistency in claiming, on the one hand, that not every person leads an excellent human life, for some lack meaningful or fulfilling work or other basic goods, and on the other hand that every person's life has intrinsic worth. Indeed, it is precisely an equality of worth and potential in all human life that provides a foundation for discouraging forms of work that undermine human agency, dignity and capabilities, even if not all such work can be eliminated entirely.[43]

Also, if there is reason for pessimism in confronting the consequences of eudemonistically meaningless work, there is also reason for optimism, particularly when we consider the measures of moral progress that workplaces have already achieved in some quarters of the world in the 21st 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, non-discriminatory and harassment-free workplace environments, equitable wages and freedom from threats, abuse and profanity while on the job. According to historian Sanford Jacoby, not one of these ideals was in place in the USA over a century ago, when the dominant mode of the production of commodities was a 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.[44] Some of us already 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 becoming a 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 should lead us toward a position of open-mindedness in entertaining long-range possibilities for transforming elements of working life that stifle human flourishing or undermine human dignity.

III The response of value pluralism

For those who adopt a perspective of value pluralism, it is hardly a problem that meaningful work is not available to all people: some people may prize meaningful work, but others prioritize other values and find personal fulfillment in other life-activities. Some men and women may work hard at labor they find unfulfilling for the purpose of supporting a better life for sons and daughters, or for the purpose of supporting life outside of work, and in any case people draw meaning and fulfillment from a plurality of sources including, for example, the successes, happiness and joyfulness of children, the family, friendship, religious fellowship, sports, or leisure. If individuals flourish in diverse ways, and many goods and virtues contribute to a meaningful and flourishing life, then every individual can, in principle, lead a flourishing life, as long as a diversity of preferences, activities and life-goals meets with a corresponding diversity of social outlets for flourishing in a well-ordered society.

This view occurs not only in everyday discourses about work and human values but also in philosophical print among political philosophers who are critical of Marxism, including Will Kymlicka and Richard Arneson. Kymlicka, Arneson and other authors put forward both a normative claim that meaningful work is not an indispensable element of the good life, and also a political claim that it should not be the business of the state to promote work as a source of value in an individual's life. As Arneson writes of the normative claim that people draw value from a variety of sources, in modern society 'people's conceptions of their good fan out in all directions ... some seek mystical ecstasy, some suburbia and its comforts, some intellectual and artistic achievement, some varieties of physical culture, and so on, endlessly'.[45] Arguing that in liberal democratic societies, individuals should be at liberty to choose primary values and sources of meaning from a variety of possibilities, Kymlicka writes along similar lines: 'I may value unalienated labor, yet value other things even more, such as my leisure. I may prefer playing tennis to unalienated production.'[46] Here meaningful work represents only one valuable life-pursuit among many others, and it merits no special priority in a liberal democracy in which free citizens realize diverse conceptions of well-being.

In responding to the possibility, as formulated by Arneson, that people can lead satisfying lives while working at unchallenging jobs, Gomberg argues that, for those thinking about social justice, the question should not be whether it is *possible* for a person to lead a good life without challenging, complex work but whether social organization makes it more or less *likely* that a person will do so. The mere possibility that a person can develop intelligence, exercise skill and garner esteem, in spite of a social organization of working life that fails to tap and develop his or her intelligence and skills, means rather little, and it does not 'rebut evidence that routine labor tends to harm the worker by making him less intelligent'. Nor does it rebut the broader point of *How to Make Opportunity Equal* that 'as long as there are many positions of routine labor, many children will be trained

for those positions, thwarting the full development of their potential', thus undermining genuine equality of opportunity.[47] In isolating why it is work rather than leisure that is important in eliciting social esteem and supporting self-esteem, Gomberg points out that it is work that 'connects us positively, as contributors, to a wider social world. Because of this, labor offers opportunities for esteem usually unavailable from leisure activities.'[48]

I would add to the arguments of Gomberg, first, that the basic issue with the arguments of Arneson and Kymlicka is that work is unlike leisure and other discretionary activities in that people must work: it is a matter of the human condition that what we need to survive or thrive is not miraculously self-actualizing – and it is a matter of survival even in flourishing human societies that most people must work in order to feed themselves and their families. Furthermore, value pluralists who discuss meaningful work write primarily from a position of armchair reflection and appear out of touch not only with lived experiences of oppressive labor conditions but also with empirical literatures on work and well-being. Allow me to cull together, albeit in a brief summary fashion, 16 ways in which work impacts on the lives of workers; as developed and supported in a range of empirical and philosophical literatures, this list is intended as a strong cumulative case against Kymlicka, Arneson and others who maintain a perspective of value pluralism.

1. In communities we are familiar with, work is a primary means of securing an income and benefits; given that work attaches to pay and therefore to a livelihood, work sets a standard of living, determining how and where an individual lives. When work is not insecure or poorly paid, it can also provide a measure of security and economic independence.[49]
2. Full-time work absorbs a substantial portion of our waking hours and productive energies, and what we do at work is therefore nothing less than a matter of how we spend a significant part of our lives. Given the sheer amount of time that work absorbs in our lives, the importance of finding work that fits us is plain. As Muirhead writes, 'that we should not be miscast in one of our life's main activities or stuck serving purposes we cannot embrace, is of obvious importance'.[50]
3. Work can have a formative influence on character and intelligence. Work has the power to foster – or stifle – the intellectual flexibility of workers, partly because work often absorbs our finest intellectual energies and contains primary opportunities for workers to concentrate the mind or confront challenges or problems that necessitate acquiring knowledge, thinking strategically, critically or creatively, or making judgements.[51]
4. Work therefore provides opportunities for personal growth, mental stimulation and the development of complex skills, including job-specific skills as well as general problem-solving skills, social skills and decision-making skills that are conducive to flourishing even outside of work.
5. Work is a primary means for achieving pleasure or satisfaction in the exercise of realized skills and capacities. This satisfaction is thought a natural principle of human motivation by John Rawls, who terms it the Aristotelian Principle: '[O]ther things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized

capacities (their innate trained abilities), and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity.'[52]

6. In complex skilled work, individuals garner esteem and recognition from others for the mastery and contribution of developed abilities, which ground self-esteem and self-respect.[53]
7. Work is a primary area of life for achieving and accomplishing. As Bertrand Russell observes in *The Conquest of Happiness*, work that creates an enduring accomplishment can also provide an unparalleled sense of satisfaction and personal purposiveness.
8. Work impacts physical and psychological health. As occupational psychologists Ivan Robertson and Cary Cooper summarize the empirically demonstrated relationship between work and well-being, 'Work can make you sick – and work can make you happy.'[54] Stress at work can produce physical ailments such as cardiovascular disease or ulcers, and can contribute to mental disorders that manifest in alcoholism or drug addiction;[55] workplace bullying and abuse can undermine victims' mental health and self-regard, impacting victims both on and off the job. Robertson and Cooper also observe that psychological health indeed depends partly on rewarding and meaningful work: it is not enough that individuals feel satisfied, relaxed and happy; rather, 'To be psychologically healthy we need to feel that what we are doing is worthwhile and serves a useful purpose.'[56] Conversely monotonous, meaningless, or stressful work 'damages resilience, PWB [psychological well-being] and physical health'.[57]
9. As I argue elsewhere, work is a primary means for securing or reinforcing personal virtues including honor, pride, dignity, integrity and discipline.[58]
10. Work situates workers within social communities, often putting workers in direct contact with others – including others 'who are least like ourselves'[59] – and presents opportunities for the development of relationships. The social dimensions of work are acknowledged by a variety of religious and secular writers: Pope John Paul II, for instance, acknowledges in his encyclical letter *On Human Work* that the activity represents our humanity partly because it marks 'a person operating within a community of persons'.[60] Another author writing on rewarding work links the social and purposive dimensions of work in acknowledging that work 'fulfills the desire to have a place in society … Many people feel a need to contribute. And many feel a need to belong, which means to be depended on.'[61]
11. Work provides a sense of purposiveness, as it is through work that we make contributions to a world beyond ourselves, and make ourselves useful in satisfying needs and desires. Work permits a person to have an impact on the lives and needs of others; as two researchers of unemployment write: '[P]eople deprived of the opportunity to work often feel useless and report that they lack a sense of purpose.'[62] In brief, work can give a sense of direction, contribute to a life that is fully occupied, and allow a person to avoid living an existence that is, essentially, superfluous.
12. As I argue elsewhere, work provides a source of meaningfulness not only in giving a sense of purposiveness, and not only in creating items of value, but also, in

some cases, in integrating the personal values and commitments of a worker within a community, or in integrating elements of a person's life.[63]

13. Not uncommonly, work is a source of personal identity and self-definition; as Gini and Sullivan write, '[W]e are known by others and we know and define ourselves primarily by the projects we devise, by the products we create and by the occupations which represent these productive pursuits … Nothing is so uniquely personal, so active a representation of individuals as their skills and works.'[64] Relatedly, more so than any other activity, work also defines adulthood and gives an individual a title, role and status.[65]
14. Crucially, work can support or undermine autonomous agency as well as personal initiative and ambition in developing and pursuing goals, even outside of work.[66]
15. Work of various sorts can be a source of creative self-expression, even if some forms of work are more clearly creative or self-expressive than others. Further, not only do we make and express ourselves through work, we create and build the world through work.
16. Work habits impact leisure activities: 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'.[67]

This considerable list is not exhaustive, as other thinkers would add yet additional reasons why work is important in a good human life, such as that work allows people to 'give a legitimate account of themselves',[68] or that work gives expression to an instinct of workmanship embedded in the human person. The above list should, however, cast reasonable doubt upon the claim that, in comparison with other goods, work occupies no special place in a good life. Although *some* of the psychological goods that attach to meaningful work can be achieved through other activities, eudemonistically meaningful work brings a host of goods that cannot be achieved in leisure alone. Although some people may live for leisure – as in the idea of working for the weekend, or as in the possibility that 'rich self-centered fainéants may find fulfillment in a round of pleasures'[69] – without meaningful work, even the idle rich fail to flourish fully, for they lack human goods and virtues, such as feelings of purposiveness, accomplishment and pride, which flow from work in which one makes oneself useful in contributing to the world.

In brief, I have serious doubts that value pluralism represents a solution to problems of meaningful work. Work impacts the person, and it does not serve the aims of social justice to ignore the impact of work upon the worker, or to appeal to a plurality of sources of fulfillment in life as a justification of social and economic systems in which some have meaningful work and flourish accordingly, while others are mired in less meaningful work and suffer the ramifications thereof. There are, however, a handful of partial solutions to problems of unfulfilling work, which include rotating routine forms of work, outsourcing unfulfilling work to machines, reducing the working day and fairly enumerating all forms of work. These solutions cannot guarantee that opportunities for meaningful work will be available to all people, but this lack of a guarantee is not a reason to avoid working to transform institutions so that work that promotes psychological health and self-development becomes possible for more people. Ultimately, I say it is worth remembering 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 flourishing can guide transformations of workplace goals and structures, so that working can become more meaningful, or at least less oppressive, for more people.

Notes

I would like to thank an anonymous *Philosophy & Social Criticism* reviewer for a good set of comments that helped improve this article.

1. John Rawls, 'Introduction', in *Political Liberalism*, paperback edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), p. lix. Rawls repeats the idea in *Law of the Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), p. 50. See also John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), p. 440 ff.
2. Russell Muirhead, *Just Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), see especially pp. 170–6 for his remarks on limiting the amount of unfulfilling work in egalitarian communities.
3. Paul Gomberg, *How to Make Opportunity Equal: Race and Contributive Justice* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Blackwell, 2007). Also notable is the work of Andrew Sayer, who supports Gomberg's argument in 'Contributive Justice and Meaningful Work', *Res Publica* 15 (2009): 1–16.
4. Adina Schwartz, 'Meaningful Work', *Ethics* 92 (July 1982): 634–46.
5. In addition to the literatures referenced above, see the work of James Bernard Murphy, who provides an Aristotelian basis for the claim that meaningful work is a component of human flourishing: James Bernard Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor: Aristotelian Themes in Economic Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993). See also the work of Dale Tweedie, who insightfully combines an Aristotelian framework with the work of recognition theorists; e.g. Dale Tweedie, 'Recognizing Skills and Capacities', in Christiana Bagusat, William Keenan and Clemens Sedmak (eds) *Decent Work and Unemployment* (Vienna, Berlin and Munster: Lit Verlag, 2010), pp. 203–15. For an empirically based defense of the claim that work impacts well-being, see, for instance, Ivan Robertson and Cary Cooper, *Well-being: Productivity and Happiness at Work* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).
6. A classic source for the claim that full-time repetitive routine work diminishes the capabilities of workers is none other than Adam Smith, who writes late in *The Wealth of Nations* that

   > The man whose whole working life is spent in performing a few simple operations … has no occasion to exert his understanding … He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become … But in every improved and civilized society this is the state into which the laboring poor, that is, the great body of people, must necessarily fall, unless government takes some pains to prevent it. (Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* [New York: Modern Library, 1937], p. 735)

   On the tendency of eudemonistically meaningless work to diminish autonomy, see the work of Adina Schwartz ('Meaningful Work'), Beate Roessler, 'Meaningful Work: Arguments from "Autonomy"', *Journal of Political Philosophy* 20(1) (2012): 71–9, or Melvin Kohn and Carmi Schooler, *Work and Personality* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1983).
7. This point about self-respect is made by Rawls, who adds that 'unless our endeavors are appreciated by our associates it is impossible for us to maintain the conviction that they are worthwhile' (Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, p. 440; cf. p. 544).

8. Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983), p. 165 ff.; Stewart E. Perry, *San Francisco Scavengers: Dirty Work and the Price of Ownership* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), p. 7.
9. Robin Nagle, *Picking Up: On the Streets and Behind the Trucks with the Sanitation Workers of New York City* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2013), see especially ch. 1 and p. 23.
10. Some might claim that all work has meaning, for all work has purpose. But this optimistic claim runs up against counter-examples of work that has little redeeming value and that adds little to the inner lives of workers. Consider, for instance, 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 15 years at the Chicago Palmer House, Louis Hayward, says that 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.' Hayward comments that he is not proud of his work, that he is stuck in it, and that he has become inured to it; he finds no genuine social value in the occupation, which he describes as 'menial': 'The whole thing is obsolete. It's on its way out.' Studs Terkel, *Working: People Talk about What They Do All Day and How They Feel about What They Do* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004 [1972]), pp. 107–10. Another striking example comes from a woman interviewed at the start of the documentary film *Rosie the Riveter*, Lola Weixel, who describes her first job in a novelty factory in Brooklyn, New York:

> I was very struck by the bright colors and tinselly things that we were working with, and the sadness on the faces of the people who were doing it. It was so boring. It was so, you know, just sort of one movement all the time: staple, put it down, staple, put it down … 144 and you've made a dime.

11. I explore several dimensions of meaningful work in a book I am currently writing provisionally entitled 'Meaningful Work'.
12. Matthew B. Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft: An Inquiry into the Value of Work* (New York: Penguin, 2009), see especially pp. 14–15, 27 and 198–9. Crawford's examples (drawn from his own work experience) of draining and dispiriting mental work include the work of a think-tank denizen and the work of a bibliographic assistant. In a historical moment of economic crisis and social uncertainty about the value of certain professions, such as Wall Street financiering, Crawford turns to the utility of productive labor, writing that

> … the question of what a good job looks like … is more open now than it has been for a long time … A calm recognition may yet emerge that productive labor is the foundation of all prosperity. The meta-work of trafficking in the surplus skimmed from other people's work suddenly appears as what it is, and it becomes possible once again to think the thought, 'Let me make myself useful'. (Crawford, *Shop Class as Soulcraft*, pp. 9–10)

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

> 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. (Kornhauser, *Mental Health*, p. 252)
>
> 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. (Kornhauser, *Mental Health*, pp. 269–70)

14. Apart from the general point that the limited availability of meaningful work arises from social divisions of labor in which not every person works in a meaningful occupation, empirical data on levels of unemployment and levels of reported job-meaningfulness may also illuminate the extent to which meaningful work is a limited good. Levels of unemployment are variable and difficult to measure precisely, but Paul Blyton and Jean Jenkins report, after looking at data from 1945 to 2004, that countries belonging to the international Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development have an 'overall average unemployment rate of 6.8 per cent' (Paul Blyton and Jean Jenkins, *Key Concepts in Work* [London: Sage, 2007], p. 228). But the number of people unable to find work has increased since the 2008 financial crisis, which, as John Budd writes: 'increased unemployment globally by an estimated thirty-four million, so that at the beginning of 2010 over two hundred million individuals were without work' (John Budd, *The Thought of Work* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011], p. 180). As to the proportion of people who are employed full-time and who find their work meaningful, Robert Wuthnow reports that '82 percent of the entire workforce said that the statement "my work is very meaningful to me" describes them very well or fairly well' (Robert Wuthnow, *Poor Richard's Principle: Recovering the American Dream through the Moral Dimension of Work, Business and Money* [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996], p. 31). Although self-reports of possessing meaningful work can be subject to critical scrutiny, these data would suggest that, in some respects, meaningful work is available for many people, but it does not exist in such abundance that everyone who seeks meaningful work, or any work at all for that matter, can possess it.
15. Muirhead, *Just Work*, p. 32.
16. Murphy, *Moral Economy of Labor*, p. 45.
17. ibid.: ch. 2 and especially p. 20.
18. ibid.: ch. 2 and especially pp. 29–30 and 45.
19. The question of whether meaningful work is available for all people is not itself addressed in the empirical literatures in industrial and organizational psychology, as far as I can tell.
20. As Walzer writes in *Spheres of Justice*, p. 167.
21. A recent spate of articles in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* addresses a coming industrial revolution in which robots will perform increasingly more roles in workplaces; see, for instance, Jeffrey Young, 'The New Industrial Revolution', *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (25 March 2013), accessible @: http://chronicle.com/article/The-New-Industrial-Revolution/138015/
22. Oscar Wilde, 'The Soul of Man under Socialism', in *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde*, vol. 8, ed. Robert Ross (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 298.
23. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 122.

24. Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, in their *Collected Works*, vol. 5 (New York: International Publishers, 1976), p. 47.
25. Iris Marion Young, *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp. 214–25. Young writes: 'Justice entails that all persons have the opportunity to develop and exercise skills in socially recognized settings' (ibid.: 220) and 'The creation of a huge class of unskilled, routinized jobs is unjust, because it condemns a large portion of the population to a situation in which they cannot develop and exercise their capacities' (ibid.: 221).
26. Murphy, *Moral Economy of Labor*, p. 9.
27. Gomberg, *How to Make Opportunity Equal*, p. 73; cf. pp. 66–74.
28. ibid.: 166.
29. Those who argue for a social sharing of routine work (or other forms of work) may analogize a household to a larger society, suggesting that in like manner as routine or unpleasant duties are shared in an egalitarian household, routine or unpleasant work should be shared in a larger society. The difficulty of such an argument, as Muirhead suggests, is that sharing duties is more feasible in a household, in which a manageable number of people regularly interact, communicate easily, can hold one another accountable for shared duties and care for the well-being of one another. In larger societies, we do sometimes see the egalitarian ideal of rotating people through less desirable forms of work, as when, for instance, young people start out in routine work, or in national service, while developing skills and knowledge that eventually allow entry into work that individuals find meaningful and fulfilling. But one would be hard-pressed to argue that a large polity should somehow enforce or guarantee that every person takes a turn 'paying their dues' in occupations of routine work. See also sections I: B and I: C of this article for a discussion of the feasibility of sharing work in small versus large organizations.
30. Muirhead, *Just Work*, p. 173.
31. Walzer, *Spheres of Justice,* p. 170. Walzer here draws upon Orwell's discussion of coalminers in *The Road to Wigan Pier*.
32. John Ruskin, *The Crown of the Wild Olive* in *The Crown of the Wild Olive and Cestus of Aglaia* (New York: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1866, reprinted London: Forgotten Books, 1930), p. 34.
33. Kazuo Koike, 'Learning and Incentive Systems in Japanese Industry', in M. Aoki and R. Dore (eds) *The Japanese Firm: The Sources of Competitive Strength* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 41–65.
34. Frank Landy and Jeffrey M. Conte, *Work in the 21st Century*, 4th edn (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2013), p. 291.
35. Edward Deming Andres, *The People Called Shakers: A Search for the Perfect Society* (New York: Dover, 1963), pp. 104–16.
36. Gomberg himself defends his proposal against several objections, as does Sayer in 'Contributive Justice and Meaningful Work'.
37. Muirhead, *Just Work*, p. 174.
38. See Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, ch. 6 for a similar distinction in several types of 'hard work'. Concerning one type of hard work that would be difficult to share, mining, Walzer writes:

> Work in the pits breeds a strong bond, a tight community that is not welcoming to transients. That community is the great strength of the miners. A deep sense of place and clan

> and generations of class struggle have made for staying power. Miners are probably the least mobile of modern industrial populations. A conscript army of mineworkers, even if it were possible, would not be an attractive alternative to the social life the miners have designed for themselves. (Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, pp. 169–70)

39. The television series *Dirty Jobs*, with host Mike Rowe, offers many examples, as does *The Worst Jobs in History*, with host Toni Robinson.
40. This latter solution is suggested by not only Bertrand Russell but also by Russell Muirhead, who ends his book by examining the possibility of limiting bad work through a reduced work day: he characterizes limiting the working day, particularly for those who toil for the comfort and subsistence of others, as a measure that would acknowledge that workers 'deserve a life that allows them to serve their own purpose', where meaningful purposes and activities can be pursued outside work. See Muirhead, *Just Work*, p. 174; Bertrand Russell, *In Praise of Idleness and Other Essays* (London: Norton, 1935).
41. Sayer, 'Contributive Justice and Meaningful Work': 11.
42. Gomberg and his antagonist Richard Arneson appear in agreement about this premise. See Gomberg, *How to Make Opportunity Equal*, p. 74.
43. A key distinction between the intrinsic worth of all human life and the superiority or inferiority of some forms of living has been made by Vinit Haskar, who argues that one can accept the perfectionist view that some forms of life are superior to others without accepting the view that some human beings have greater intrinsic worth than others; Vinit Haskar, *Equality, Liberty and Perfectionism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).
44. Sanford Jacoby 'The Way It Was: Factory Labor before 1915', in *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions, and the Transformation of Work in the 20th Century*, rev. edn (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), pp. 10–28.
45. Richard Arneson, 'Meaningful Work and Market Socialism', *Ethics* 97 (April 1987): 517–45 (533).
46. Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy: An Introduction*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), pp. 191–2.
47. Gomberg, *How to Make Opportunity Equal*, p. 74.
48. As to the damaging blow of unemployment upon an adult person's sense of self-esteem, Gomberg notes that although the social disparagement of the unemployed as lazy or incompetent is often undeserved, the lack of recognition for an economic contribution is in any case devastating to dignity and self-esteem 'because the unemployed themselves accept the value of contributing and hence feel worse about themselves' for not contributing. Moreover, this blow to dignity is not 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' ibid.: 70.
49. As Kathi Weeks notes, in a society in which people are expected to work for wages in order to sustain their lives, work is a crucial good not only for those who work but also for those who have no work, or who are marginalized in relation to work. K. Weeks, *The Problem with Work* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), p. 2.
50. Muirhead, *Just Work*, p. 1. Even further, as Kathi Weeks notes, work absorbs a significant amount of our lives in that, when we are not working, we spend time 'training, searching and preparing for work, not to mention recovering from it' Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, p. 2.

51. The concept of intellectual flexibility is used by Kohn and Schooler to designate the ability of a person to respond successfully to cognitive problems and to engage in complex reflection. Using longitudinal assessments, Kohn and Schooler show a reciprocal relationship between the complexity of work and the intellectual flexibility of workers: jobs not only reflect personality and intelligence formed prior to occupational careers (as has been long assumed) but also affect personality and intelligence throughout working adult life. See *Work and Personality*, ch. 5.

    Classically, the influence of work on intelligence and character is also noted by, among others, Adam Smith and Alfred Marshall; the latter acknowledges that 'The business by which a person earns his livelihood generally fills his thoughts during by far the greater part of those hours in which his mind is at its best; during them his character is being formed by the way in which he uses his faculties'. Alfred Marshall, *Principles of Economics*, 8th edn (London: Macmillan, 1920), p. 1, quoted in Edmund Phelps, *Rewarding Work* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), pp. 12–13.
52. Rawls, *Theory of Justice*, p. 426 (s. 65, para. 5).
53. The esteem that attaches to complex skilled work is highlighted particularly by Gomberg, who argues that whereas, on the one hand, contributing to a community through work that demonstrates mastered complex abilities elicits prestige and esteem, as 'mastery of complexity makes us aware of our own abilities and draws admiration from others', life-occupations of routine work tend to damage self-development and self-esteem (Gomberg, *How to Make Opportunity Equal*, p. 73; cf. ibid.: 66–74).
54. Robertson and Cooper, *Well-being*, p. 3.
55. For a nice overview of the empirical literature on job stress, which appears widespread yet highest in occupations that 'contain high levels of demands and afford low levels of decision latitude', see Mark Tausig and Rudy Fenwick, *Work and Mental Health in Social Context* (New York: Springer, 2012), p. 162 and especially chs 1 and 7.
56. Robertson and Cooper, *Well-being*, p. 89. These authors highlight that, in addition to providing a sense of purpose, jobs that enhance well-being are sufficiently demanding so as to provide a sense of achievement, allow an appropriate degree of control over working processes, furnish workers with adequate support to perform tasks and permit opportunities for rest breaks.
57. ibid.: 3.
58. Veltman, 'Meaningful Work' (book MS).
59. Budd, *The Thought of Work*, p. 179.
60. *Labor exercens*, encyclical letter of Pope John Paul II, in Gregory Baum, *The Priority of Labor* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982), p. 95.
61. Phelps, *Rewarding Work*, p. 12.
62. John Hayes and Peter Nutman, *Understanding the Unemployed: The Psychological Effects of Unemployment* (London: Tavistock, 1981), p. 43.
63. Veltman, 'Meaningful Work' (book MS).
64. A. R. Gini and T. Sullivan, 'Work: The Process and the Person', *Journal of Business Ethics* 6 (1987): 649–55.
65. Among others, Beate Roessler highlights the impact of work on personal identity, arguing that, in light of this impact, it is crucial for social and political philosophers to attend to the deleterious impact of alienating work. As she writes, 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. (Roessler, 'Meaningful Work': 83–4)

66. In the empirical literature, see the classic studies of Kohn and Schooler, *Work and Personality*, especially the summary of findings on pp. 32–3, and Kornhauser, *Mental Health*. In the philosophical literature, see, for example, Roessler, 'Meaningful Work', as well as Andrea Veltman, 'Autonomy and Oppression at Work', in *Autonomy, Oppression and Gender*, ed. Andrea Veltman and Mark Piper (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
67. Murphy, *Moral Economy of Labor*, p. 4. Likewise, Arthur Kornhauser notes of factory workers in routine jobs, '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' Kornhauser, *Mental Health*, p. 267.
68. Wuthnow, *Poor Richard's Principle*, p. 225.
69. John White, 'Education, Work and Well-being', *Journal of the Philosophy of Education* 31(2) (1997): 233–47 (241).