18 Skilled work and ethics: How can we expand opportunities for meaningful work?[1]

Andrea Veltman

In this chapter, I would like to address questions of ethical and social philosophy that arise once we see that meaningful work is central in human flourishing: in a just society, is meaningful work available for all people? Who should do the necessary work that undermines the well-being of the workers performing it? And how can we expand opportunities for meaningful work for more people? In some respects, these are old questions, as utopian social theorists have for centuries envisioned ways in which communities can provide good work and minimize bad work for citizens. In the contemporary philosophical literature, Paul Gomberg (2007) proposes that egalitarian communities share forms of routine unskilled work that harm workers when undertaken as full-time occupations. This chapter is partly a meditation on the merits and limits of Gomberg's proposal, which on my view can provide a partial solution to problems that arise in conjunction with work and well-being. We have no complete solution to unhappy moral problems created by occupations of routine labor, and I believe we should acknowledge that work that allows us to thrive is a limited social good. The limitedness of meaningful work is not a reason to reject the normative claim that meaningful work is central in human well-being, nor is it a reason against working to transform social organizations so as to increase opportunities for meaningful work. If we have reason to avoid dreaming 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.

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 call eudemonistically meaningful work, or work that contributes to human flourishing by developing or exercising agency, skills or capabilities of workers. As I was at pains to demonstrate in *Meaningful Work* (2016), work that is not eudemonis-

tically meaningful is not necessarily meaningless altogether; meaningful work is a multifaceted 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 contributing to a community. In this way, elements of meaningful work are available to many people. But even if nearly all work has elements of meaning, work still may harm the worker. Working extensively at eudemonistically meaningless work stifles the flourishing of a worker and, in particular, can diminish her cognitive capabilities, her drive toward self-determination and her sense of self-worth. Thus, an intractable problem for social theorists concerns who will perform eudemonistically meaningless 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.

In what follows, I look first in sections 1 and 2 at the limited availability of eudemonistically meaningful work and at proposals to share forms of work that are not eudemonistically meaningful. In section 3, I explore the implications of the fact that sharing work represents only a partial solution to problems of work and well-being. Most important among these implications is that even in a well-ordered community, not all people will flourish. This is a hard truth that we should accept, at the same time that we work for structural transformations that bring opportunities for meaningful work into reach for more people. The chapter closes in section 4 with a discussion of ethics as a more adequate arena than politics for expanding opportunities for human flourishing through meaningful work.

On the limited availability of eudemonistically meaningful work

Eudemonistically meaningful work appears to be a limited good, and its limited availability arises ultimately, even if not exclusively, from a need 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 or otherwise unpleasant. If one is inclined to hope that an ideal well-ordered society will transform or eliminate undesirable forms of work, Russell Muirhead reminds us in *Just Work* 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" (2004, 32).

Granting that some social divisions of labor are a part of human life, 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" (1993, 45). 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. Murphy, however, emphasizes a distinction originally made by Marx 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. He argues that not all technical divisions of labor necessarily entail social divisions of labor; it is possible that one worker can efficiently tackle a number of discrete tasks, albeit there are limits to what one person can do (Murphy 1993, chapter 2 and especially p. 20).

Moreover, empirical studies of experiments in job design show a variety of social divisions of labor are equally commensurate with efficiency and productivity, and increasingly detailed divisions of labor tend to give diminishing returns in efficiency (Murphy 1993, 29–30, 45). Degrading the character of labor undermines worker morale, which undermines productivity. To increase productivity, some firms have experimented with job enlargement, in which workers rotate from task to task, as well as job enrichment, in which workers take responsibility for projects from conception to execution (Murphy 1993, 29–30 and 45). These experiments in job design highlight possibilities for organizing work in ways that reduce monotony for workers, teaching us to set aside assumptions that efficiency and productivity require social divisions of labor in which each task demands its own worker. Let us turn then to examine some of the morally imaginative proposals concerning social divisions of labor.

First, as a response to problems of unfulfilling work, a few social philosophers suggest that human communities can someday cease assigning people to perform such work. The old dream that advancements in technology will someday allow machines and robots to perform the worst occupations is a dream now revitalized by twenty-first-century developments in robotics. These developments 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 ambitions and creative activities. Replacing workers with machines would produce unpar-

alleled cost-savings for companies, but profit-maximizing capitalists are not alone in welcoming a revolution in robot-workers: the hope that dispiriting and dreary work 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. (1993, 298)

But such a proposal is not a complete solution to the problem of unfulfilling work: as 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 half 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 (1958, 122). Moreover, robots and machines cannot do the all the work of caring for others who cannot care for themselves, which can be joyous and pleasant but also draining and burdensome. Caring is a human activity involving communication, human touching and empathetic interaction; a society that would outsource childrearing and caring of sick, aged or disabled persons to fully automated institutions would be a dystopia and, as one author writes, "an abandonment of people to machines" (Bubeck 2002, 162).

On sharing work

As an alternative to the old dream in which no person need perform undesirable work, some egalitarian social philosophers entertain suggestions to share unwelcome work, in order that no one need perform such work as an occupation and, instead, all confront an opportunity to pursue fulfilling work. In contemplating this idea, the philosophical mind often turns immediately to Karl Marx, who suggests in *The German Ideology* that a communist society 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 (Marx and Engels 1976, 47). Marx's vision of a society without confining occupational divisions of labor is commonly dismissed as utopian fancy, but in revised form part of his core idea and his critique of oppressive divisions of labor live on in the writings of contemporary egalitarian philosophers of work. 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 (1990, 214–225). 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 dignity and pride among craftsmen (1993, 9).

More recently, in *How to Make Opportunity Equal*, Paul Gomberg argues that achieving genuine equality requires abolishing social divisions of labor. In contrast to routine work, complex skilled 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, whereas life occupations of routine work tend to damage self-development and self-esteem (Gomberg 2007, 73 and 66–74). 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" (Gomberg 2007, 166). Sharing routine labor would allow all people (particularly those who otherwise labor exclusively at routine work) an opportunity to pursue self-development and contribute complex work to communities. Sharing routine work and allowing all an opportunity for complex work is thus a matter of what Gomberg calls contributive justice. Whereas matters of distributive justice concern what individuals receive from communities, contributive justice concerns what individuals can offer to communities.

It is important to appreciate that the purpose of Gomberg's proposal is not to abolish all divisions of labor, nor is it a suggestion that people perform work that they lack competency to perform. The philosopher takes issue only with divisions of labor in which some enrich themselves through the development and exercise of complex skills while others perform only routine operations; he has no objection with job specializations, which are necessary for complex societies, in which workers master a subset of a broad body of human social knowledge. In highlighting connections between exercising complex skills and achieving dignity, social esteem and self-esteem, Gomberg writes that a community of equals must be one in which no one's life need be consumed by routine work, so that everyone can train for mastery of some complex skill; opportunity to do so can be unlimited. But a community of equals is not one in which everyone performs every task to which they are inclined: "People should not do things for which they are untrained or unqualified," he clarifies.

"If we share routine labor, those now confined to routine tasks will have the opportunity to acquire qualifications and master new knowledge according to their interests … In order to contribute an ability, one must show that one has mastered it" (2007, 76–77).

Some may attempt to counter a proposal that we share routine labor by arguing that, in a just society, advantages of complex work, such as stimulation, satisfaction, or social and self-esteem, could accrue to all kinds of work, if only routine work carried a higher social value. But such an objection runs up against a considerable body of empirical literatures, such as that of Arthur Kornhauser (1965) or Melvin Kohn and Carmi Schooler (1983), which demonstrate that complex, challenging work enhances cognitive capacities and self-esteem, and that non-use of cognitive abilities in one's life work lowers self-esteem and intellectual development while increasing personal "discouragement, futility and feelings of failure" (Kornhauser 1965, 29). Gomberg adds that the lack of esteem attached to occupations of routine work "is not an artifact of arbitrary evaluations"; routine workers do not receive the social and self-esteem that human beings naturally receive upon mastery of complexity, which elicits admiration on account of the level of difficulty, intelligence, beauty or skill exercised in the activity (2007, 70, 73).

Gomberg's proposal to share routine work rests on norms of justice, but in fact both moral and prudential reasons can motivate practices of sharing labor. Rotating job assignments in an organization represents one way of communally sharing work, and it contributes to the flourishing of an organization in multiple ways. For example, many Japanese firms practice 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 (Koike 1996). 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 prepare promising employees for management positions. Job rotation can alleviate worker burnout or fatigue and help prevent repetitive stress injuries in mechanical work. It has been shown to improve worker satisfaction, increase outputs and reduce absenteeism and employee turnover in occupations that would otherwise be excessively monotonous (Friedmann 1961, 21–28).

At the level of large-scale societies, however, proposals to share routine work 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 individual occupational choices and diversities of interests and talents. Sharing routine labor is

morally meritorious but runs up against fundamental limitations as a solution to social problems of work and flourishing. The practice appears feasible in contexts of households and smaller communities or organizations – particularly those united around shared goals, egalitarian values, and a spirit of caring for well-being of one another – but it is doubtful that larger societies could fully implement practices of sharing routine labor. Larger societies would face problems of implementation and accountability, and unless societies resort to dystopian bureaucratic intrusion into the lives of individuals, they realize ideals of contributive justice only imperfectly, in varying ways and measures. One fundamental issue is that larger societies are not entirely like egalitarian households in which a manageable number of people regularly interact, communicate face to face, hold one another accountable for shared duties, offer skills to one another freely, and care for the well-being of one another.

In any case, sharing routine work would not alone solve problems of work and flourishing, for not all oppressive work is simple and routine, readily mastered and thus sharable. Routine work like basic cleaning represents only a subset of a broader class of work that undermines or threatens the flourishing of a worker. There are many examples of skilled jobs that are integral to maintaining social functioning but that are not safe or pleasant for workers themselves: consider, for instance, septic tank technicians, sewer inspectors, glass makers, high-rise window washers, rodent control specialists, medical waste processors, and decomposition analysts at crime scenes. Given the skill level required, these jobs are not sharable. They do offer the satisfaction of serving the needs of communities through the use of developed skills, but aspects of these jobs, such as unpleasant smells, confrontations with disgusting substances, risks of serious injury and accidental dousings with waste, can impinge worker well-being and make them difficult to endure. The ongoing management of sizeable quantities of dirt, muck, and animal or human waste or remains, especially when combined with physical strain and stifling environmental conditions, makes some of these jobs endemically grueling. But due recognition, remuneration, and shortened working days that enable workers to enjoy life outside of work would to some extent alleviate the oppressive qualities of these and other occupations.

When feasible, sharing bad work can be commendable in bringing a community closer to ideals of human flourishing and equality, for unpleasant 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 sharing 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 outsourcing 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 reducing the hours of the working day.

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 perhaps 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 to 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 eudemonistically meaningful work, is not a reason to avoid social and economic transformations that will bring flourishing and meaningful work into reach for more people.

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 that leads some to propose that we share the worst forms of work – I would emphasize that justice can demand only that we try to bring opportunities for the good life within the reach of more people, or that we strive to create optimal social conditions for universal flourishing. The human condition never contained a promise that everyone will flourish, and it is not a deficiency of a normative theory of the good that not everyone flourishes. 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; such a theory is inherently prescriptive and should be unbounded by present (and by presently foreseeable) social distributions of goods.

In response to those who find it unsettling or unacceptable to believe that not everyone flourishes because not everyone has meaningful work, for example because the centrality thesis may thereby appear elitist or undemocratic, 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.

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.

In brief, part of the purpose of a theory of human flourishing is to illuminate a need for change in individual lives and social organizations, and to this end it is fruitful to explore solutions to social problems that undermine human flourishing. The solutions to problems of undesirable work reviewed here – including sharing routine work, outsourcing unfulfilling work to machines, reducing the working day and fairly enumerating and recognizing the value of many forms of work – 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 transforming working institutions so that work promoting psychological health and self-development becomes possible for more people.

There may be no ultimate remedy to the lingering dark side of work and flourishing, wherein some people do not have richly meaningful work and hence do not fully flourish. At this juncture, some may turn to value pluralism, which I briefly consider below (for a more elaborate discussion, see Veltman 2016, chapter 6). But I should like to underscore first that asserting that a person does not flourish is not tantamount to asserting her 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.

At the root of value pluralism are the important questions, "Is it not possible that people can achieve happiness without meaningful or fulfilling work?" and "Why can work that lacks meaning – or a life that lacks work altogether – not be chosen autonomously and reasonably by a person who has other life priorities?" In responding, I would begin by referring the value pluralist to the empirically well-documented impact of work on cognitive capabilities, autonomous agency and self-respect (see the review in Veltman 2016; esp. chapter 2). Given this profound impact, a desire for meaningful work is clearly more than a mere individual preference or a subjective taste.

A person is unlikely to fare well in life if he is out of work or if he lacks good work, for even if he can secure some of the goods enumerated above from sources such as family or leisure activities, he can be expected to lack a fuller array of the psychological, social, moral and economic goods that flow primarily from good work and, accordingly, he will not thrive. Accordingly, well-ordered societies provide opportunities for meaningful work, individuals would be well advised to pursue these opportunities, and the philosophical view of value pluralism, which casts work as having no special significance in an individual's life (see, e.g., Arneson 1987), is false.

Value pluralists appear to imagine individuals as reasonably choosing meaningless work in exchange for meaningful leisure or greater freedom, which can facilitate all kinds of worthy private pursuits. In responding to the view that people can lead satisfying, excellent or virtuous lives while working unchallenging jobs, Gomberg (2007) notes that the relevant question for social justice 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. In essence, in thinking about how social institutions can improve working life, we must consider what social structures are likely to produce or encourage in human communities, rather than what is merely possible for persons to achieve in a given context.

Without meaningful work even the rich lack important human goods and virtues, such as a sense of purposiveness, pride and accomplishment that flow from work in which one utilizes oneself in contributing to the world. Indeed, it may be for the reason that work brings several benefits that most of the

abundantly rich work (see, e.g., Muirhead 2004) and that a majority of people incorporate work when asked to envisage a fantasy life of economic freedom. In a classic study that has since been replicated and expanded with similar results, Morse and Weiss (1955) asked men and women in both blue collar and professional occupations whether they would continue to work if they won the lottery and faced no economic need for work. A vast majority (80%) answered that they would continue to work even without an economic need to do so (Gini and Sullivan 1987 review a number of similar studies).

In light of the impact work has upon workers, I would like to turn next to address questions concerning how communities can support the provision of meaningful work.

Ethical and political implications of the centrality of meaningful work in human flourishing

The centrality of meaningful work in human life does not itself entail a mandate on the part of governments, businesses or other employing organizations to provide meaningful work to people as a matter of right. The centrality thesis is a normative claim with open social and political implications, and specific arguments must be given to justify any particular program of social and political reform in light of the importance of meaningful work in living well. Still, I would join others in asserting that a decent social and political order does not undermine human flourishing but, on the contrary, promotes opportunities for acquiring basic human goods, including meaningful work. Among other philosophers, John Rawls argues that a well-ordered society provides opportunities for meaningful work, as the lack of meaningful work undermines a person's sense of security, self-respect and social membership (Rawls 1996, lix). Although Rawls does not treat the topic of work in any detail, his claim that a well-ordered *society* provides meaningful work captures what is perhaps the right picture of a network of social institutions – including but not limited to businesses, non-profit organizations, hospitals, schools, universities, families and government agencies – together providing opportunities for meaningful work. This picture is not one in which *the state* takes responsibility for distributing meaningful work or for determining what makes work meaningful. If indeed a well-ordered society provides opportunities for meaningful work, a key question in this context concerns *how* social organizations can support this provision. Let us turn now to examine this question.

Foremost, businesses and other employing organizations support the provision of meaningful work by creating and sustaining jobs that pay a living wage and that allow people to contribute knowledge and skills to communities. Not all jobs fit this bill, and as I discussed above, sharing routine labor and utilizing machines for eudemonistically meaningless work promise some success in ameliorating oppression in working life and in making meaningful work possible for more people. Additional possibilities and methods for social change include community and consumer activism rooted in ethical judgments of businesses whose activities are short of what is right, even if in the confines of what is legal. The starting point for such change is greater public awareness of the realities of working life: affluent persons in particular should come to see that our comfortable and pleasant lives depend on the toil of workers whose suffering is ordinarily shielded from our view in, for instance, the misery of the maquiladoras or in sweatshops around the globe. These forms of work undermine the health of workers, imposing mind-numbing repetition and physical strain upon people who toil for extremely low pay amid noxious chemicals while stuck at workstations, sometimes unable to get up and move about freely. Consumers have a tendency to ignore this dark underbelly of their purchases and, as Russell Muirhead writes in *Just Work*, "to wish away the bad work we make necessary, and to turn away from those who do such jobs" (2004, 173). Overcoming this ignorance and confronting the suffering of those whose work is bad is an important first step in envisioning and implementing a diverse handful of solutions to problems of bad work.

In addition to public awareness of realities of oppressive work, both labor laws and ethical judgments merit a place in regulating working life in a liberal democracy, as ethics transcends the law, and there are limits to what the law can achieve in promoting employee well-being. The force of law appears more suitable than the influence of ethical judgments in responding to problems of damaging work, whereas providing opportunities for meaningful work – which is a matter of promoting what is good rather than merely preventing or penalizing what is bad – lies in the sphere of ethics rather than politics.

Political coercion cannot ensure all moral action. In the context of work, it is hardly advisable to promote an economic system in which businesspeople believe their only obligation is to obey the law. A strong business and professional ethics provides insurance against moral failures, and in terms of providing employment, integrity in business requires an understanding of social roles and responsibilities of businesses and a consideration of the well-being of employees. As businesses impact human well-being not only in *what* they produce or provide but also in *how* they do so, it is fair to say that a business or other employing organization can merit moral esteem insofar as it has

a manner of production that enhances the flourishing of its employees; such an organization merits moral disesteem insofar as its manner of production imposes largely meaningless, stultifying or damaging work upon people.

If it appears wildly impractical to imagine substantial ethical transformations in the internal operations of profit-minded businesses and other employing organizations, I ask the reader to consider for a moment the considerable measures of moral progress that workplaces have achieved in some quarters of the world in the twenty-first century. In many countries, it is now commonplace to maintain as ideals – and to instantiate in practice in varying degrees – rational and fair hiring processes, non-discriminatory and harassment-free workplaces, equitable wages and freedom from threats, abuse and profanity while on the job. None of these ideals was in place a century ago, when the dominant mode of the production of commodities in the U.S. was the factory system, in which factory foremen used close supervision, abuse, profanity and threats to motivate faster and harder work, and in which work was highly insecure, poorly paid, fraught with pay inequities and ethnic discrimination, and not uncommonly secured through nepotism, favoritism and bribery (Jacoby 2004). Those of us lucky enough to reside in the rich countries of today already live in workplace utopias in comparison with the factories of the late 1800s, when it would have been difficult to see possibilities for the sort of change now becoming reality. Appreciating the moral progress achieved in past centuries highlights the abilities of human communities to transcend and reinvent given workplace structures and should lead us toward a position of open-mindedness in entertaining possibilities for transforming elements of working life that stifle human development or undermine human dignity.

Fundamentally, promoting healthy and meaningful work is a matter of ethics. Prioritizing people over profit, treating workers with respect, respecting the intelligence of working people and creating opportunities for people to contribute developed skills are basic ethical principles not only for employing organizations but also for communities at large. Such principles can work in tandem with more radical social and political initiatives, such as eliminating or reducing occupations of routine labor, instituting a universal basic income that would improve the bargaining position of workers or overthrowing capitalism. It is worth entertaining the more radical solutions, for social and political organizations are not unchanging elements of a natural order but variable human constructions. Without a firmly and widely implanted sense of ethics concerning workers, however, social and political transformation means little and may indeed never take root.

Note

1. This chapter is adapted with permission from Andrea Veltman, *Meaningful Work* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

References

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*, second edition. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958.
Arneson, Richard. "Meaningful Work and Market Socialism." *Ethics* 97:3 (April 1987): 517–545.
Bubeck, D. "Justice and the Labor of Care" in *The Subject of Care: Feminist Perspectives on Dependency*, edited by Eva Feder Kittay and Ellen K. Feder. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2002, 160–85.
Friedmann, Georges. *The Anatomy of Work: Labor, Leisure and the Implications of Automation*, translated by Wyatt Rawson. New York: The Free Press, 1961.
Gini, Al and T. Sullivan. "Work: The Process and the Person." *Journal of Business Ethics* 6 (1987): 649–655.
Gomberg, Paul. *How to Make Opportunity Equal: Race and Contributive Justice.* Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007.
Jacoby, Sanford. *Employing Bureaucracy: Managers, Unions, and the Transformation of Work in the 20th Century*, revised edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.
Kohn, Melvin and Carmi Schooler. *Work and Personality*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing, 1983.
Koike, Kazou. "Learning and Incentive Systems in Japanese Industry" in *The Japanese Firm: The Sources of Competitive Strength,* edited by M. Aoko and R. Dore. New York: Oxford University Press, 1996, 41–65.
Kornhauser, Arthur. *Mental Health of the Industrial Worker: A Detroit Study*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965.
Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. *The German Ideology*. (Originally published 1846.) In *Collected Works* Volume 5. New York: International Publishers, 1976.
Morse, Nancy and Robert Weiss. "The Function and Meaning of Work." *American Sociological Review* 20:2 (1955): 191–198.
Muirhead, Russell. *Just Work*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.
Murphy, James Bernard. *The Moral Economy of Labor: Aristotelian Themes in Economic Theory*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.
Rawls, John. *Political Liberalism*, paperback edition. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
Veltman, Andrea. *Meaningful Work*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.
Wilde, Oscar. "The Soul of Man under Socialism." In *The Collected Works of Oscar Wilde*, edited by Robert Ross. Volume 8. London: Routledge, 1993.
Young, Iris Marion. *Justice and the Politics of Difference*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990.