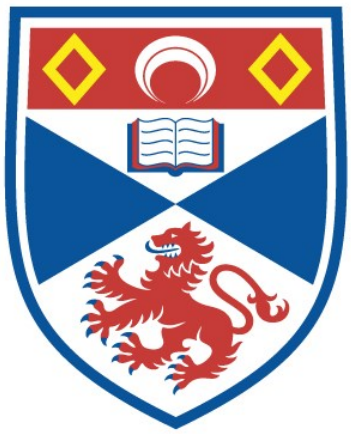
WORKING FOR EACH OTHER:
AN ACCOUNT OF THE NEED FOR WORK IN SOCIETY

Deryn Mair Thomas

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD
at the
University of St Andrews



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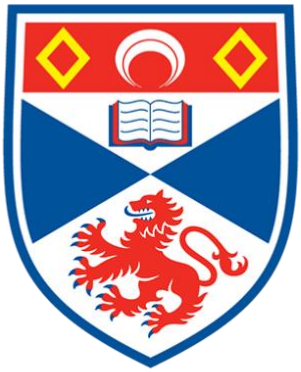

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I, Deryn Mair Thomas, do hereby certify that this thesis, submitted for the degree of PhD, which is approximately 73,000 words in length, has been written by me, and that it is the record of work carried out by me, or principally by myself in collaboration with others as acknowledged, and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for any degree. I confirm that any appendices included in my thesis contain only material permitted by the 'Assessment of Postgraduate Research Students' policy.

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Working For Each Other

An Account of the Need for Work in Society

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Abstract

This dissertation evaluates a need for work. In doing so, it addresses a neglected topic – by systematically exploring the concept of work and its relation to basic needs – and situates that contribution in the context of existing philosophical literature on work and adjacent research in the humanities and social sciences. Second, it offers up new conceptual tools – by arguing for the usefulness of a needs-centred perspective on work – which can aide in our deliberations about how to construct a more human(e) future of work.

The project defends an account of a need for work which is grounded in the basic, non-contingent needs we hold, not as individuals, but as a society. It begins by defining *work* and *need*, and clarifying the meaning of the question, "Do we need work?" in light of these definitions. It then draws a distinction between the different levels of social life at which we can be understood to hold needs: as individuals, as a community, and as a society. I argue that it is possible, at each of these levels, to ask and answer a different question about work's relationship to our basic, non-contingent needs. Subsequently, I find that work is important, but not necessary for our ability to meet such needs as individuals and members of a community, since we can do so through non-work activities. It is, however, necessary at the level of society. As a society, we have a need for a shared system of reciprocity to govern how we recognise and communicate about contribution. Work allows us to meet this need by functioning as a signalling mechanism for value. In fulfilling this function, it cannot be straightforwardly replaced by non-work activities, since activities like leisure are not connected to contribution in the same way.

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generosity and care. Much of this dissertation would have remained unintelligible, even to myself, without his guidance and encouragement.

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1 Introduction

Through the activity of labour, man develops his powers and capacities, and creates new needs - including the need to work.[1]

In the Oscar-Winning film, *Nomadland,* Frances McDormand stars as Fern, a middle-aged widow who, after losing everything in a recession, decides to live in a van as modern nomad and travel across the United States. The film touches on a wide range of philosophical topics and questions concerning modern life, but chief among them is work. In the story, Fern shuffles though seasonal jobs and temporary positions, living paycheque to paycheque in order to make ends meet. Her choice to do so is characterised as intentional, since the flexibility allows her to maintain the freedom and mobility of a nomadic life. But the story makes it clear that the choice does not come without hardship.

In a brief scene at the start of the film, Fern is sitting in a welfare office, hoping to find some kind of semi-permanent employment that will let her settle down for a season or two. Her face is worn. It is the dead of mid-western winter, and she has just spent the night in a frozen van.

The social worker, too, looks overworked and underpaid. She politely tries to tell Fern that there is nothing available. She urges her to consider early retirement. "I don't want to retire!" Fern replies, the disappointment and frustration in her voice barely concealed. "I don't think I can get by on the benefits and… [pauses]…I need work. I like work."[2]

In this line, McDormand's character asserts a belief – held in common by many – that work is simply something she cannot get on without. It is a necessary feature of life. And this sentiment is echoed, not only in fiction, but in testimonial accounts of real people's experiences with work. For example, in the interviews he conducted for his oral history, *Working*, Studs Terkel spoke to Americans across

[1] Sayers, "The Need to Work."
[2] 15:05, *Nomadland.*

the country about what they did all day and how they felt about what they did. In one interview, Bud Freeman, a saxophone player, stated, "I want to play [the saxophone] for the rest of my life. I don't see any point in stopping…It's become clearer to me after having done it for forty-seven years. It's a thing I need to do."[3]

In another interview, a factory manager, Dave Bender, said, "I love my work. It isn't the money. It's just a way of expressing my feelings…Retire? Hell no. I'd open up another shop and start all over again. What am I gonna do? Go crazy? I told you I love my work…I don't have to worry about tomorrow. But I still want to work. I *need* to."[4] According to Kay Stepkin, a baker: "Work is an essential part of being alive. Your work is your identity. It tells you who you are."[5]

What's more, this sense of need, although commonplace and shared, is not simply an expression of the relationship between work and its products: in other words, these people are not just expressing a requirement for goods, to be fulfilled by working. Dave Bender confirms this when he says, "It isn't about the money." Nor is that requirement fulfilled by having completed the required number of years in a particular job, as illustrated by both Bender, who rejects retirement, and Freeman, who cites the forty-seven years he has spent as a saxophone player as evidence, not that he should quit, but that he *must* go on playing for the rest of his life. Stepkin even argues, in a later part of her conversation with Terkel, that people who work for purely instrumental reasons actually lose one of the central goods of work, namely the joy that comes from working for its own sake. And although Fern clearly values (and requires) the job for the wages and the benefits it will give her, she does not explain her need for work in instrumental terms. "I need work. I like work." Work is something she cannot get on without, even as she does not want to get on without it.

But what is going on here? What does it really mean, to *need* work? Although this expression is ubiquitous, it has been largely unexplored or dismissed in academic philosophy. Further, fundamental assumptions about the nature of work are readily being questioned in the public arena and work itself is being radically transformed by new digital and automated technologies. Ingrained cultural beliefs about what counts as legitimate work, and who should be recognised as a contributing member of

[3] Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day And How They Feel About What They Do*, 907.
[4] Terkel, 789–90.
[5] Terkel, 925.

society, are being challenged and upended. There is a pressing need for new conceptual tools with which to ask and answer questions about work.

The central aim of this dissertation is to contribute somewhat towards this goal, by offering up a robust, philosophical account of a need for work. First, I aim to make a distinct contribution to the academic philosophical literature – by systematically exploring the concept of work and its relation to our most basic needs – and to situate it in the context of existing philosophy on work and adjacent research in the humanities and social sciences. Second, I aim to offer up some new conceptual tools – by arguing for the usefulness of a needs-based perspective on work in addressing problems of policy – which can aide in our deliberations about how to construct a more human(e) future of work.

The purpose of this introductory chapter is three-fold. First, I say something more about the justification for the project, by discussing the absence of existing literature on the topic and the special urgency for its exploration in the context of current social and political landscapes. Next, I discuss the dissertation's aims and structure. Finally, I give a brief overview of the dissertation, including its central thesis and conclusions. In doing so, I aim to illustrate a more general picture of the project, to which the reader can return for clarification as they progress through more detailed chapters.

1.1 Justification for the Project

Why is it important for a philosopher to study a need for work? We can start with the most basic reason: because work is extremely important to people. In many parts of the world, the average person's life will revolve around their work. They will spend their childhood and adolescence preparing for it and the majority of their adult life doing it, and it will affect the quality of life they have after they are no longer able to (or choose not to) do it anymore. The kind of work they have access to and choose will determine who they associate with, where they live, their social status, and their ambitions and their sense of identity. As a central feature of human life, it seems only fitting, then, that philosophy should be concerned with investigating it.

While there is quite a bit of literature across the humanities on the topic of work, there has been very little systematic discussion of the sense in which we might need it. This seems odd, given that a sense

of necessity around work is pervasive and rarely does one's experience of work escape it. Further, anyone who works will likely experience this sense of necessity in the day-to-day practice of work, and not just when thinking about it in the abstract. For example, in addition to the examples already given, a person might experience it when she feels she *must* go to work every day. She might experience it when, after an injury or illness, she feels she *needs* to get back to work as soon as possible. She might even experience it when, after retiring, she feels she *must* find something useful to do.

What these expressions of need refer to is up for debate. They could refer to an existential need for meaning and purpose, like in the statements made by Bud Freeman or Dave Bender. They could refer to an instrumental need, either for money, goods, resources, or any of the other concrete benefits of work. But they could also refer to an inherent need, where to work is to engage in a fundamental human activity without which one's life would be reduced to something less than human. They could refer to a moral need, where to work is to fulfil a requirement for living a good or righteous life.

Understanding the subtle distinctions between these various senses of need has theoretical and practical implications for how we organise society. But the absence of dedicated scholarship on the subject means philosophy has neglected to address these implications and other important questions related to our relationship to work and our motivations for doing it. In my research, for example, I have found only a handful of explicit attempts to address a need for work in the mainstream academic scholarship, such as Sean Sayers' essay on the topic and Ruth Yeoman's work on meaningful work as a fundamental human need, both of which will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.[6] This project is valuable in so far as it attempts to contribute rigorous philosophical analysis on the subject, to motivate further philosophical research and expand the debate.

While answering such questions would constitute a unique contribution to the literature in its own right, there is another justification for a project which aims to enrich the academic scholarship on the subject: because work, and the public conversation about it, is radically changing. These changes are multi-faceted and complex, a result of advancements in technology, shifting work norms, changes to the landscape of labour policy and unprecedented global events such as the COVID-19 pandemic. But regardless of the underlying reason these changes and events have occurred, they are raising new

[6] Sayers, "The Need to Work"; Yeoman, "Conceptualising Meaningful Work as a Fundamental Human Need"; Yeoman, *Meaningful Work and Workplace Democracy: A Philosophy of Work and a Politics of Meaningfulness*.

questions about work and our relationship to it, which traditional conceptual tools are often ill-equipped to answer.

Here are a few examples. The rise in video gaming as a form of recreation over the last several decades has led to the emergence of a multi-billion-dollar industry of professional video gaming. Professional gamers, like professional athletes, make money by competing for a team, winning international tournaments, and receiving sponsorships. But the emergence of such an industry also raises challenging questions: Where is the line between work and play? What constitutes a legitimate instance of work? A traditional definition of work – paid productive activity – cannot help us to answer these questions: while professional gaming is clearly compensated, it also involves engaging in an activity which has typically belonged to the domains of leisure and play.

As another example: the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to a large-scale digitalisation of work, by forcing a global shift towards greater acceptance of remote work and flexible working arrangements. Many have celebrated the increased agency this affords to workers: they are able to make their own schedules, spend more time engaging in non-work interests, and decide the degree to which their work and non-work lives interact. But even though remote work has become normal, it is still a privilege: many forms of employment cannot be made remote. Given the possibility of future pandemics and the related risks associated with working in-person, this can raise the following questions: What constitutes good work? How should good work be fairly distributed? Existing conceptions of what makes work good will need to adapt to consider the advantages (e.g., flexibility) and disadvantages (e.g., loneliness) of digitalisation, and incorporate these into evaluations about distribution.

Finally: in the face of persistent conditions of bad work, many thinkers in the public sphere have called for the eradication of work, through the application of automated technologies and artificial intelligence. However, these technologies are also leading to the positive transformation of workplaces *for* people. Robots can relieve workers from tedious, mundane activities as well as those tasks which are dangerous or harmful, allowing some of society's most burdensome but necessary labour to be re-allocated to machines.[7] They are also changing our understanding of what constitutes a work community or a social relationship at work. For example, cobots – a type of robotic device designed

[7] Paulíková, Gyurák Babeľová, and Ubárová, "Analysis of the Impact of Human–Cobot Collaborative Manufacturing Implementation on the Occupational Health and Safety and the Quality Requirements."

to work in collaboration with a human operator – are becoming commonplace in industrial and manufacturing environments.[8] These examples raise interesting questions about the value of work: Would we *really* be better off in a world without it? What new opportunities for previously unimagined benefits (such as the possibility of developing 'social', collaborative relationships with robots) do advancements in technology open up?

These are only a few examples which illustrate the importance of advancing philosophical theory on the topic of work and developing new conceptual tools to help answer these questions. Of course, developing an account of a need for work is only one such tool – and it cannot answer all of the questions outlined above. However, I argue here that it is an especially useful one, because, as I will explore in Chapters 3 and 8, it helps resolve some of the shortcomings of the existing conceptual tools which have been traditionally used to evaluate problems concerning work. As such, it should be thought of as one part of a broader toolkit that provides the empirical, theoretical, and normative equipment that we will need to make careful and reasoned decisions about institutions and policy for an uncertain future of work.

1.2 Aims and Structure

In response to the changing landscape of work in the public sphere, and recognising its relevance for philosophy, this project was originally motivated by three central questions. Imagining that the material or financial need to work could feasibly eliminated, by ensuring that people have other ways to access the material and financial benefits currently provided through work, why else might we want to preserve work? Do those reasons constitute a different kind of need for work? What does this entail for how we ought to organize society? The aim of the project is, then, to systematically analyse the concept of work, to examine what it might mean for work to be a need – *beyond* a strict material need – and to explore the implications of such a need.

Structurally, the dissertation is divided into eight chapters, which can be roughly grouped into three parts. In the first part, Chapters 2 and 3 are devoted to defining the key terms of the project – namely, that of *work* and that of *need* – and setting up the question to be answered. "Do we have a need for

[8] Pauliková, Gyurák Babeľová, and Ubárová, 2.

work?" becomes something more specific, in light of these definitions. While some readers might be surprised at the amount of space I dedicate to definitions, it is important that I choose the appropriate ones for the task at hand and that I explain the rationale behind these choices. Although such concepts have been analysed and defined before in academic philosophy, work has often been treated as a concept whose definition is so commonplace or obvious (or difficult to determine) that it does not bear examining in great detail. In rejecting this assessment, I offer one possible analysis of the concept of work and explain how it serves the purposes of this project.

Chapters 4 through 6 cover the main body of the argument by addressing, in turn, different versions of the question. For example, Chapter 4 aims to address the question of whether we need work as individuals*;* Chapter 5, as a community and as members of a community; Chapter 6, as a society and as members of a society. In Chapter 6, I present and defend the central thesis of the dissertation: that a need for work exists and should be understood as a need that is grounded in our society-based requirements for a shared system of reciprocity to govern contribution. Work is, in our current social arrangements, the only activity which allows us to satisfy this society-based need. As such, I do not need work on the basis of my individual requirements, nor, necessarily, as a member of any specific community, but instead on the basis of my requirements and the requirements of others that arise out of our belonging to the same society.

The final part of the project is devoted to exploring the major implications of such a view. Chapter 7 considers some of the major objections presented to it by the dominant arguments against work: namely, the anti-work or post-work position. In Chapter 8, which also serves as a conclusion to the dissertation, I briefly examine what the central thesis can contribute to deliberations about policy, and more generally, to the practical evaluations we make about the future of work.

Where it makes sense to do so, I have highlighted key terms and central claims using italicised and bolded formatting.

1.3 Overview

Although I am interested in evaluating a need for work, it is not a need for work in any old sense of the terms. A definition of work must strike a balance between "the overly narrow focus on paid employment and the excessively broad inclusion of all human activity"[9] in order to capture "the familiar things we do in fields, factories, offices, schools, shops, building sites, call centres, homes, and so on, to make a life and a living."[10] A conception of need must distinguish between the various ways we can require things, such as the difference between the way I need a pencil to write a letter, the way I need food to live, or the way I need friendship to flourish. Therefore, in Chapters 2 and 3 respectively, I set parameters for the inquiry by defining work and establishing a conception of need.

In Chapter 2, I draw on the work of Andrea Veltman and John Budd to define work as purposeful, goal-oriented human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that produces economic, social, or symbolic value beyond itself. This offers a perspective of work that is interpretive, in that it integrates a descriptive account of work – by defining core characteristics of the activity – with a normative account – by saying something about the meaning and value of the activity. In doing so, I am able to capture common examples of work, such as employment, alongside more marginal examples, including unpaid work, civic engagement and artistic creation. Bringing together many disparate conceptions of work allows me to broadly capture the familiarity of work while still maintaining a distinction from non-work activities, which include labour, leisure and rest.

In Chapter 3, I consider the four Aristotelian senses of need in order to establish an understanding of need as that for which there is no alternative. This understanding of need allows us to make sense of what is meant when a government claims that a road *needs* to be constructed, or a nuclear reactor *needs* to be built. Understood in this light, the central question of the dissertation can be further refined. Do we have a requirement, for which there is no alternative, for purposeful, goal-oriented human activity involving exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that produces value beyond itself?

[9] Budd, *The Thought of Work*, 2.
[10] Clark, "Good Work," 62.

Having established definitions for both work and need, one final task involved in laying the groundwork remains: to get clear on who *we* are. I begin this task in Chapter 3, by distinguishing between three distinct categories of needs for which there is no alternative: first, those that we have as individuals, alone; second, those that we have as members of communities; and third, those that we have as members of societies. Chapters 4 through 6 subsequently explore each of these kinds of needs, and the relationship between these needs and work.

In Chapter 4, I characterise the needs that we have as individuals as basic, non-contingent needs. Drawing on an account offered by Soran Reader and Gillian Brock, non-contingent needs are unforsakeable requirements, things we cannot get on without. They can be basic and shared, or entirely unique to the person that I am. They can be temporary. For example, while I write this, I have a non-contingent need for a quiet place to work, in order to finish my dissertation. In a year, I will not necessarily have the same need. That it is temporary does not make its need to be met any less urgent. Since I consider completing my degree as something of incomparable value for my life, there is simply no alternative – it is a need I must meet.

As individuals, we have a wide range of material, relational, political, and personal needs which can be considered basic and non-contingent. I show that work plays an important role in allowing us to answer these kinds of needs, by giving us the opportunity to acquire material goods and concrete resources and to develop capabilities. Ultimately, however, it is not the only way we can meet them. Very basic material needs can be met through labour. Further, material goods and concrete resources are transferable, which means we can acquire them so long as others work to produce them. And although capabilities are not transferable, they can be developed in the context of many non-work activities. I therefore argue that work does not constitute a need for any particular, individual person on the basis of their individual needs.

But as I showed in Chapter 3, we do not only have basic, non-contingent needs as individuals. We can also be understood to have such needs as members of communities and societies. In Chapter 5, I turn to consider the basic, non-contingent needs which are community-based: that is, the requirements that must be met for us to live together with others in communities. Since a community is defined as a cohesive group of individuals who possess shared or common features, such as identity, interests, or aims, it can be understood to have a need for members, as well as a need for a system of norms which

allows members to communicate about and regulate membership within it. I also argue that communities have a need for social capital, a term borrowed from Robert Putnam which refers to connections among individuals and the social networks that arise from them.

Just as in the case of individuals, work also plays an important role in allowing us to meet our community-based needs. By engaging in many forms of work, we enter into and come to hold membership within communities formed and sustained around shared, cooperative norms. A community needs to reproduce itself. Thus, it needs some number of individuals with shared characteristics or common activities; it needs connections, or social capital, to form between these individuals; and it needs a system of norms that govern membership and allow members to communicate with each other. Work allows us to ensure that these needs are met.

Ultimately, however, it is also the case that work is not the only practice through which communities meet these needs. Thus, I again argue that work itself does not a constitute a need for communities. This pushes the question forward, yet again, into Chapter 6, where I ask: Does work constitute a need for society?

I define a society as a cohesive network of communities and individuals who are relevantly connected to each other through interactions linked by a common fate and governed by a shared system of reciprocity. Like a community, a society must engage in the processes that allow it to reproduce itself, and these can be understood as basic, non-contingent needs which are based on our membership in societies. I argue, in particular, a society needs mechanisms to communicate about the norm of contribution. Such norms ultimately contribute to a shared system of reciprocity, which is the foundation of a sense of a common fate. Work answers these needs in two ways: by promoting a sense of a common fate through belonging and pro-social behaviours, and by contributing to a shared system of reciprocity through a signalling mechanism for value.

It is here, at the level of society and through work's function as a signalling mechanism for value, that there is a more promising case for a need for work. In signalling a person's social contribution to others in their society, I argue that work plays a necessary role in regulating societal membership and how members of a society communicate with each other about social contribution. However, perhaps most importantly, work allows us to transcend the standards and measures of contribution that exist

within the narrow limits of particular communities, so that we may communicate intelligibly with other members of a diverse society about what kinds of standards and measures of contribution are relevant to society at large. Thus, work is not just any old norm governing societal membership – it is a central one.

In fact, it is so central that it cannot be straightforwardly replaced by other forms of human activity, such as leisure. This is because leisure is not linked to contribution in the same ways that work is, and it is this conceptual link that allows a society to have a shared system of reciprocal norms. Although this thesis accepts that new concepts and practices could, in theory, emerge to fulfil the signalling function of work, I argue that we can presently understand work as a societal-level need. While I myself may not need to work in virtue of any specific needs that work meets for me individually, or for me as a member of a community, I can still have a need for others in my society to work, due to the function work plays for society at large.

In Chapter 7, I address the critique of this claim posed by arguments against work. After all, there would seem to be a fundamental conflict between the anti-work position and a society-based need for work. How can we need work, in any sense, if it is often so bad for us?

I lay out this critique in greater detail and argue that, before the challenge can be addressed, the anti-work position must clarify three central disagreements which are present in the literature: what the position means by *work*, what makes work bad, and what is the end goal of the anti-work project. Once these conflicts are addressed, I show how the two positions may in fact be compatible. Both can agree that the existing conditions of many forms of modern work are bad, and deeply in need of reform. Where they differ is in respect to their ultimate solutions. While many anti-work arguments remain agnostic about prescribed solutions, they allow for the conclusion that the best (and in some cases, only) way to solve the problems of work is to destroy society as it currently exists in order to construct a new social arrangement in which work is no longer necessary. The central thesis, on the other hand, rules out this possibility. It does, however, suggest that work can meet the society-based need while still being reformed to eliminate its worst aspects.

Chapter 8 serves as conclusion to the project, by exploring the contributions of the dissertation to the philosophical literature and its usefulness beyond academia. One of the most notable advantages of

the central thesis and, more generally, the use of a needs-centred perspective to evaluate questions regarding work, is that it makes work important without making it *too* important. I argue that work constitutes a need because, in our current organisation of society, we cannot get on without it. However, it is *not* essential for our individual identity, or even for our identity as members of a community, although it may still function as an important activity in that respect. Further, I argue that work constitutes a society-based need only in so far as we choose to live in societies, and do not choose other modes of social organisation. Should we choose not to live in societies, or to organise society differently, according to radically different principles, the same need for work may not exist. In this way, a need for work can be real and genuine, while at the same time, within our control to shape and change.

2 Defining Work

Because such a vast array of uses and meanings exist for the term, defining work can prove challenging. Within certain fields and in relation to certain questions, it makes sense to define work by the meaning which is most relevant to that field. This is because definitions are often employed to serve a specific purpose, and their purpose is laid out by certain parameters and conceptual boundaries. For example, in an economics seminar, it makes sense to define work in terms of hardship undergone for a desired output. In vocational psychology, it would be more relevant to define work as an occupation, job, or career.

This chapter will review existing literature on conceptions and meanings of work in order to offer a definition which best serves the central question of the dissertation; namely, evaluating a need for work. But I am not looking to evaluate a need for work in any old sense. In particular, I am interested in evaluating whether we have a need for "the familiar things we do in fields, factories, offices, schools, shops, building sites, call centres, homes, and so on, to make a life and a living."[1] If the definition of work is too specific – say, if I define work as employment – then I can only evaluate whether we need to do work in that very specific sense. However, if it is too broad – if I define work as all purposive activity – then I assess whether we have a need to do *most* kinds of activity. The first topic is a narrower inquiry than I am interested in exploring here. The second topic is somewhat philosophically uninteresting. Recognising a need to do *some* sort of activity would tell me very little about the things I require to live a full human life.

Therefore, I begin in Section 2.1 by offering a rough sketch of the sort of definition required, one which strikes a balance between "the overly narrow focus on paid employment and the excessively broad inclusion of all human activity."[2] I illustrate one of the central dilemmas of defining work by

[1] Clark, 62.
[2] Budd, *The Thought of Work*, 2.

describing two different people – one, an actor who bartends; the other, a bartender who acts – and highlighting the difficulties that arise when trying to delineate between what counts as work and what does not.

Next, I outline several of the dominant approaches to defining work, including a broad approach, a narrow approach, and an interpretive approach (§2.2). Broad definitions take a general, abstract approach, while narrow definitions of work are highly specialised, aiming to identify descriptive features of work in order to draw boundaries around a very specific conception of work. Both definitions focus primarily on descriptive features, seeking to identify what work *is* or *does* without directly reflecting on the meaning of these features, or the reasons and purposes for which it is pursued. The interpretative approach, by contrast, aims to capture both descriptive features and normative features – what work *means* and why it is valuable – under one definition.

Following each approach, I show how both the broad and narrow approaches are unsuitable for the purposes of this project because they generate the wrong kinds of questions about a need for work. Finally, however, I outline two examples of the interpretive approach – from the work of Andrea Veltman and John Budd – which integrate relevant descriptive features of work with a normative account of its place in human life (§2.3). I derive, from their discussions, a definition of work as the following: ***purposeful, goal-oriented human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that produces economic, social, or symbolic value beyond itself.*** This definition makes intelligible the question of whether work – as more than just a job but less than all productive activity – is something we could need.

2.1 A Dilemma: Defining Work in Relation to the Question of Need

This dissertation aims to address questions about the relationship that we have with work, construed in a generally intuitive sense. But determining what counts as work, even in that sense, can still be challenging. Andrea Veltman points to this problem when she writes that "work is a concept which eludes clean conceptual analysis."[3] And Russell Muirhead echoes this sentiment by stating that work

[3] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*, 22.

"cannot be hemmed in by natural definition or fixed like an element on the periodic table."[4] What counts as work can be dependent on historical and cultural contexts, as well as existing social norms. It can change over time. It can be dependent on the way a person is oriented towards an activity – one person's work might be another person's leisure. And although the colloquial use of the term *work* most commonly refers to a person's job or occupation, work can be both paid and unpaid.

As an illustration of some of these challenges, consider the activities of two different people. The first, who I will call the *actor-bartender,* is a struggling actor who has a day job as a bartender. The second, who I will call the *bartender-actor*, is a bartender who is an actor in her spare time. The *actor-bartender* intends to become a professional actor one day, and often spends her evenings applying for auditions, running lines, and developing a broad range of acting skills. All these activities are pursued in the hopes of one day getting her big break. The *bartender-actor*, on the other hand, loves her job. It gives her flexibility and ample free time to pursue acting in her free time, which is her favourite hobby. She regularly performs in local community theatre productions, using the time outside of her job to run productions, attend rehearsals, and develop her own skills as an actor.

These two people engage in approximately the same sets of activities. So, who is working, and who is not? I use this example to show that it is sometimes very difficult to tell what really distinguishes work from non-work. Both earn a pay cheque by bartending while doing activities in their free time that allow them to pursue their passion for acting and theatre. Beginning from intuitions or common sense, many would be willing to label the *actor-bartender*'s extracurricular activities as work: after all, if she is aiming to become a professional actor, her extracurricular acting is done in the service of that goal. Applying for auditions, running lines, and rehearsing are, in that sense, activities necessary for professional advancement – a category of activities more obviously identifiable as work. At the same time, intuitions and common sense will likely view the *bartender-actor*'s extracurricular activities as pure leisure, something she does 'for fun'.

If work is defined simply as employment, then the only activities in this example that count as work are those that are remunerated: bartending. However, this seems to ignore important realities about unpaid work: that many forms of work which are not compensated are nevertheless fulfilling and offer

[4] Muirhead, *Just Work*, 4.

many of the same benefits we get from our jobs. If work is defined as all productive activity, then any activity which is demonstrably productive will count as work. But this definition restricts work to only those activities that result in some clear product, which may go against many intuitions that work can also involve mental or emotional effort. And it ignores another intuitive element of work: that pursuing one's personal goals or dreams can also involve goal-oriented, purposeful tasks which require effort over an extended period in order to see the results.

This example illustrates the challenges involved in defining work because it captures the many different senses of work that are relevant to a question of need. To evaluate a need for work means being able to consider, in Sam Clark's terms, "the familiar things we do in fields, factories, offices, schools, shops, building sites, call centres, homes, and so on, to make a life and a living" under the purview of one definition of work.[5] It means being able to consider the significance and value of unpaid work as well, since such work is only made distinct from employment by the (somewhat arbitrary) designation that someone is willing to pay for it. Unpaid work is, in many cases, no different from paid work in allowing us to meet our material needs, be productive, find meaning, or engage in interesting and useful activities. I therefore treat it as a legitimate form of work which must be accounted for in a definition of the term.

For the purposes of this dissertation, then, I will need a definition of work which, as John Budd writes, strikes a balance between "the overly narrow focus on paid employment and the excessively broad inclusion of all human activity."[6] In the following sections, I review existing definitions of work in order to further explore how such a definition could be articulated.

2.2 Existing Definitions of Work

Analysis of the concept of work is an underexplored area in analytic philosophy. While many authors have written on the topic of work, very few have made sustained efforts to systematically define it. It is, instead, common to find an appeal to the intuitive logic of, 'You know it when you see it.' For example, in a paper exploring the duty to work, Michael Cholbi simply outsources the definition of

[5] Clark, "Good Work," 62.
[6] Budd, *The Thought of Work*, 2.

work to whatever the dominant culture identifies as work when he writes, "[R]ather than attempting to settle what work is, we can instead rely upon whatever notion of work is at issue in the ostensible interpersonal duty to work… work is whatever individuals are required to do so as to discharge the ostensible duty to work."[7] This approach, however, can be problematic in cases where the dominant cultural definition fails to include many forms of work conducted by marginalised members of society.

Of those that have been offered, philosophical definitions of work can be sorted into at least three main categories. In this section, I outline three major categorical approaches to defining work – broad, narrow and interpretive – and explore some of the advantages and disadvantages of their use in relation to the central question of the dissertation. Ultimately, I argue that we can find a solution to the problems of broad and narrow approaches by turning to the third, interpretive category. Rather than offer a list of descriptive conditions for the concept, interpretive definitions integrate a descriptive account of work with an account of its meaning and value as a concept and practice embedded in human life.

2.2.1 The Broad Approach

Bertrand Russell famously defined work in the following way: "Work is of two kinds: first, altering the position of matter at or near the earth's surface relatively to other such matter; second, telling other people to do so."[8] While the quotation captures a somewhat satirical attitude towards the concept, it does aptly summarise a broad approach to defining work. Broad definitions are abstract. One textbook example of this approach would be, quite literally, the one you might find in a textbook or dictionary, where work is defined as a verb meaning "to act, do, function, or operate."[9] Broad definitions describe work as activity, while attempting to remain agnostic about exactly what kind of action, function, alteration, or production such activity entails.

Amongst the work of contemporary academic philosophers, one can find many iterations of this sort of abstract, analytic definition. As an example of a descriptive definition, this approach provides a list of descriptive features to say something about what work is or does. For example, Sam Sayers defines work as a productive activity aimed towards useful ends. Work, he argues, is productive because it is

[7] Cholbi, "The Duty to Work," 1122.
[8] Russell, "In Praise of Idleness."
[9] "Work, v."

an activity that reflects "the exercise of our powers to shape and form the objective world and appropriate it to our needs."[10] However, productivity is treated somewhat loosely here, as involving both the creation of material objects as well as the moulding of ideas, relationships between people, or states of affairs. In addition, he adds that the products of work – the things created or achieved – must display a use-value, "something that satisfies human needs."[11] However, he remains neutral about what form the use-value must take, only specifying that the end result must be useful to other human beings.

John White, a philosopher of education who has explored the relationship between education and work, offers a similar account. He defines work as a heteronomous or autonomous activity that the agent intends to lead to some end product outside of the activity itself.[12] According to White, work is an activity that must have end products, although they need not be tangible and might be best understood as goals or outcomes. Internal goals – or what he calls 'intrinsic delights' – and the perpetuation of the activity itself do not, in fact, count as end products. This is primarily because, as he argues, their presence fails to trigger intuitions about work, causing "any thought that this is a form of work to drop away." White considers this a mark against their inclusion.

Sayers' and White's definitions are examples of a broad approach to work because their lists of conditions cast as wide a conceptual net as possible. With such abstract conditions, these definitions can encompass all instances of productive and unproductive work, paid and unpaid work, creative and intellectual work, emotional and physical work (and so on) under one unified definition. The benefit of such an account is that it will fit, with relatively little controversy, almost any example or instance of work.

However, the generality of such an approach can make it difficult to determine where work ends, and non-work begins. Broad definitions sometimes capture examples which intuitions or cultural usage of the term would reject, such as failing to differentiate between work and labour. Some authors will treat these terms as interchangeable.[13] However, given that the two terms have different etymological backgrounds and are often used in different ways, I treat their distinction as important here.

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[10] Sayers, "The Need to Work," 19.
[11] Sayers, 19.
[12] White, "Education, Work and Well-being," 234.
[13] See, for example: Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*.

I find Hannah Arendt's account useful as a way to sketch, in broad strokes, the important differences between the two concepts, although I do not agree entirely with her characterisation of each.[14] According to Arendt, while labour and work may both contribute to the production of *things*, labour is distinct from work in that it does not produce anything of permanence. Instead, it is a basic, exertive activity whose sole value is in producing things for immediate consumption, which allows us to meet requirements for survival and basic reproduction that are especially fundamental to our functioning as animals. In some senses, labour can also be understood as always involuntary or compelled: either because it is physiologically involuntary (e.g., when we breathe or give birth) or because, without it, we will die (e.g., when we gather or produce and prepare food for consumption).[15]

The broad approach flattens a complex concept by treating work and labour alike. In the same vein, it also does so by failing to recognise the distinctions that exist between various forms of work, especially those which bear little superficial resemblance to each other. Consider the differences between the occupations of university professor and postman. That there are any commonalities between the two is not immediately obvious. They employ different skillsets, different kinds of exertion, and different forms of productivity. They display different kinds of use-value. A broad definition of work, such as the one offered by Sayers, does not help make sense of how and why these two occupations would be captured under the same conceptual umbrella.

If we return to the *actor/bartender* example, we can ask: how would this definition of work help differentiate between the work and the non-work activities of the *actor-bartender* and the *bartender-actor*? Both can be explained as productive activities, since productivity in this instance is broadly construed: while bartending can be understood to produce a consumable product, such as a cocktail, acting can be understood to produce a creative product, such as a play (uncoincidentally, sometimes called a 'production). Both of these 'products' can be shown to have use-value, since use-value is also broadly construed. Thus, work defined according to the abstract principles of the broad approach will lead to

[14] Arendt, *The Human Condition*.

[15] Interestingly, it is for this reason that Arendt treats the productive, exertive activity historically done by enslaved persons as labour rather than work. An enslaved person would have been compelled to perform the reproductive labour of others (e.g., producing their food or caring for their children) so that their enslavers could be free from the demands of necessity. This idea is discussed at length by Arendt in Chapter 3 of *The Human Condition*. Notably, a similar idea is presented in Chapter 5 of Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*.

the conclusion that both the bartending and the acting, in the case of both people, must be instances of work.

However, a definition this abstract seems to neglect important nuances which should be captured in a definition of work. For example, one element of the actor/bartender illustration that this definition fails to capture is that the *actor-bartender* presumably sees herself as being "at work" when she acts, while the *bartender-actor* does not. The actor-bartender is oriented towards her acting as she would be oriented towards other work. But the bartender-actor treats acting as leisure or recreational time, an activity for self-expression and creative exploration. The broad approach does not offer any conceptual tools to distinguish between productive activities taken as leisure, and productive activities taken as work.

Therefore, I find the broad definition to be unsuitable for the purposes of framing and answering the question laid out at the start of the dissertation. If work is defined as in the most abstract sense as simply acting or doing, then work will appear necessary for, well, everything. After all, how could a person *live* without acting or doing? But conceptualising work as necessary in this way turns this claim about work into something which is conceptually uninteresting, akin to the claim that a person needs air to live a full and flourishing human life. A person needs air to flourish in a very strict, biological sense – since they will die without it – but identifying such a need tells us very little about what else might be necessary to make one's life rich and fulfilling.

2.2.2 The Narrow Approach

In contrast, the narrow approach defines work within the confines of a particular context, like the economic seminar or the field of vocational psychology. While the broad approach offers a list of abstract conditions, the narrow approach provides a list of specific conditions which delimit concrete boundaries around work. However, like the broad approach, the narrow approach also aims to say something about what work is or does – in this sense, it is another example of a descriptive definition of work.

An academic field might be one context where the narrow approach to defining work will be employed. In the right to work literature, for example, work is predominantly defined as the activity by which a person generates an income, sometimes articulated as "a positive claim-right to an

income."[16] Some authors in the field, such as James Nickel, frame their discussion of work as "some organised form of production" which is oriented towards "generating income and making a living."[17] Other authors, such as Hugh Collins, focus on work as a way "to make a living to feed oneself and one's dependents."[18] Amanda Greene also hints at this conception of work in defending a human right to livelihood, where livelihood is understood as "the ability to reliably generate personal income that is sufficient for providing one's own material well-being."[19] On this view, work must be linked to income – or at least to a legitimate claim to an income.

Another context where the narrow approach is employed is in the service of a particular question or inquiry about work. For example, Kathi Weeks defines work as "productive cooperation organised around but not necessarily confined to, the privileged model of wage labour."[20] This definition serves the author's broader project of critiquing the concept and experience of work under capitalism. To make the case for this definition, she points to the fact that capitalism is the dominant economic model in many parts of the world. As a result, wage labour or contractual employment is the conception of work that most people interact with on a day-to-day basis. Workplaces are some of the most significant places for people to acquire many of the benefits of work, while also being a central location for subjugation and oppression, by those who have authority in those spaces and who own the means of production. Thus, she argues for a definition of work as wage labour which, like the definition of work as the means to generate an income, restricts the concept to include only a narrow range of activities.

There are advantages to the specificity of the narrow approach. It sets a clear and concrete set of conditions which can be used to delineate between work and non-work. If work is defined as activity which generates income, then one only needs to know if an activity is compensated to determine whether or not it is work. For example, in the case of the *actor/bartender*, this definition indicates that only the formal jobs held by both the *actor-bartender* and the *bartender-actor* will count as work, since these are the only activities which generate an income for each. This definition is also appealing because it presents us with a black and white picture of what counts as work.

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[16] Mantouvalou, *The Right to Work: Legal and Philosophical Perspectives*, 25.
[17] Nickel, "Giving Up on the Human Right to Work," 138.
[18] Collins, "Is There a Human Right to Work?," 17.
[19] Greene, "Making A Living: The Human Right To Livelihood," 153.
[20] Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*, 14.

The narrow approach, however, has some disadvantages – especially in respect to my purposes here. After all, the *actor-bartender* treats acting as a job. She performs all the activities that she would perform as an actor if she were paid to do it. The reasons why she is not paid to do it may be the result of her own autonomous choice not to be employed as an actor, or a result of her own failure to secure a paid role, but they may also be entirely arbitrary. For example, it could be the result of bad luck or poor timing, having been passed up by an agent who gave preference to a famous name or because her audition tapes were lost in the mail. On this definition, the failure of her acting to count as an instance of work – and therefore the delineation between work and non-work – does not appear to be connected to anything about the activity itself.

Therefore, one of the drawbacks to this approach is that it can be underinclusive. While narrow definitions are appealing because they make the concept of work appear black and white, they have, as one author writes, "the implausible consequences that housewives and hunter-gatherers don't work."[21] Like broad definitions, narrow definitions can also fail to recognise the distinctions between different forms of work. But unlike broad definitions, they do so because they *exclude* other forms of work entirely. As a result, these definitions can be criticised as "unsatisfactory, both on grounds of reflective conceptual analysis and on grounds of historical and social variance."[22]

This final point highlights the fact that there are many forms of work which, historically, have not been compensated or recognised in the formal economic sphere. To exclude these examples of work would seem like a failure to provide a complete account of work, as it neglects to account for the useful and relevant category of unpaid work.

Therefore, this definition is also inadequate for the purposes of my project. Further, by offering an exceptionally limited view of work, the narrow definition does not provide enough breadth to make sense of a need for work as a meaningful question. It simply reduces the central question to a series of questions about whether we need very specific instances of work, such as: Do we need employment? Do we need wage labour? Do we need jobs? If there is no way to understand a more general sense of the term *work* beyond each of its individual forms, then there is no broader question

[21] Clark, "Good Work," 62.
[22] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*, 24.

to be asked. Answering such questions may be interesting and relevant in the context of very specific domain. But evaluating a need for work *as* work, or as an overarching category of activities that share common characteristics which differentiate them from other types of human activity, requires operating with a definition that offers more flexibility.

2.2.3 The Interpretive Approach

So far, I have outlined and discussed the broad and narrow approaches to defining work. These descriptive approaches aim to say what work is or does by providing a list of features or conditions which distinguish work from other forms of activity. They are, in this sense, analytic approaches to defining work.

There is another position that takes what I will call an interpretive approach, which aims to say what work *means*. The term *interpretive* draws on a distinction in the philosophy of social sciences between interpretive and naturalistic accounts.[23] While naturalists favour a scientific method and an emphasis on studying facts and observable phenomena in order to categorise or predict human action and practice, advocates of the interpretive approach treat the task of social science as one of interpretation, where the goal is to explore and uncover the meaningfulness, significance, and value of actions and practices. In this context, an interpretive approach aims to integrate descriptive features of work with a normative account of its meaning and value into a definition.

Interpretive definitions consider features such as what work feels like, the processes it incorporates, and the effect it has on the world in order to define it. For example, Ruth Yeoman cites phenomenologist George Kovacs in defining work as "'a basic mode of being in the world', where 'to work is to humanise the world and produce something'." "In this sense," she writes, "work functions to create and sustain values and meanings beyond the realm of its economic productivity: work is a mode of being in the world which transcends the employment relation to include all the activities which contribute to producing and reproducing a complex system of social cooperation."[24]

[23] Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*.
[24] Yeoman, "Conceptualising Meaningful Work as a Fundamental Human Need," 236.

Here, I take Yeoman to be articulating the view that work is not only characterised by the presence of productivity, or other such features visible in the act or its results, but also by some feature present in the reasons we do it. She uses the phrase 'to humanise the world', which could be interpreted to mean that work is the activity by which we make the world more suitable for our inhabiting it, more conducive to human life. By creating and sustaining values and meanings beyond its products, work contributes not only to the physical world we inhabit, but to a world of ideas that creates our cultural, political, and economic structures as well.

This approach to defining work echoes the writings of an earlier philosopher and political theorist, whose work I have already briefly discussed: Hannah Arendt. Arendt wrote that work, as separate and distinct from labour, "fabricates the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice." These 'things' are "mostly, but not exclusively, objects for use" which "possess the durability Locke needed for the establishment of property, the 'value' Adam Smith needed for the exchange market, and they bear testimony to productivity, which Marx believed to be the test of human nature."[25] As stated in the previous section, for Arendt, labour is a basic activity that we share with animals, who must also exert physical effort to construct dens, collect food, and survive in the world. Work, however, is a distinctly human activity which involves not only the exertion of effort but also the heightened degree of organisation, planning, and intention required to create the artifice and artefacts of the human world. These artefacts have permanence, unlike the products of labour, which are mere consumables. They are "mostly, but not exclusively, objects for use" which give the human life the "stability and solidity" necessary "to house the unstable and mortal creature which is man."[26] Arendt also includes art to be among its fruits – thus, why we refer to objects of art as *works* of art.

Arendt and Yeoman, as examples of the interpretive approach, highlight what is arguably one of the most challenging aspects of defining work, and the aspect that the broad and narrow approaches often neglect. Work does not always or only involve the alteration and change of a physical or tangible world – I cannot always look out into the world to see work being done. That is because to do work can also involve alterations in thoughts, ideas, and values. Its productive quality can be stretched to include many different interpretations of 'production'. It may also be understood as 'creative' in a way that is

[25] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 136.
[26] Arendt, 136.

similar but distinct from how it is 'productive'. In this sense, Arendt's and Yeoman's definitions do not just tell us that work is productive or involves effort: they also attempt to characterise what it means for work to be productive or involve effort in the context of human life.

Broad and narrow definitions can leave us with the sense that something more must be said about work, especially when considering border cases. One illustrative example is the work of an artist. On one hand, if it is paid for or if it produces some obvious product, then at least some forms of art will fit neatly into the narrow definitions of work (such as work as employment) that have already been discussed. On the other hand, a 'work' of art is not just the production of a piece of art that is paid for, since we often include, amongst the greatest works of art, pieces that were never compensated when the artist was alive. So, whether we call something a work of art is usually irrespective of whether it has been paid for, whether the artist was employed to create it, or even whether it is represented by a physical product or object (such as in the case of musical or theatrical performances, for example).

It is in these kinds of cases that an interpretive approach can offer the conceptual tools to help make sense of the ambiguity. A definition which defines work by its processes, for example, could shed light on the inclusion of art as a form of work: there may be something in the process of imagining and creating art which shares something in common with the processes of other forms of work. Art involves creative as well as physical skills and requires sustained efforts towards some goal over an extended period. This description echoes the features of goal-orientation and productiveness that are typically used to characterise work. It may be the case that the processes of art creation remind us of the processes of work, and the way we use language has evolved to reveal this relationship.

Interpretive definitions which define work by its relationship to human value could also account for this outlier. Arendt's and Yeoman's accounts both connect work to activities which hold a special kind of value in human societies. For Yeoman, this value lies in work's humanising power, while for Arendt, it lies in the role that work plays in building the architecture and artefacts of the human world. For Arendt, no other activity achieves this. Thus, using work to describe the process of art creation may have emerged as a way of communicating an understanding of art as something which possesses distinct and unique value to the social and cultural life of human beings, without which the fullness or richness of such life would be significantly diminished. Art conceived as work may express the idea that art, in Yeoman's terms, humanises the world.

The interpretive approach appears attractive as a way to make sense of border cases and the grey area between work and non-work by giving greater weight to features of work which have been neglected in traditional analytic approaches to the defining work. It is also especially appropriate for the purposes of this project since, by recognising the *meanings* with which the features of work are imbued, it acknowledges work as a social institution, a form of activity by which we relate to each other.

However, some examples of the interpretive approach fail to provide enough of a descriptive account of work for us to easily identify instances of work in the world. For example, if work is defined as activity which 'humanises the world' or as activity which 'fabricates the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice', we will be no closer to differentiating between the work and non-work of the *actors/bartenders* than we were at the start. The bartending activities of each person could, by a stretch, be understood as responsible for 'fabricating' products or experiences for consumers, but it is not clear how they might be understood to 'humanise' the world. Acting is perhaps a better contender for a humanising activity, if 'humanisation' is conceptualised as the act of creating or contributing to human culture but acting does not obviously fabricate any products for use. Delving deeply into Arendt's text in order to explore the subtleties of her definition may be one way to resolve this problem in this particular instance. But in the end, I would still require a definition for the purposes of resolving contradictions in a broader range of cases.

This point simply shows that while the interpretive approach appears to be the most appropriate approach for the purposes of exploring work as a need, not all interpretive definitions will serve that end. In the next section, I will settle on a definition of work which draws from two interpretive accounts. These examples strike a balance between providing both a descriptive and normative account of work, thereby offering a more suitable alternative.

2.3 Defining Work

It will ultimately be impossible to find a perfect definition that settles all debates and puts all exceptions to rest. But a perfect definition is unnecessary. As stipulated at the outset of this chapter, this project simply requires a definition which strikes a balance between "the overly narrow focus on paid

employment and the excessively broad inclusion of all human activity" and which helps makes sense of the intuitive distinctions at play in the cases of the actor who bartends and the bartender who acts.[27]

In this final section, I will discuss two examples of interpretive definitions found in the work of Andrea Veltman and John Budd. Both offer definitions of work as purposeful, productive, or goal-oriented activity, while also emphasising its dependency on social contexts, cultural norms, and the particular activities that a community deems as valuable or necessary. Their definitions are, at once, sufficiently general and appropriately particular. It is in occupying this middle ground that they offer the most suitable definitions for my approach to evaluating a need for work.

Andrea Veltman argues that there are three core characteristics of work – it must be purposeful, productive, and goal-oriented – but spends much time discussing "the variability of what counts as work", as she acknowledges that a definition of the concept is extremely hard to pin down.[28] Work is historically contextualised and culturally dependent. It may appear to have different meanings for different people. At the same time, it can be universally recognisable. She identifies the features of production, contribution, and effort, as well as strain and discipline, as features which appear closely connected to a concept of work. However, she rejects as 'underinclusive' any definition of work as simply paid activity.

In the end, her definition is based on the fact that our intuitions seem to hold a conceptualisation of work as "goal-oriented activity aiming to produce something of value beyond itself" or productive activity "performed with an intention to bring about an end product." In addition, she asserts that "[w]ork aligns with the conceptions of production, contribution and effort, for work often answers wants and needs." With this definition, she aims to offer an account that is "attractively broad, yet precise."[29]

Veltman, in her discussion, also endorses a definition offered by John Budd, as "purposeful human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that has economic or symbolic value."[30] Budd makes clear that, according to his view, employment is included

[27] Budd, *The Thought of Work*, 2.
[28] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*, 23.
[29] Veltman, 24–25.
[30] Budd, *The Thought of Work*, 2.

under a definition of work, but is not synonymous with work, since work is a broader category. His definition takes a broadly inclusive perspective when thinking about the kinds of value work can hold. This allows different cultural perceptions of work to be housed under the same conceptual roof. Thus, "[a] Chinese son working in a family business, a Turkish daughter knitting for extra income, and an American housewife or househusband taking care of a family" may all be considered as examples of work on Budd's view.[31]

While Veltman and Budd offer definitions which are similar in scope, Budd's definition makes explicit two features that are worth drawing attention to. First, he identifies work as an activity which is not exclusively valued for the pleasure it produces. Second, he includes the stipulation that instances of work must hold some economic or symbolic value.

The first feature is important because it resolves another central challenge in defining work: delineating work from play. Nick Yee, a Stanford researcher who studies immersive online game environments, offers some insight into this challenge.[32] He notes that, within these games, it is often very difficult even for players themselves to distinguish whether they are working or playing, due to the time commitment and types of activities they perform within the game, which often mirror 'real' life. Although players are free to quit at any time, Yee notes that many of the players described their game play as a chore, a second job or obligation, often exhibiting symptoms of overwork, exhaustion, and burnout.

Budd's definition helps shed light on this confusion – and by extension, the confusion present in the dilemma of the *actor-bartender* and *bartender-actor*. If the game is played because one must play it, or *feels* that one must play it, the activity is no longer done purely for pleasure. This also explains why the extracurricular activities of the *actor-bartender*, who is trying to become a professional actor, will feel to her, and look, to many others, like work. Even though she will not be paid for much of the training, practice, and after-hours effort she will invest in developing her acting skills, she still operates with the sense that she must do these things. But non-work can be distinguished from work as an activity pursued purely for pleasure – like a game, or like the acting that the *bartender-actor* does for fun in her

[31] Budd, 2.
[32] Yee, "The Labor of Fun."

spare time. It is never something she *must* do, but simply something she would prefer to do. Hobbies become work when we feel we must do them.

The second feature of Budd's definition further illuminates this relationship between work and the things we feel we must do. Budd stipulates that for an activity to be an instance of work, it must hold some kind of external value, which he refers to as 'symbolic' or 'economic'. The reader is left to determine exactly what is meant by this claim, causing the designation to appear, as Veltman critiques, a bit "suspect."[33] But this claim captures something which Veltman herself also tries to include in a definition of work: it must produce something of value beyond itself. I interpret both of these claims as the same attempt to explain the important connection between work and activities that are perceived as valuable, however value is to be interpreted.

Explaining that connection is tricky, and not everyone agrees on the kind of 'value' that an activity must display or produce in order to count as work. Budd wants to include both a concrete measure of value (economic) as well as a more subjective one (symbolic). While the first is easy to spot in the modern world, in activities which are paid for or recognised by the market, the second is a more ambiguous category. Here is one way to make sense of it: an activity could display symbolic value if it is symbolic to the person who does it, because the activity is personally meaningful or aligned with one's values and goals.

Veltman points out, as a potential concern, that many activities which satisfy intuitions about work are neither economically valuable nor symbolically valuable in this sense of the term. She cites the fact that work done in the home, "including cleaning, childcare, and eldercare", is often not economically or symbolically valuable in an obvious sense.[34] However, I would suggest that Veltman's criticism can be resolved by conceptualising symbolic value, in this context, as *social* value. Activities hold social value when they provide clear, recognisable benefit for social groups or fulfil necessary social functions. Domestic housework and caregiving are obvious examples. Others include voluntary or charity work done for the larger community, as well as political organising and civic participation. These forms of work are valuable because they provide important services for the community while

[33] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*, 25.

[34] By 'obvious', I believe Veltman means to say that these occupations are not valued *primarily* as economically or symbolically important in the dominant culture. While some might find caregiving to be personally symbolic, as a calling or vocation, she suggests that this being the case is usually the exception, rather than the rule.

alleviating the burdens on public institutions and private entities, like health care systems, schools, or elder care facilities.

If symbolic value can also be represented as social value, then this helps clarify many of the border cases of work. Activities which are uncompensated, but also lacking in obvious 'personal' symbolism, may be considered work on the view that they fulfil socially necessary functions. This also helps explain why certain forms of work have historically been attached to traditional beliefs and social roles that maintain a cultural way of life. Work in the home, for example has functioned to maintain society-wide beliefs about the 'rightful' place of women and minority groups in the context of the wider social order. Certain forms of work may serve to codify and ritualise the activities associated with the proper fulfilment of these roles. Such an example can represent the darker side of work's 'value' to society and one way that the overestimation of work's positive value might ignore the significant negative realities of work. This point, however, only helps to further illustrate the usefulness of including some dimension of value in the definition of the term.

An additional advantage to these definitions of work is that both authors place a strong emphasis on understanding work as a concept that "eludes clean conceptual analysis."[35] Veltman repeatedly reminds the reader that "[t]he variability of what counts as work appears plain" and that "not every activity that requires and meets needs or desires is work."[36] Budd also asserts that the work concept is made up of many competing conceptions, formed as a result of historical social and cultural conditions which shift and change over time. He acknowledges the "nebulous" line between work and leisure activities, highlighted by cases like professional sports, caregiving, and individuals with fulfilling careers. But as each are clear to state, this does not deny the possibility of arriving at a meaningful definition: "All of these ambiguities reinforce the need for an inclusive approach to thinking about work – including paid and unpaid work – even if the boundaries of work are not always crystal clear."[37]

A final advantage of both Veltman's and Budd's accounts is that both authors aim to define work in the context of philosophical projects similar to my own: an attempt to understand the relationship between work and a full and flourishing human life. For example, Veltman is clear to state at the outset

[35] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*, 24.
[36] Veltman, 23, 25.
[37] Budd, *The Thought of Work*, 3.

of her project that she will be examining the importance of work in relation to human well-being, "arguing on the whole that meaningful work is central in human flourishing."[38] Budd, too, explicitly aims to find the balance between a narrow focus on employment and the broad inclusion of all human activity in the hopes of landing on a definition of work that can best account for how we use the concept in the world. Both recognise that work is a widely diverse and complex phenomenon, acknowledging that "even if work is basic to the human condition, [it] is a socially constructed phenomenon with diverse manifestations across locations and times."[39]

As Budd writes, "The definition of work used… is intended to foster a broad, inclusive approach to thinking about work, not to delimit exactly what work is and is not."[40] Both Veltman's and Budd's achieve this end. Both provide a robust definition of work which is useful in the context of complex social, political, and economic questions. Their definitions account for work in both its broad and its narrow interpretations, addressing the permeability of its borders and the nuance required to make sense of exceptions. However, both still provide a notion of work that is concrete and distinguishable from non-work activities like leisure, labour, and rest.

Therefore, for the remainder of the dissertation, I adopt the following definition of work:

> ***Work:*** *purposeful, goal-oriented human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that produces economic, social, or symbolic value beyond itself.*

How does this definition of work help differentiate between the work and the non-work activities of the *actor-bartender* and the *bartender-actor*? On this view, the *actor-bartender*, or struggling actor, can be understood to work in both her job as a bartender and in her extracurricular activities as an actor because both sets of activities fulfil the requirements of work activities. Both are purposeful and goal-oriented and involve physical or mental exertion. Both are not done exclusively for pleasure, but for material need or personal desire, and as such, produce some kind of external value – either in the form of a pay cheque or in moving the actor closer to her goal of becoming a professional. The *bartender-actor*, on the other hand, only works when she is bartending, since her acting is done exclusively for

[38] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*, 2.
[39] Veltman, 23.
[40] Budd, *The Thought of Work*, 2.

pleasure. This example presents a useful illustration, showing that this definition captures many existing intuitions about work.

It also offers a way to differentiate work from the other basic human activities I have mentioned in this chapter. This definition distinguishes work from leisure, which can be undertaken solely for pleasure, and from labour, which produces no external value beyond its role in sustaining life and producing things for immediate consumption. In addition, it distinguishes work from rest and any other non-work activities which are not productive or exertive. However, I acknowledge that no definition can delineate perfectly. Thus, I do not aim to draw a hard line between work and non-work, but to foster, as in Budd's words, a 'broad, inclusive approach to thinking about work.'

For example, many activities done exclusively for pleasure (like leisure) as well as many activities done to produce things for immediate consumption (like labour) may, at times, cross the boundary into work. On a recreational camping trip, I must perform a variety of activities – such as chopping and gathering wood, starting the fire every morning, and preparing food for other camp members – which also share features of labour or work. Further, some people are so materially well off that they take up employment, not out of material necessity, but simply out of a desire to do so, which could be understood as motivated by pleasure. Some forms of work – paid and unpaid – may be so enjoyable that I experience doing them as entirely motivated by the pleasure they bring to me. Examples of these kinds will never be straightforward to categorise.

Finally, it is worth reminding the reader that the definition arrived at should not be understood as the *only* legitimate definition of work, but the best one for the job. By providing a framework which is general enough to capture intuitive, common-sense uses of the term, but particular enough to allow meaningful study of exceptions and border cases, this definition lays the appropriate foundation for the project of this dissertation, which is interested in evaluating a certain kind of need for work.

A Note on Good Work

I have defined work using an interpretive definition, which I explained as providing both a descriptive and normative account of what work means. On that normative account, work must hold some kind

of value. These claims may lead readers to question – and perhaps criticise – the degree to which I am treating all work as good work.

I will answer this by drawing a distinction between work as *valuable*, and work as *good*. I discussed, in the previous section, many of the ways that work can be valuable. It can be economically valuable in that it stimulates the economy or is highly valued on the market. It can be symbolically valuable in that it holds meaning for an individual person. It can be socially valuable in that it performs an important social task or responsibility and contributes to the social health of the community or society.

On my view, work which is valuable, in any of these ways, is not always good for the person who does it. For example, a care worker may perform work which is valuable to society, even though she is under-paid, and the conditions of her work are objectively harmful to her. Gheaus and Herzog offer a similar example: "A lonely gravedigger can see that her work makes an important social contribution, while lacking any sense of accomplishing excellence, receiving recognition, or experiencing community."[41] I do not think it too radical to suggest that even work which is personally meaningful can still be bad for the person who does it, such as in the case of many philosophy graduate students and early career researchers who are driven from academia by precarity, low wages, and toxic work cultures.

Finally, bullshit jobs – a term coined by David Graeber, and which I will discuss in more detail in later chapters – are another example of work which may be bad for the person who does it while at the same time being valuable for the rest of society.[42] An office worker may perform an objectively pointless, bureaucratic bullshit job, which leaves them feeling meaningless and empty, but which still stimulates the economy. In this way, their having a bullshit job is 'better' (in a very particular sense) for the economy than if they did not have a job at all – or perhaps even a lesser paid, but more meaningful one.

The definition of work that I have offered does require that work always holds some value. But it does not require that work is always good. Work which has value in this sense may be said to be 'good' for society, or for others. But this should be understood as a category of 'good' work which is separate

[41] Gheaus and Herzog, "The Goods of Work (Other Than Money!)," 76.
[42] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*.

from work that is good for me; for the person who does the work. The two categories may overlap and, in many cases, align, but they should be understood as distinct. For this reason, for the remainder of the dissertation, when I want to talk about the former, I use *valuable* as a descriptor for work. When I talk about the latter, I use *good*.

Implicit in these claims, and in the claims of the chapters that follow, is the acknowledgement that not all instances of work will be good. But as Andrea Veltman aptly writes, "If working people commonly experience work as an activity that one would rather avoid…one reason may be that many work in jobs that are, on the whole, exhausting, boring, spiritually impoverished, disconnected from inner life, or even psychologically diminishing or personally humiliating. These present realities, however, betray the promise of work itself to contribute positively to a good human life."[43] In this dissertation, I focus on exploring *this* promise. Even some forms of bad work have the potential to meet certain needs. Since I am interested in the relationship between work and need (as well as needs), this project is attached to a view of good work as work which offers minimally adequate opportunity to meet a sufficiently broad range of material, psychological, and social needs.

This interpretation is useful because it allows for the possibility that what qualifies as good work might be different for different people, given that not all individuals require the same opportunities or resources in order to meet their own individual needs. However, all people require some opportunities and some resources, and there is presumably a minimum threshold of needs met below which no person could live a full human life, on any conception of what such a life entails. I leave open the possibility that stronger claims about good work could be derived from the claims I offer here.

2.4 Conclusions

This chapter aimed to deliver a definition of work for the purposes of a philosophical project exploring a need for work. I did so by offering a rough sketch of the sort of definition required and outlining some of the dominant approaches to defining work which exist in current literature. I discussed the advantages and disadvantages of using these definitions, ultimately arguing that many traditional approaches are either too general or too specific for the purposes of the project. Instead, I argued that

[43] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*, 3.

the interpretive approach supplies a suitable middle ground by offering both descriptive and normative features. In doing so, it captures a common sense and generally intuitive notion of work, as an activity that can be identified by both its analytic characteristics as well as its symbolic meaning in human life.

As an example of such a definition, I used the accounts offered by Andrea Veltman and John Budd to arrive at a definition of work as purposeful, goal-oriented human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that produces economic, social, or symbolic value beyond itself. While this definition is sufficiently concrete to delineate between obvious examples of work and non-work, such as employment and play, it still acknowledges the important reality highlighted by Veltman: inevitably, "[h]owever well refined our final definition of work, an outstanding issue surrounding the conceptualisation of work is that some purposeful activities lie at the border of what is work and what is not."[44]

Going forward, when I use the term *work* throughout the text, I will be referring to this conception of work. Any more specific definition of work will be clarified and identified as such: for example, when discussing compensated activities, I will take care to use the specific terms of *employment*, *job* or *paid work*. Where my definition differs from the definitions put forward by the authors I engage with, I also try to make note of this. Although the claims I make about work should also extend to employment, claims about employment will not always be applicable to a broader understanding of work.

It is also important to note that non-work, as a broad category, refers to more than just leisure. It also includes sleep, rest, and labour, which are activities associated, like work, with the realm of necessity. However, I primarily focus on leisure in my discussion of non-work throughout the text since it is intuitively treated as the 'opposite' of work. Any references to non-work which are not explicitly clarified should be understood to refer to leisure and pleasure-based activities, rather than sleep, rest, and labour.

[44] Veltman, 26.

3 Defining Need

This dissertation aims to address the question of whether we need work. In the previous chapter, I established a definition of work as purposeful, goal-oriented human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that produces economic, social, or symbolic value beyond itself, by drawing on the work of John Budd and Andrea Veltman.[1] I argued that a definition of work – for the purposes of a project which is interested in "the familiar things we do in fields, factories, offices, schools, shops, building sites, call centres, homes, and so on, to make a life and a living"[2] – must not only take into account the descriptive features of work, but its normative features as well.

The next order of business will be to get clear on who we are and what our needs, in this respect, might be. This chapter serves three aims. It will first establish a meaning of need and second, distinguish between two different ways we can ask the question of need. Third, it will argue for the separability of need from two existing topics within the philosophy of work, to which the question of need has often been relegated: that of work as a mechanism for goods acquisition, and that of work as a right.

The first section is devoted to examining the concept of need (§3.1). Using Aristotelian conceptions of need to explore the various ways in which we can have requirements for things, I identify the sense of need as '***that which cannot be otherwise***' – or what David Wiggins refers to as unforsakeable – to be most useful for this project, as it generates the most philosophically interesting questions about our relationship to work. It allows us to ask: Is work something for which there is no alternative? I suggest that we can use this understanding of need to further make sense, not only of what we require as individuals, but also of what we require by virtue of our membership in communities and societies.

[1] Budd, *The Thought of Work*; Veltman, *Meaningful Work*.
[2] Clark, "Good Work," 62.

In the following section (§3.2), I situate my discussion in the context of previous attempts to explore a need for work within contemporary analytic philosophy. I argue that while many of these attempts have focused exclusively on an individual's need *to* work, there is another version of the question which has largely gone unaddressed: the need *for* work that we might have as a community or a society. Although I personally may not have an inherent need to work, I may still need others around me to work. This is materially true – at least *someone* needs to do the work which creates the material resources necessary for everyone's survival, even if not *everyone* needs to – but it may also be true of other non-material, social conditions required for existence. Therefore, I argue that a need *for* work merits greater consideration – in part because it allows us to ask questions, not only about the value of work to the individual, but also about the value of work along social dimensions.

Attempts to answer the question of a need for work have typically bled into two other areas of philosophy of work: questions about what goods are provided by work, and questions about the status of work as a right. In the final section (§3.3), I outline these two areas of debate and explain why the three questions are so easily conflated. However, I argue for their separation. A need for work cannot be adequately captured by the language of goods or rights. The language of goods is unable to do so because it can only enumerate the many goods that are associated with work. It cannot tell us how to weigh the value of those goods against each other. The language of rights, while it does offer a normative framework to understand the value of work (and its goods), also cannot fully capture a need for work. Not all goods things in life can be the subject of rights, including some needs and many things which benefit us collectively.

Altogether, the arguments put forward in this chapter allow me to further hone the central question: Is work a need for which there is no alternative? Further, who holds this need? Answering these questions will be the task of the following three chapters.

3.1 What is Need?

In this section, I establish a more precise meaning of need for the purposes of clarifying the central question. Drawing from Aristotelian distinctions, I establish a sense of need as that for which there is

no alternative: what David Wiggins refers to as 'unforsakeable,' something which we could not get on without. In addition, I show how a question of need – that is, a question about what we could not get on without – can change depending on our perspective of what a person is. That is to say, different needs will appear as unforsakeable if we view a person as an individual or as a member of a social group. I identify communities and societies as relevant social groups.

As a result, the central question must be addressed in relation to three distinct focal points: the person as an individual, the person as a member of a community, and the person as a member of society. In other words: Do we need work as individuals? Do we need it as members of communities? And so on. Each of these questions will be explored in full in Chapters 4 through 6.

3.1.1 Defining Need

To begin, there are a few different ways we can talk about that which is necessary. In the *Metaphysics,* Aristotle identifies at least four different understandings of the concept: as that without which life is not possible; as the conditions without which good cannot come about; as a compulsion; and as that which cannot be otherwise.[3] The first three of these meanings are fairly straightforward, capturing the sense in which something necessary is required to bring about certain ends. I need food *in order to* stay alive, in the same way that I need to study hard *in order to* be a good student, and in the same way that I might need to eat chocolate while pregnant *in order to* satisfy an urge which compels me, uncontrollably, to eat chocolate.

The fourth is somewhat more opaque. It is better captured by the following example: A mammal needs to have mammary glands, otherwise it is not a mammal. We could put this statement into the same format as the previous three, in which case it would become: A mammal needs to have mammary glands *in order to* be classified as a mammal. But this sense of need conveys a slightly different meaning than what is captured by the first three examples. Here, having mammary glands is not necessary because it is required to bring about certain ends: we are not trying to say that something can *become* a mammal by acquiring mammary glands. Instead, we are trying to say something like the following: Mammary glands are a necessary precondition for something to be identified as a mammal.

[3] Book V, 1015a. Aristotle, *Aristotle's Metaphysics, Vol. 1*.

Arguably, one of the most important features of this fourth sense of need is that it is distinct from instrumental need. David Wiggins elaborates on this understanding of need, "by which the purpose is already fixed, and fixed in virtue of the meaning of the word."[4] He begins by recalling a line from the work of G. E. M. Anscombe, where she writes, "To say that [an animate creature] needs [such and such] is not to say, for example, that you want it to have that environment, but that it won't flourish unless it has it."[5] With this statement, he argues, Anscombe highlights what makes this sense of need distinct from mere instrumental needs: we think of 'flourishing' as a kind of *unforsakeable* end, and meeting that requirement an unforsakeable need. The underlying reason for its 'unforsakeability' may be up for debate – some may wish to maintain the language of flourishing introduced by Anscombe, while others (such as Wiggins himself) may favour an interpretation in line with Aristotle's 'that without which it is impossible to live'. But no matter the language, the meaning is clear: the need simply must be met.

Wiggins goes on to categorise these unforsakeable needs as absolute or categorical. For the remainder of the dissertation, I adhere to this sense of need: ***that for which there is no alternative; that which is 'unforsakeable' or something which we could not get on without***. I then interpret the central question – Do we need work? – in light of this meaning.

There are many examples of this kind of need which pertain to being human. Certainly, we say that a person needs food to convey that without it, she will die. But we also use it when we say that a child needs to be loved, to convey that love is something without which "the subject in question will be seriously harmed or… will live a life that is vitally impaired."[6] We say that a person needs meaningful relationships and experiences to convey that a life devoid of meaning is, in some sense, a less than human life.

Each of these examples describes some unforsakeable requirement without which our experience of life would be significantly diminished. They also illustrate the way that, even amongst our unforsakeable needs, needing beings (or more broadly, needing things) have different needs in so far as they fall into different categories. If we categorise a human being as a physiological creature, then

[4] Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*, 9.
[5] Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," 7; Wiggins, "An Idea We Cannot Do Without," 29.
[6] Wiggins, "An Idea We Cannot Do Without," 31.

only physiological needs appear salient. But as a person, I do not only have physiological needs. I am also a social creature, by virtue of which I do not just need food, water, and air, but also need decent socialisation and companionship, perhaps even friendship, and love. I am a member of a society of other people, which has agreed to coexist according to certain rules, by virtue of which I need agency, autonomy, and the ability to participate in political life. I also need the material resources that allow me to meet an adequate level of good health and well-being in the society in which I live.

Some may want to restrict the set of unforsakeable needs to those basic physiological needs without which we will die. If we define a human being as merely an isolated, biological organism, this might be a suitable boundary to draw. However, if take a broader view of human beings, then a broader range of needs will appear as important.[7] If, for example, a human being is not only a biological creature but as a social creature as well, then a need for decent social contact becomes unforsakeable. If we further expand the definition, treating a human being as a person or as a member of a political community, they may need the opportunity to self-actualise, or the autonomy to full participate in their communities, in order to be the sort of thing that they are. For the purposes of this project, I view human beings as persons who occupy overlapping and complex economic, social, and political worlds and consider needs for which there is no alternative in this light.

This view helps clarify, not just vital individual needs, but also needs we might have as or within groups. For example, it helps clarify what is meant when, for example, a government claims that a road 'needs' to be constructed, or a nuclear reactor 'needs' to be built. The use of need in these cases seems to imply not only that the road or reactor is required for a particular purpose, but that it is required for 'the public good' or the safety or proper functioning of the community: a need shared by all members, by virtue of their belonging to a particular kind of community that has a particular need for, say, a road or a nuclear reactor. In both cases, we are trying to say something like "There is no alternative: the life of the individual or the life of the community requires that we construct this road, or build this reactor, in this particular way."[8]

[7] Ruth Yeoman hints at this in her discussion of meaningful work as a need: "Furthermore, the fundamental need which we attribute to a person depend on what we understand to be their value as human beings." Yeoman, "Conceptualising Meaningful Work as a Fundamental Human Need," 241.
[8] Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*.

For human beings seen as persons, who exist in complex economic, social, and political contexts and have corresponding requirements that allow them to exist and flourish as economic, social, or political beings, the question of a need for work takes on new meaning. Is work a need for which there is no alternative? Further, do we hold it as individuals, or as members of social groups? I turn now to consider which categories of social groups are most relevant to that question.

3.1.2 Defining Relevant Social Groups

While the question could be asked in relation to very specific social groups, such as *this* bowling club or *that* nation, I draw a distinction between two generalised categories: communities and societies.

For making a rough pass at this distinction, I find Andre Gorz's differentiation between microsocial and macrosocial communities useful. The former refers to communities "based on common interests and endeavors" and which are "devoid of commodity relations."[9] The latter refers to "the society at large, encompassing innumerable small communities" and which displays the characteristics of "a system", placing it beyond the control of its individual members. Thus, in contrast to community, this category denotes a scale of social group in which members are not able to know and interact with every other member (or most other members) individually, make decisions together, or communicate directly with each other.

Although I depart from Gorz's definitions, his categories offer a useful delineation between two general levels of collective life. Below the line – that is, groups lesser than a certain size or population number – are groups in which certain kinds of communication, deliberation, and organisation between individual members is still possible, where members can know and interact with each other, make decisions together, and directly manipulate or control the forces which shape their collective life. Above that line, or within groups greater than a certain number, these groups exist at such a scale that not all members can know and interact with one another and many of the forces which shape collective life are out of the control of individual members. These groups can, however, still be understood as cohesive, due to shared features of identity or the fact that members recognise themselves and others as belonging to a cohesive group.

[9] Gorz, "On the Difference Between Society and Community, And Why Basic Income By Itself Cannot Confer Full Membership of Either," 178.

In Chapters 5 and 6 respectively, I explore each category in more detail. In Chapter 5, I argue that communities are small to mid-scale social groups in which a cohesive group of individuals possess shared or common features, such as identity, interests, or aims. This category consists of social groups in which all members are, for the most part, able to know and interact with each other, make decisions together, or communicate with each other. Defining community in this way brings a wide variety of types of groups under the definition. This allows me to include, as Daniel Bell does, groups that inhabit a common geographical space, groups that share a cultural tradition or belief system, and groups that share common goals and interests.[10] A bowling club, neighbourhood, or a local government are all examples of communities.

On the other hand, a society is, by extension, a cohesive network of communities and individuals.[11] However, society members need not share features of identity or engage in common activities to be understood as cohesive. Instead, a society can be understood as cohesive when its members are relevantly connected to each other through interactions linked by a common fate and governed by a shared system of reciprocity, two features I will discuss in Chapter 6.

To paraphrase Soran Reader, "[t]hings have needs," and our communities and societies are no exception.[12] I treat communities and societies, like individuals, as things that can have requirements for which there is no alternative or unforsakeable conditions which must be met. Recall, for example, the case of a road that *needs* to be constructed, or a nuclear reactor that *needs* to be built. But not all of these unforsakeable requirements can be satisfied by material things, like a road or nuclear reactor. For example, a neighbourhood is a community that depends on people inhabiting a local space or living in close proximity to each other: it is a community with a geographical location.[13] Thus, I could say that a neighbourhood itself *needs* a physical location in order to be the thing that it is. The inclusion

[10] Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics*.
[11] While it is theoretically possible that a society could be comprised exclusively of individuals who are not part of communities, most familiar examples of societies – such as national (e.g., American), cultural (e.g., Western), or economic (e.g., capitalist) – will have communities as a component part.
[12] Reader, *Needs and Moral Necessity*.
[13] While there may be atypical or outlying uses of the term, it is usually recognized as a 'socio-spatial' concept that will, in most cases, include some feature that specifies that such a community has a geographical location. See Jenks and Dempsey, "Defining the Neighbourhood."

of these kinds of examples within my understanding of need will be important for a distinction I draw in the next section, between a need *to* and a need *for* work.

3.2 The Need to Work Vs. The Need for Work

So far, I have argued to that when discussing work as a need, we should consider need as that for which there is no alternative. Further, when discussing who holds this need, we should consider the needs that we hold as individuals, as members of communities, and as members of a society. However, there are different ways to ask the question about whether work is a need. In this section, I distinguish between two: a need *to* work and a need *for* work. In doing so, I situate my discussion in the context of previous attempts to explore work as a need within contemporary analytic philosophy.

To ask whether I need *to* work is to consider my instrumental relationship to work. It means the following: Do I, as the person that I am, need to do this or that task in order to live (or in order to acquire the things I require to live)? This relies on an understanding of need as the first kind offered by Aristotle, as something required in order to bring about certain ends. Asking whether I need to work means asking whether these ends are contingent on my engaging in work activities.

This is the question traditionally asked when the necessity of work has been philosophically or conceptually explored. And it is certainly a question of genuine importance, given the fact that many of the things made available to us through work *are* themselves biological or physiological necessities, including a wide array of material goods, or the money used to acquire them, as well as many non-material goods that are psychological, emotional, social, or even spiritual in nature.

There is, however, another way to interpret questions about work and need. To ask whether I have a need *for* work, is to consider a broader question, not only about work's instrumental benefits, but about the way it might fulfil a role in human communities and societies for which there is no alternative. While I myself may have no need to work, I still need work to be done. Stated another way, I may still have a need *for* the institution of work to exist, even though I do not have an individual need *to* work. This might be because I need *someone* to work to produce the material resources I require to live, or because work may play a necessary role in upholding the material and social structures which

make collective life possible. In either case, asking whether we have a need *for* work targets this kind of relationship between work and necessity.

As this shows, *need-for* claims allow us to consider the social dimensions of the question of need, while *need-to* claims only focus on an individual's relationship to work. For example, a need-to claim allows me to ask, with little confusion, 'Do I need to work?' But if I try to ask the same question with a collective subject – Does a community need to work? – the meaning of the question becomes a bit puzzling. If a community of one hundred people needs fifteen members to work, would we say that the community itself needs to work? It is more likely that we would frame it in the following way: the community has a need for the work to be done, and as a result, needs some of its members to work. A collective need-to claim might also come across as puzzling because it raises a complicated and unsettled debate about whether a community is merely the aggregate sum of its members, or a separate collective entity.

A need-for claim allows us to avoid that debate. Need-for questions about work are then advantageous because they allow us to ask a more comprehensive set of questions about work as a need: while a need-to question can only reasonably be asked in relation to individuals, a need-for question can be intelligible in relation to both individuals and social groups. An individual can have a need *for* work in the sense previously described, as a need for others to work or for work to exist in order to meet their needs. So, we can ask: Do I have a need for work to be a feature of my social groups? Can I get on without it? A social group can also have a need *for* work in this sense, as a need for work to be exist in order for group-based needs to be met. Just as a neighbourhood might have a need for a physical location to inhabit, communities might be understood more broadly to have a need for work. So, we can also ask: Does my community (or society) have a need for work to be a feature of my social groups? Can my community (or society) get on without it?

Further, a need *for* work will still encompass a need *to* work. If I have a need for an established institution of work to exist, then this implies that some others will need to work in order to ensure that my need for it is met. Thus, a need for work will also likely generate a need to work, in the case of some individuals.

In spite of these advantages, the need *for* work – along with its distinction from need-to claims – has typically been underexplored in philosophical literature. Most exploration of work as a need has been an analysis of a need *to* work, whether for or against.

Sean Sayers, for example, argues that "the need to work is genuine and real" because "people gain real and important fulfilment from work."[14] His argument is based, in part, on the instrumental role that work – by which he means, primarily, employment – plays in securing a wide variety of essential resources and experiences which contribute to our ability to live full lives, fulfilment being one example. In addition, he asserts that "[f]or many people, work is the main basis of their social life, and also of their sense of identity and status."[15] He also points that work is one of our primary opportunities to master particular skillsets, and then use those skillsets to contribute to our communities. In this way, Sayers grounds a need to work in the things it affords us: the opportunities for goods and experiences that we acquire through work.

Although there are very few explicit philosophical defences of a need for work, even many arguments *against* work as a need also focus on this instrumental relationship between doing work and acquiring individual goods. Some of the earliest modern arguments against work focused on the way that work dominates our time, thereby restricting the alternative avenues by which we can acquire goods and benefits or depriving us of access to other goods altogether. One example of such an argument was offered by Paul Lafargue in 1883, when he mocked the capitalist claim that work would increase social wealth and individual prosperity: "Work, work, in order that becoming poorer, you may have more reason to work and become more miserable."[16] Bertrand Russell also famously argued that a cultural "diminution of work" would be the key to "happiness and joy of life, instead of frayed nerves, weariness, and dyspepsia."[17] Russell focused on the goods available through leisure to argue that an overemphasis on work impedes one's ability to engage in important non-work activities that play a role in character formation, self-development, and a happy life. Other arguments have been presented for the abolition of work and reduction of a work-centred culture on these grounds.[18]

[14] Sayers, "The Need to Work," 21.
[15] Sayers, 19.
[16] Lafargue, "The Right to Be Lazy."
[17] Russell, "In Praise of Idleness."
[18] See, for example: Black, "Abolition of Work"; White, "Education, Work and Well-being."

Need-for claims have not been entirely neglected. For example, Ruth Yeoman constructs an argument for meaningful work as a fundamental human need which displays some characteristics of a need-for claim. On her view, a fundamental human need is "not simply what [is] required if harm is to be avoided, but [is a necessity] for a flourishing life."[19] The author then argues that meaningful work is such a need, because it is an experience "which all persons require in order to fulfil their inescapable interests in freedom, autonomy, and dignity."[20] Note, that Yeoman uses the 'in order to' format to articulate this need, making the claim look like a need-to claim (work is a need because it provides the requirements necessary to bring about certain ends). But the argument does reflect the characteristics of a need-for claim in the sense that she treats work as "a mode of being in the world which transcends the employment relation to include all the activities which contribute to producing and reproducing a complex system of social cooperation."[21] In doing so, Yeoman draws a picture of work, not simply an instrumental process by which we acquire things, but also an activity which embeds us in a social landscape and therefore has social dimensions.

Further, recent philosophical discussion on the concept and value of work has seen a shift towards a more socially oriented perspective of work. Kathi Weeks echoes Yeoman's approach to work when she defines it as a central way in which we "are integrated not only into the economic system, but also into social, political, and familial modes of cooperation."[22] Some authors no longer treat work as only an individual good, but also a "social relation" which plays a central role in the vast and complex social worlds that we inhabit as individual persons.[23] Social relations are understood by Rodriquez-Lluesma et. al. as "a meaningful bond between agents that emerges as a consequence of specific courses of their reciprocal actions."[24] Examples of such relations include "kinship, friendship, and being colleagues or neighbours."

When work is understood as a social bond, this illuminates the way in which work can be dually valuable: that is, simultaneously good for the person who does it and good for others. Further, it also shows how these kinds of value can come apart – as discussed in Chapter 3, work which is good for

[19] Yeoman, "Conceptualising Meaningful Work as a Fundamental Human Need," 241.
[20] Yeoman, 235.
[21] Yeoman, 236.
[22] Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*, 8.
[23] Rodriguez-Lluesma, García-Ruiz, and Pinto-Garay, "The Digital Transformation of Work."
[24] Rodriguez-Lluesma, García-Ruiz, and Pinto-Garay, 158.

others is not always good for the person who does it – in a way that is not available when we only consider a need *to* work. Of course, *need-to* and *need-for* claims are not mutually exclusive – asking and answering both allows us to explore different aspects of a human relationship with work. However, need-for claims offer a unique and as yet underexplored perspective to the debate on work.

3.3 Work, Goods, and Rights

In this final section, I situate the debate on need in the context of existing philosophical literature on the topic of work. I explore why questions of need – in any form – have so often been conflated with two different sets of questions about work. The first is about work as a mechanism for goods acquisition. The second is about work as a right. I argue that, ultimately, neither can be used to settle questions about a need for work because both focus exclusively on the way work is good for the individual. In doing so, they neglect questions about the social dimensions of a need for work.

It is not, however, difficult to see why a question of need has so often been subsumed into one of these two areas of debate. First, work is an important avenue for the acquisition of important goods and benefits, and the question of need is made complicated by the fact that many of the goods and benefits that we acquire through work are themselves often categorised as needs. The 'goods' of work include a wide range of concrete material goods, such as money, as well as social, psychological, and personal benefits which offer us the opportunity to develop important capabilities. Since goods answer needs, many attempts to settle a question of need have turned to a discussion about which goods – how many, how valuable – belong to work.

Second, work is seemingly special in conferring these goods. There are not many other activities through which we can simultaneously feel useful, find a sense of purpose, belong to a community, and meet our material requirements. Further, unemployment and the loss of work is associated with significant physiological, psychological, and emotional harms.[25] It is therefore unsurprising that the question of need has been subsumed under a question of work's status as a right, which is the most common way, in contemporary analytical political philosophy, to conceptualise this 'special' relationship.

[25] Uchitelle, *The Disposable American*.

Thinking about work as a good or as a right can allow us to discuss and establish the economic, legal, and political structures that protect our opportunities for and experience at work, but they do not offer a complete picture of work, especially with regards to providing an account of its social value. Specifically, they do not give us a way to make sense of how work might be necessary along social, rather than individual, dimensions. Therefore, while both can be the source of fruitful philosophical discussion regarding work, I argue that questions of a need for work cannot be reduced to one of these two debates.

3.3.1 The Goods of Work

Work has been known, and shown, to confer a number of significant benefits on the worker. In contemporary philosophical literature, much examination of the concept – especially work which is good or meaningful – has focused on enumerating these goods.[26] The most obvious are the concrete, often material goods that are used to compensate work, such as money. For most people, a basic level of income is required to support material needs, for necessities such as food, clothing, housing. In some places, it may also be required to access adequate levels of other basic resources, such as healthcare and education. Unsurprisingly, the need to support oneself and one's dependents is typically offered as a reason for why people need to work.

But while the most obvious goods of work are the financial goods of compensation, several authors have highlighted a wider range of benefits associated with work.[27] These benefits include many concrete and material goods – things we are able to *use* – as well as things that would be more accurately categorised as capabilities, or things we are able to *do*. Work gives a person access to capabilities by offering the opportunity for the development and mastery of skills and a rich social environment to experience recognition, contribution, community, and self-realisation.

Meaning, too, can be understood as a good of work. Several authors have recently argued that meaningful work should itself be understood as a need,[28] or as an essential component of a full,

[26] See, for example: Gheaus and Herzog, "The Goods of Work (Other Than Money!)"; Clark, "Good Work"; Schwartz, "Meaningful Work."
[27] See, for example: Gheaus and Herzog, "The Goods of Work (Other Than Money!)"; Clark, "Good Work."
[28] Yeoman, "Conceptualising Meaningful Work as a Fundamental Human Need."

flourishing life.[29] These arguments typically draw from a wealth of empirical evidence and other philosophical arguments correlating meaningful activity with positive psychological health and well-being. They also point to the significant psychological, emotional, and social harms which come as a result of job loss and extended periods of unemployment, which can affect a person long after they have found another job.[30] These arguments build on the intuition that people care about their work and are motivated to do it for reasons beyond a paycheque.

Further, work also provides goods which benefit social groups as a whole. These might include goods such as social cohesion and solidarity, through which work functions as a kind of social glue that helps groups stick together and maintain a shared identity. Working together with others can provide the motivational trigger for solidaristic practices, or "other-directed, pro-social" behaviours which help oneself and others to flourish.[31] In doing so, it can promote positive social cohesion by making members more likely to remain within the group.

In addition, work can provide membership in cooperative communities formed and sustained around shared goals and goal-oriented activity. Membership itself can be a good for individuals. It can give a person access to certain benefits and privileges. It can provide them with a sense of identity or a sense of belonging. It can offer a meaningful context for individuals to act as social contributors, which may be an important component of our basic social needs.[32] And by providing membership in distinct communities, work also offers a structure of shared norms that allows individuals to communicate about their role and the roles of others in a shared social context. As a practice which many if not most people engage in, work is therefore an important mode of social communication.

But a goods-centred perspective can only tell us so much. First, it is limited by the fact that it cannot tell us how we should weigh the value of different goods. Simply reporting on the goods of work only identifies which goods – and ills – are associated with work. In some cases, this will be an advantage of the view, since it allows the view to be compatible with a variety of conceptions of the good life and theories of value. However, analysing a need for work requires taking a normative stance on the role of work in human life.

[29] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*; Schwartz, "Meaningful Work."
[30] Uchitelle, *The Disposable American*.
[31] Prainsack and Buyx, "The Value of Work."
[32] Brownlee, "The Lonely Heart Breaks."

Second, the language of goods is also limited in that it is not always the most appropriate language with which to capture what is good about work. By 'language of goods', I mean to target, specifically, a view of goods as commodities rather than a broader view of goods as simply things which are good for us. Treating the goods of work as commodities – and therefore work as an exchange mechanism through which we acquire things that are important, if not essential, to our lives – is not the most suitable conceptual tool for, on the one hand, making sense of the value of some of these 'commodities' and on the other hand, explaining how we acquire them through work.

Let me give an example to illustrate these two points. Studs Terkel's oral history of working Americans describes work as, "a search for daily meaning as well as daily bread… for a sort of life rather than a Monday through Friday sort of dying. Perhaps immortality, too, is part of the quest."[33] That these are 'goods' of work is relatively unquestioned, confirmed by cultural catchphrases ("Love what you do, and you'll never work a day in your life") as well as much testimony about the experiences of modern work.[34] However, it would seem odd to describe a 'search for daily meaning' or 'quest for immortality' as simply a good of work – in part because doing so would collapse the differences in value that exist between those goods and, say, a high salary or social status. A goods-centred perspective, while useful for identifying what benefits are associated with work, does not provide any normative framework to determine how these benefits weigh up against each other.

Regarding the second point, it also seems ill-fitting to refer to the quest for immortality or daily meaning which can be found through work as a transferable good, something which work could be traded for. Conceptualising work as an exchange mechanism obscures that there is something distinct about the way we 'acquire' certain goods through work. Material goods *can* be exchanged in this way: when I show up for my barista shift at the coffee shop, I am trading my work for a paycheque. (I can then take my paycheque to the grocery store and exchange it yet again for other goods.) However, many of the psychological, social, and personal benefits of work are not transferable in this way. When I experience a sense of belonging by being part of a work community or develop a greater sense of myself and my talents by mastering a particular skill through work, it is not an exchange of effort for

[33] Terkel, *Working: People Talk About What They Do All Day And How They Feel About What They Do*.
[34] Examples of which can be found in Richard Sennett's *The Craftsman*, or Matthew Crawford's *Shop Class as Soulcraft*.

goods that is taking place. Neither can I simply give payment in order to acquire the good of community or mastery. I *must* be an active agent in the processes that allow me to acquire them.

A goods-centred view *does* offer certain conceptual tools and allows us to ask certain kinds of philosophical questions. For example, it can support a cost-benefit analysis of the goods of work, if we have agreed upon a value hierarchy, or standard, by which to measure the goods. Such analyses are common in the arguments of many anti-work and post-work authors.[35] Since this perspective allows work to be separated from its goods, the value of work can be determined based on which goods, and how many, it does or does not offer. If work fails to offer enough goods, or confers too many ills, the case can be made that work is not really all that valuable, or indeed of negative value.

However, as stated previously, there are some philosophical questions about work which a goods-centred view cannot answer. It cannot, for example, explain how goods weigh up against each other when they are different in kind. And what of the goods of work which cannot be clearly and analytically separated? How do they factor into this evaluation? Further, what do we make of a case in which someone who holds all the traditional goods of work is still deeply unsatisfied with their work?

To illustrate this point, let's consider the young professional at the centre of a story offered by David Graeber in his book, *Bullshit Jobs*.[36] As a recent university graduate, Eric is hired at a large design firm to implement and manage the company's 'content management system', an intranet that allows the company's projects to be shared across its seven UK offices. As he soon discovers, however, several of the company partners are resistant to the implementation of the management system and have only hired him to keep up the pretence. As a result, there is very little *real* work for him to do, other than to run the system and do the bare minimum.

He has many of the obvious benefits of work: his job is well-paid and largely unsupervised, he finds friends within the company, and the partners treat him with respect and recognition. In time, Eric is able to do whatever he wants with his days, such as taking three-hour lunch breaks, learning to read French, and arranging fake 'business meetings' to drink with friends. But he is deeply unhappy. He

[35] For example, in *Automation and Utopia*, John Danaher constructs an argument against work on the basis that the bad features of work outweigh the good, and that there are other ways of acquiring many of the goods we associate with work. Danaher, *Automation and Utopia*.
[36] Chapter 3 in Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*.

tries to quit on several occasions, only to be offered a higher salary. In the end, it takes a drug trip for him to realise "how profoundly upsetting it was to live in a state of utter purposelessness."[37]

If we consider the example through the perspective of work as an exchange mechanism, then we might try to make sense of Eric's dissatisfaction by expanding the number and kinds of goods that work offers to include whatever he is missing – say, the sense that he is making a social contribution. However, expanding the list of goods indefinitely is not the most satisfying of solutions. What's more, this explanation also seems to neglect an important feature of what is wrong with Eric's situation. Eric, as an individual, has his needs met – a full range of the goods of work ensures this. But Eric, as a member of society, does not. A goods-centred perspective does not adequately account for this distinction. As I will explore in Chapter 8, a needs-centred perspective can, by providing a framework that allows us to think about different categories of needs – such as the needs we might hold, not only as individuals, but also as members of a community or a society – as separate but distinct and non-transferable.

3.3.2 The Right to Work

Nevertheless, the goods provided by work are arguably not just important, but essential for many conceptions of a good life. Therefore, much of the contemporary philosophical literature has also turned to the question of whether work constitutes a right. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) of 1948 identified "the right to work, to free choice of employment, to just and favourable conditions of work and to protection against unemployment" and placed it as a social right alongside other civil and political rights.[38] Thus, it does not only encompass a positive claim to access work, but also a right to autonomous choice for and agency at work.

A right to work is often grounded in the fact that many of the goods acquired through work are themselves the subjects of fundamental human rights, such as a right to basic material necessities like food, clothing and shelter. Since work is the primary manner by which most people obtain these basic material necessities, proponents argue that a right to work merits special consideration amongst other rights. For example, Hugh Collins writes: "In discussions of social and economic rights, though

[37] Graeber, 96.
[38] United Nations, "Universal Declaration of Human Rights."

satisfaction of basic necessities such as food, clothing and shelter are regarded as fundamental rights of every person, the manner by which these goods can be obtained is rarely considered. Yet in most countries, for most of the population, the income to purchase these necessities derives from work, either through employment or self-employment. For these people, securing the right to work is a necessary precondition for securing the necessities of life."[39]

A right to work can also be justified by the relationship between work and non-material goods. Kimberley Brownlee, for example, has proposed including robust social rights like the right to be a social contributor or a right against social deprivation.[40] If there is a place for these as rights, then work may very well be one, too, as one of the primary ways by which a person can access the social conditions which satisfy these rights.

Defending and articulating a right to work, however, has never been straightforward. Virginia Mantouvalou identifies at least two key paradoxes involved. First, "unlike other basic goods such as housing or health care", work "is not something that everyone desires to have."[41] Mantouvalou uses the term *work* to refer primarily to employment, and it is certainly the case that many people would prefer to spend less time in employment so that they might have more time to spend on other, valuable non-work activities. The protection of leisure time is itself the subject of certain rights, which may come into direct conflict with a right to work.[42]

Second, the enforcement of a right to full employment can promote inefficient systems which are often ultimately unsustainable.[43] Another contradiction of full employment is that many fabricated jobs are often low skilled, monotonous, and meaningless: in short, jobs which fail to provide many of the aforementioned benefits of good work. It may also create undesirable conditions of work, which run the risk of endangering other fundamental human rights.

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[39] Collins, "Is There a Human Right to Work?," 18.
[40] Brownlee, "The Lonely Heart Breaks"; Brownlee, "A Human Right Against Social Deprivation."
[41] Mantouvalou, *The Right to Work: Legal and Philosophical Perspectives*, 2.
Of course, whether someone desires the object of a right does not necessarily bear on its standing as a right. I thank Kim Brownlee for raising this point – that a person with anorexia does not desire food does not bear on the existence of a general human right to subsistence. The point Mantouvalou makes (which I repeat here) is that when it comes to work, there is a rather wide range of preferences regarding how much work a person is willing to do, including preferences not to work at all. And these preferences are not always obviously detrimental to a person's well-being, as anorexia is. Therefore, it seems reasonable to take this variation into consideration when evaluating work as a right.
[42] Rose, *Free Time*.
[43] Mantouvalou, *The Right to Work: Legal and Philosophical Perspectives*.

I would add a third problem involved with the defence of a right to work: determining what constitutes work. Although the Universal Declaration of Human Rights focuses on the right to employment and fair labour rights while working, it remains suspiciously silent on other forms of work, such as unpaid work, and the conditions of such work. What's more, many authors studying a right to work now agree that it is not a right to any old work. It must be a right to decent, non-exploitative work.[44] It must be a right which is sensitive to the limitations and restrictions experienced by disabled members of society, which often prevent those members from participating in society to the full extent of their ability or willingness to participate.[45] It should therefore promote the "dignity and equality" of all members of society and their access to work, regardless of physical or cognitive impairments.

Even the earliest contemporary literature on the right to work recognised these problems and reflected an endemic pessimism about a right to work. As John Elster wrote, "Not all good things in life can be provided as of right…To show that a good ought to be provided as a right, one has to argue that it is feasible to do so and that the good is sufficiently important to take priority over conflicting rights that one might also want to create."[46]

Both its feasibility to enforce and its priority over conflicting rights have been extensively challenged.[47] But Elster's words still highlight what is one of the central challenges facing the right to work in general and one which is most relevant to my argument in particular: not all good things in life can be the subject of rights. Take, for example, love, which is something so central to a minimally decent human life that it would seem uncontroversial to include it amongst our non-contingent, basic needs. Can we claim a right to it?

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[44] Mantouvalou, "The Right to Non-Exploitative Work."
[45] Albin, "Universalising the Right to Work of Persons with Disabilities: An Equality and Dignity Based Approach."
[46] Elster, "Is There (or Should There Be) a Right to Work?," 62.
[47] For example, Bob Hepple showed that a right to work against the State would be meaningless, in that it would amount to "only a right to social assistance," while a right against the employer would offer no "meaningful strategy against poverty" (Hepple, "A Right to Work?," 81–82.). The only right it might hope to protect is that of an individuals' right to equal treatment and equal respect. James Nickel, too, expressed scepticisms, highlighting that any right to work which could not enforce full employment for all would not be an appropriate use of the rights designation: "…if the human right to employment is construed as generating no individual claims and as being compatible with substantial unemployment, then…any talk of 'rights' in this area becomes downright misleading." Interpreting the right to work as simply a "rhetorical" way of talking about the *goal* of full employment "destroys most of the point of asserting that employment is a human right" (Nickel, "Is There a Human Right to Employment?," 155.).

The right to be loved has been defended by some authors, such as S. Matthew Liao, who argues that love is a fundamental condition which children require for healthy psychological and physical development. As such a condition, it should be understood as a right, since human beings have human rights to "the fundamental conditions for pursuing a good life."[48] However, outside of the rather specific question about how important love is for healthy childhood development, a right to love for adult human beings is more difficult to sketch out. Here we encounter another paradox: I may need love, but I cannot force anyone to love me. Love is arguably the sort of thing which arises out of genuine relationships, in which members hold some sense of affection and responsibility for those with whom they bear the relationships.

This does not deny the possibility that, at times, we must work at loving those with whom we bear significant relationships. Further, it does not contradict the possibility that a specific duty to love may arise out of particular types of relationships, as may be true in the case of parents or guardians of children.[49] But it does suggest that authentic love, which is arguably the subject of such a right, cannot be easily contrived (if at all). Thus, it is not clear that a right to love is the best way to conceptualise and explain why love is valuable to us more generally, even if it might illuminate the answers to more specific questions (e.g., about the importance of love as a requirement for development).

Work, on any definition broader than just employment, may also be subject to this paradox, especially if it is important or essential along social, rather than individual, dimensions. Recall my suggestion that the failure of Eric's work may be a failure to meet his needs as a member of society, rather than his needs as an individual. Conceptualising work as a right can collapse this difference. The articulation of the right to work in the UDHR does not straightforwardly indicate whether a right to work is a right we might have as members of society or a right we have as individuals.

Further, as Elster writes, the fact that not all goods things in life can be the subject of rights "is sometimes true for goods taken individually", but it is especially true "for goods taken collectively."[50] As discussed in the previous section, many of the goods which work offers are not only beneficial for us as individuals. Work also provides collective social goods, such as solidarity, social cohesion, and

[48] Liao, *The Right to Be Loved*, 39.
[49] Liao, 131.
[50] Elster, "Is There (or Should There Be) a Right to Work?," 62.

membership, which benefit groups of individuals as well as the individuals themselves. But as Elster points out, goods which are collective in nature are difficult to fit into the language of rights, since collective rights must be conceptualised differently than individual ones. Collective rights raise all sorts of tricky questions, not only regarding the ontology of groups but also regarding the feasibility of enforcement and the justification for such rights.

Some will want to push back on these claims about collective rights. They might argue that these are things which, if they are important enough to be considered rights, will simply reduce to individual ones. On this view, collective goods are only important in so far as they offer necessary goods and experiences to the individual. Thus, a community does not have a right to solidarity or social cohesion, or the practices that promote them; instead, its members have a right to *participate* in those practices, and to the social goods and resources afforded by such participation, such as connections and relationships, a sense of community, or the ability to associate.

However, a right to participate is not the same as a right to the practices themselves, or the systems that house them. For example, while it is generally accepted that individuals have rights concerning positive health and bodily integrity, it would be odd to argue that they have a broad-scale moral right to a functioning health care system, even though such a system would be a necessary precondition for members of society to have their right to health fulfilled. Further, the social and financial costs of fulfilling such a right may be so nonsensically high that this actually serves as reason to restrict the right: as Allen Buchanan argues, "No individual's interest in health is morally sufficient to justify the great costs that such large-scale policies entail and the significant restrictions on many individuals' liberty that they would inevitably require."[51] Thus, even reducing the collective value of work to an individual right does not solve the problems introduced by rights language.

As such, I argue that a rights-centred perspective of work, like a goods-centred perspective, also neglects important questions in the philosophy of work, such as questions which concern work's collective or social value. A needs-centred approach is, on the other hand, able to provide a more appropriate framework to make sense of the collective value of work, by treating social groups as

[51] Buchanan, "A Pluralistic Justificatory Methodology for Human Rights," 61.

things which can have needs and making these needs the centre of the analysis. I explore this claim further in Chapter 8.

3.3.3 A Final Note on Whether Work Can Be (Socially) Valuable While Being (Individually) Bad

Throughout this section, I have argued that the major shortcoming of both perspectives is that they focus almost exclusively on the individual's relationship to work – whether on the individual's instrumental relationship with goods or on the special status of individual rights. But questions about work (and what is good about work) cannot always be reduced to questions about what is good for the individual. Work may be valuable for society and for others, even while it is not good for me, the person who does the work. I have argued that a needs-centred perspective offers an advantage in this respect, since it provides a framework from which we can examine the value of work for social groups.

This might raise a concern: Can work be understood as valuable for a social group if it is bad for every individual person within that social group? Responding to this concern requires first clarifying the distinction between work as good and work as valuable. I do not claim here that work which is bad – in the sense of harmful, degrading, or dehumanising – should ever be conceived of as good for society. What I instead hope to draw attention to is the possibility that work could be an essentially valuable feature of society, even while bad forms of work persist.

As an analogy, a shared language is valuable because it is a tool which allows complex social interactions to occur. At the same time, having a shared language provides us with new and unique ways to perpetuate harms against each other (e.g., hate speech). That harmful speech acts occur does not conflict with the claim that having access to a shared language is, on the whole, beneficial for a society.

I will discuss this objection further in Chapter 6. For now, it is enough to show that there is a different sense in which work might be valuable for us as a social group which is neglected by just exploring how work is good for the person who does it. Therefore, analysis of the need for work – and more generally, of the relationship between work and needs – cannot be subsumed under the debates about goods or rights, and instead must be explored on its own terms.

To briefly summarise, I have made two claims in this section. First, I have argued that the language of goods cannot explain a need for work because while it enumerates the goods of work, it does not explain the value of those goods. As a result, it cannot answer certain kinds of philosophical questions about the value of work, such as why work which offers individual goods may nevertheless be experienced as disvaluable, as illustrated in the case of Eric's bullshit job. Second, I have argued that the language of rights, while it does offer more by way of an explanation of value, cannot explain a need for work because it does not adequately account for all good things in life, including things which have social or collective dimensions, like work. As a result, it also cannot answer certain kinds of philosophical questions about the value of work, such as how work might be collectively valuable.

3.4 Up Next: An Individual Need for Work

In this chapter, I defined need and explored the different senses in which work might be necessary. I outlined some of the past attempts to address the question of a need for work. Finally, I situated the discussion of a need for work in relation to two central debates which have dominated philosophical research on the topic of work: that of the goods of work, and that of the right to work. I argued that further analysis of a need for work must be explored on its own terms, since the debates on the goods of work and the right to work focus exclusively on an individual's relationship to work. Assessing whether there is a need for work requires the ability to consider whether, and in what way, work might constitute a need with social, as well as individual, dimensions.

Next, I turn to this task: assessing whether a need for work can be defended. I divide this question up into three parts: whether we have a need for work as individuals, as members of communities, and as members of a society. I address each of these parts in Chapters 4-6, respectively, beginning in the following chapter with an exploration of the relationship between work and individual needs. While work plays an important role in meeting individual needs and may, in some cases, be a need for specific individuals, I ultimately argue that work does not constitute a need for individuals in general, since many needs can be met outside of work and through leisure activities.

4 Who Are We?
Individuals and the Need for Work

So, who are *we*? As laid out in the previous chapter, the answer to this question will depend on our point of view. In this dissertation, I consider three different perspectives from which we can understand a single group of human beings. First, 'we' can be taken to mean each of us, alone, as individual persons. Second, 'we' can be taken to mean us, together, as members of communities. Third, 'we' can be taken to mean us, together, as members of a broader society. Each of these perspectives is connected to the others, although each presents a different lens through which to view needs. In the following three chapters, I consider whether work constitutes some such need.

This chapter addresses the first understanding by examining the way work provides opportunities for us to answer many of the needs that are most important to us as individuals. In the first section of the chapter (§4.1), I categorise these needs as basic and non-contingent, drawing on an account put forward by Soran Reader and Gillian Brock. I discuss the wide range of ***material, relational, political*** and ***personal*** requirements which may be understood to constitute legitimate examples of such needs, like material resources, decent social contact, political agency, and the ability to self-realise.

Next, I consider the relationship between work and the basic, non-contingent needs of individuals (§4.2). I argue that work allows us to meet needs ***by providing opportunities to acquire material goods and develop capabilities***. Each of these functions of work plays an important role in not only meeting needs which are basic and shared amongst all people, but also in allowing each of us to meet the non-contingent needs which are particular to who we are as individuals. Further, it allows us to do so in the company of others. Although non-contingent needs are not universally shared, they are still needs which may nevertheless be understood as unforsakeable. Therefore, work's role in allowing a person to fulfil their such needs should not go overlooked.

However, work is not the only way we can meet these needs, basic or otherwise. Therefore, I conclude that work itself does not constitute a need for any particular, individual, since many of these needs can be met outside of work, through labour or leisure activities.

4.1 Our Needs as Individuals

We humans are needing beings, and we experience all sorts of needs. In this section, I elaborate on the kinds of needs we can have as individuals. I identify the most urgent of our needs as those that are basic and non-contingent, drawing on work by Soran Reader and Gillian Brock.[1] These include the things we require to sustain life, but they also extend to include things, unique to me, that I simply cannot not get on without.

Reader and Brock connect these seemingly disparate sets of requirements under the category of *non-contingent* needs. On their account, non-contingent needs are "necessary conditions for non-contingent aims that the needing being could not but have (like life)."[2] For example, I have a non-contingent need for water because without it, I will die.

But I can also have a non-contingent need for things which are specific to who I am, or to a particular situation I find myself in, at a particular point in time. One example is, say, the non-contingent need a person has for medical attention following a cycling accident. A less obvious one is the non-contingent need I have for a quiet place to work. As a philosopher whose work relies on the ability to enter into deep concentration for extended periods, I simply cannot get on without such a need being met. As another example of a non-contingent need, a person might have a deep, abiding need to have a child, because her desire to do so is so strongly connected to her sense of self that she cannot help but to have it.

Some of these needs often escape notice as being morally salient, Reader and Brock argue, because they are not universal – that is, not everyone shares them. They are not even needs we necessarily have

[1] Reader and Brock, "Needs, Moral Demands and Moral Theory."
[2] Reader and Brock, 252.

all of the time. While I currently have a non-contingent need for a quiet place to work, I may not have the same need once my dissertation is complete. However, non-contingent needs are important in ethics because, as the authors state, "…the needing being simply cannot go on unless its need is met."[3] Even though my non-contingent needs may change, this does not exclude them from being treated as important as other, more material requirements.

However, not all non-contingent needs are so unique. Some such needs *are* shared by groups of people. Think about the needs that are common, say, amongst all members of the same species, like the need for food or water. Reader and Brock refer to these sorts of fundamental, common needs as *basic* needs.

What are some examples of basic needs? While the things necessary to maintain life serve as very obvious examples, there are almost certainly others. Here, by drawing on work from Sabina Alkire,[4] I will highlight some of the general categories of basic needs that have been proposed by a variety of authors.[5] I do, however, not align with any particular list of needs.

In addition to the basic, ***material*** needs that we require for healthy physical development and bodily integrity, it is widely recognised that many of our basic needs concern our shared social life with others. I will refer to these needs as ***relational***.[6] On a fundamental level, decent social environments and adequate exposure to social contact are not preferences, but things without which people will experience extreme psychological and physiological harm as well as early death. Kimberley Brownlee notes that "deficiencies often caused by social deprivation under the extreme conditions of long-term physical isolation or solitary confinement, such as depression, despondency, hallucination, self-mutilation, psychosis, or suicidal ideation and behaviour, can equally effectively prevent the exercise of rights requiring clear thought, social ability, and personal control; and that extreme deficiencies can result in early death."[7] Surgeon and public health researcher Atul Gawande, in exploring whether long-

[3] Reader and Brock, 252.
[4] Alkire, "Dimensions of Human Development."
[5] Some of the most famous examples from philosophy include: Sen, *Commodities and Capabilities*; Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*. Some examples from the literature on development include: Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, "Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends"; Max-Neef, *Human Scale Development: Conception, Application and Further Reflections*; Narayan, *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?*; Doyal and Gough, "Need Satisfaction as a Measure of Human Welfare."
[6] I use the term 'relational' to distinguish these needs from those that we hold in virtue of our belonging to social groups, which I will discuss in Chapters 5 and 6.
[7] Shalev, London School of Economics and Political Science, and Mannheim Centre for Criminology, *A Sourcebook on Solitary Confinement.* cited in Brownlee, "A Human Right Against Social Deprivation," 202..

term solitary confinement constitutes torture, references the experiences of prisoners of war who reported, after long periods without human contact, feelings of mental disintegration, of the mind 'grinding down' or being 'lost' altogether – an experience from which some never recovered.[8] He also notes that, in a US military study of veterans who returned from Vietnam, veterans "reported that they found social isolation to be as torturous and agonizing as any physical abuse they suffered."

In addition, Reader and Brock also acknowledge that "[t]he concept of a basic human need is now generally extended to include requirements for a decent human life which go beyond physical survival, such as education, privacy, freedom."[9] I will refer to this category as ***political*** needs. For example, Martha Nussbaum identifies, in her list of basic human capabilities, the need to have control over one's political environment or "to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life."[10] Others identify participation,[11] coherent self-determination or practical reason,[12] and freedom of choice and action,[13] which also express the importance of being free to make self-directed and autonomous choices about who we affiliate with, how we engage with our political community, and what our political values are. Being able to participate may be a precondition for understanding oneself as equal to others, as well as experiencing a sense of belonging within communities: as André Gorz suggests, "To feel anyone's equal, you also need to feel that you are useful to that society as a whole, and that it needs whatever skills or capabilities you may have."[14]

Personal development and our ability to express ourselves as unique individuals may also be understood as a category of basic needs. Various authors articulate these needs differently, but all can be captured under the umbrella of ***personal*** or identity-related needs. For example, Nussbaum also identifies, as central human functional capabilities, the ability to use one's senses, imagination, and thought alongside practical reason to develop a unique sense of self and make free choices about the structure of one's life.[15] Grisez et. al. identify, as basic human values, self-expression – by which a person aligns their inner self with their choices and behaviour – and self-integration, by which a person

[8] Gawande, "Is Long-Term Solitary Confinement Torture?"
[9] Reader and Brock, "Needs, Moral Demands and Moral Theory," 255.
[10] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, 80.
[11] Max-Neef, *Human Scale Development: Conception, Application and Further Reflections*.
[12] Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, "Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends."
[13] Narayan, *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?*
[14] Gorz, "On the Difference Between Society and Community, And Why Basic Income By Itself Cannot Confer Full Membership of Either," 180.
[15] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*.

is able to reconcile various reasons for acting when those reasons come into conflict with each other.[16] And Manfred Max-Neef names identity as a basic need which may be expressed along different dimensions of being, having, doing, and interacting: for example, an expression of the need for identity along the dimension of 'being' involves satisfying one's requirements for a sense of belonging or self-esteem.[17] Regardless of differences in expression, I treat all authors as aiming to capture the sense that being able to develop a unique sense of self, and to align that identity with one's choices and actions in the world, constitutes a fundamental part of living a characteristically human life.

I have discussed the following categories of our basic needs, without which we would be unable to live fully human lives, on many conceptions of what such a life may entail:

> ***material needs***, for healthy physical development and bodily integrity;
>
> ***relational needs***, for healthy psychological development and the development of interpersonal, social capacities;
>
> ***political needs***, which allow us to participate in the world of others and to exercise agency and autonomy;
>
> and ***personal needs***, which allow us to develop a sense of ourselves and align our identity with our actions in the world.

I admit that there may be additional categories to those I have discussed here, and that some needs have gone unmentioned. Some of these needs may be understood as preconditions for other needs, or necessarily connected in important ways. For example, meeting basic educational goals, such as basic levels of literacy and numeracy, may be understood as important because knowledge itself is something which is intrinsically valuable,[18] or because it is a basic requirement for other, intermediate needs such as security in childhood, self-realisation, or political participation. Finally, it is worth noting that to be able to meet these needs in the company of others is of central importance: "To plan for one's own life without being able to do so in complex forms of discourse, concern, and reciprocity with other human beings is, again, to behave in an incompletely human way."[19]

In this chapter, I focus exclusively on the basic, non-contingent needs of individuals *as* individuals. However, the concept of a basic need can also be used to refer to needs which are shared by all

[16] Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, "Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends."
[17] Max-Neef, *Human Scale Development: Conception, Application and Further Reflections*.
[18] Grisez, Boyle, and Finnis, "Practical Principles, Moral Truth, and Ultimate Ends."
[19] Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, 82.

members of a community, or all members of a society. In the previous chapter, for example, I discussed what is meant when a government claims that a road needs to be constructed or a nuclear reactor needs to be built. These are also examples of basic needs because members of a state require certain conditions to be met in order for their nation to carry on existing.[20] I will return to discuss the basic needs that individuals have as members of a community or society in Chapters 5 and 6.

4.2 How Work Answers Individual Needs

Work allows us to answer our basic, non-contingent individual needs in two significant ways. First, it allows us to acquire material goods and concrete resources. Second, it provides the opportunity to develop important skills and capabilities.

4.2.1 Acquiring Material Goods and Concrete Resources

In the first instance, work allows us to acquire goods, through which we can meet our needs for material resources. I use 'goods' in a narrow sense, to refer to commodities, rather than the broader sense of referring to things that are good for us. Work can allow us to do so directly, as when we use the direct products of our work in order to meet our needs. But it can also do so indirectly, when we receive money in exchange for work, which then allows us to purchase the material goods necessary to sustain our lives.

An income is the most common form of compensation for work in the modern world. It is also, perhaps, one of the most valuable 'goods' of work, since very few people in the modern age possess the skills, knowledge, natural resources, or even desire to be entirely self-sustaining. For most people, surviving without money is not a viable option. Therefore, a basic level of income is required to support material needs for necessities such as food, clothing, housing, as well as (in some cases) adequate levels of other basic resources, such as healthcare and education. Work is the primary way that most people earn an income.

Work can also offer direct access to the material goods we need. Sometimes compensation for work is not given in currency but in a pre-determined set of commodities. For example, the Worldwide

[20] Wiggins, *Needs, Values, Truth: Essays in the Philosophy of Value*.

Organization of Organic Farms (WWOOF) and WorkAway are two organisations which promote this sort of labour exchange. For many of the jobs offered on these platforms, workers are not paid a wage, but instead offered some equivalent product or service as compensation for labour or the achievement of set projects. In addition, digital platforms have made it easier for people to set up bartering networks and connect with each other about shared needs, thereby exerting greater control over alternative forms of exchange.[21]

While receiving a wage in exchange for work may be a fairly recent phenomenon in the history of human work, working in exchange for material resources is not. Historically speaking, work and labour have been the primary means of acquiring the basic material necessities required for survival.[22] And in many economic systems prior to industrial capitalism, a person worked and laboured for the direct acquisition and production of many of these material goods. These goods may have, in themselves, functioned as products which could be bartered in exchange for other resources, but payment in currency was not always the primary commodity of work. Work can provide goods without an element of exchange because some work involves the direct creation or production of objects of use. And these objects can then be used *by* the worker to sustain their needs. For example, a farmer's worker yields food, a carpenter's work yields a chair or a bed, and a builder's work yields a house. So, this is another sense in which we can say that work provides material goods or commodities.

However, money and material goods are not the only forms of resource that work gives access to. It also provides access to social resources, such as relationships, social capital and recognition. In the first instance, work puts us into contact with others and encourages us to interact and collaborate. It often does so in ways that make it difficult to avoid developing relationships and establishing lasting connections. This leads to the second resource of social capital, by which I refer to "the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them."[23] Although I will discuss the concept of social capital more extensively in the next chapter, I introduce it here as another concrete relational resource which work gives us access to.

[21] Burton, "Bartering In The Modern Day."
[22] As a reminder to the reader, I treat work as distinct from labour. See §2.2.1.
[23] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, 21–22.

In the third instance, work offers the opportunity to receive positive acknowledgement from others, in public arenas where our contributions can become known and rewarded. Anca Gheaus and Lisa Herzog also argue that work offers the good of social recognition, which they define generally as "high regard by others," which can be manifested through the achievement and acquisition of many different goods and opportunities of work, including "achievements, social contribution, and even high salaries."[24]

Further, recognition is a kind of social reward which is given not only for "the kind of work that one does, but also [for] one's position in a job hierarchy."[25] Therefore, some examples might include receiving a promotion at work or being awarded an honorary degree for one's contribution to their field, but it might also include more informal modes of reward, such as being praised in an informal meeting with one's manager or being thanked by a colleague. The opportunity for meaningful work and the recognition it engenders is also closely connected with self-respect or self-esteem, an individual good recognised as essential for human flourishing.[26]

If I, as an individual, can be understood to have a basic, non-contingent need for the material resources that ensure healthy physical development and bodily integrity, then this is the first way that work can answer individual needs: work provides a way to acquire these resources directly or to earn an income, by which we can indirectly acquire (i.e., purchase) the material resources we need. As an individual, however, I also have basic, non-contingent needs for non-material resources which ensure healthy social and psychological development. I have shown how work answers these as well – by providing relationships, recognition, and social capital.

Altogether, work answers our material needs by providing direct and indirect avenues to acquire the goods and resources that satisfy those needs.

Since we cannot get on without access to these goods and resources – or would live a significantly diminished life without them – this could suggest that, as individuals, we hold a necessary relationship

[24] Gheaus and Herzog, "The Goods of Work (Other Than Money!)," 76.
[25] Gheaus and Herzog, 78.
[26] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*.

with work. The question remains: What sort of necessary relationship is it? Is it a need *to* work or a need *for* work?

To prove that the relationship constitutes a need *to* work, one would need to show that work was the only way to receive these goods and resources. However, this is not the case. To begin, the most basic needs that an individual has in order to sustain life can be met through labour, the non-work activity by which we produce things for consumption and perform the activities which are especially fundamental to our existence as animals. While labour cannot meet all of the needs that we are able to meet through work – for example, political, personal, and some complex relational needs – it can ensure basic physiological survival by meeting material and some basic relational needs.

Further, resources – material and relational – are transferable. By this, I mean that I myself do not necessarily always need to do the work in order to receive the resource: if I receive an income, but do not work, I can still go to the store and buy milk. If I am the inheritor of a vast fortune, I can 'buy' relationships, rely on the social networks that I am granted access to by virtue of my family legacy, or have social relationships with the people who work for me. If I am unable to work (either because I am too young, or am physically unable), but have the benefit of a caregiver and breadwinner (such as a parent), then I can fulfil my material need for resources simply by being given the goods and resources that someone else has worked for. Ultimately there are many ways I can fulfil my requirements without needing to *do* work.

If the question were this simple, there would be little room for further discussion – it seems clear that we do not have a need to work on the basis of this evidence. However, I cannot fulfil my requirements without work entirely – I still need someone else to do it. This is the thought which grounds a possible need *for* work. Thus, although I myself may not have a need *to* work, I may still have a need *for* it – for others around me to do it. This is the question I will address in the final section (§4.3).

4.2.2 Developing Capabilities

The goods of work should not be understated, but they are not alone in their importance. Work does not only allow us to acquire material goods and concrete resources. It also provides us with the opportunity to *do* things, which includes the development of important capabilities. These

opportunities allow us to become capable agents, who can choose and act to fulfil their basic, non-contingent needs.

Other authors, such as Andrea Veltman, have previously explored the relationship between work and human capabilities.[27] The term *capability*, however, draws from Amartya Sen's work on economic development. A capability, on Sen's model, is a collection of functionings, where a functioning is "an achievement of a person – what he or she manages to do or to be."[28] A capability might also be understood as a qualitative skill, an ability to successfully perform a combination of activities or tasks that allow a person to function as a person.

Sen argues that a capability is distinct from both goods – or commodities that make functioning possible – and the pleasure or happiness or well-being that is derived from that functioning.[29] (On Sen's view, pleasure and well-being are umbrellaed under the economic term *utility*.) While goods come prior to doing and acting as human beings, capabilities come prior to the maximising of utility, or one's welfare and well-being. Without the possession of important capabilities, such as bodily integrity or participation in society, one's welfare could never be improved by, for example, the mere addition of material goods.

I use the language of capabilities to highlight the fact that many of the non-material benefits received through work are not commodities, and therefore not something work is done in exchange for. A worker gains access to these benefits *through* working, not as a result of a contractual exchange that comes once the work is completed. This is, in part, because these benefits of work are not things but types of activity, and they are experienced, rather than used or consumed, as in the case of material goods. The person who is to acquire them must *act* in certain ways. They must engage in a process of *doing* in order to acquire the end result of these benefits. To characterise these benefits as capabilities captures the way in which these benefits involve things we are able *to do* rather than things we are able *to use*. (I make this point because some of the examples I will discuss below are not best described as

[27] See Chapter 4 in Veltman, *Meaningful Work*.
[28] Sen, *Commodities and Capabilities*, 7.
[29] Sen places "pleasure / well-being / happiness" under the economic term of utility. Here, I need not commit to a view of utility in order to explain what a capacity is. I will use welfare and well-being going forward, but it should be understood that these could be interchangeable with any term that denotes a positive ideal at which a human life might overarchingly aim.

capabilities but do broadly concern things we are able to do. Like capabilities, they are not transferable in the way that commodities are.)

Let me offer some examples. Several authors have identified the fact that good work allows us to achieve mastery[30] or excellences[31], both which refer to the wide variety of skills and competencies that work gives a person the opportunity to develop. When a person 'masters' a specific skillset, they are able to devote enough time and concentration to a skill or task that they are able to rise to heightened level of ability in performing that skill.[32] By working as a barista, for example, I have the opportunity to develop a broad set of specialised food service skills. I am able to develop a sensitive palate and to learn the language used in speciality coffee tasting. I am able to develop a technical understanding of espresso machinery and of the relationship between pressure, temperature, and time which is essential to brewing coffee. I am also able to develop important emotional capacities and interpersonal skills from interacting with customers on a regular basis.

Mastery of a skillset may be beneficial because it is one of the primary opportunities we have to enter "flow states", a term first coined by psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.[33] Flow, or optimal experience, is a term for a state of total absorption or concentration on a task. Such absorption produces an extremely enjoyable and gratifying experience which people are willing to engage in exclusively for its own sake. The ability to master a particular skillset also has the potential to contribute positively to our own sense of self-worth and the way we are perceived by others around us. In addition, having the opportunity to excel at a particular set of skills and abilities, which are unique to an individual and their particular sense of self, is, for many people, central to their conception of a good life.

In addition, Jon Elster argues that work provides the opportunity for active self-realization, the process through which an individual is able to freely develop and exercise the full range of her powers and abilities, as the individual that she is.[34] According to Elster, work, in its many forms, is particularly well-suited to do this because self-realization can only occur through the exercise of particular skills,

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[30] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*.
[31] Gheaus and Herzog, "The Goods of Work (Other Than Money!)."
[32] For other authors who discuss the benefit of mastery in relation to work, see: Veltman, *Meaningful Work*; Sennett, *The Craftsman*; Clark, "Good Work."
[33] Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*.
[34] Elster, "Self-Realization in Work and Politics."

in purposeful, intentional activities.[35] It is not something that can be achieved through passive consumption or activities of drudgery, or trivial, repetitive activities that require little to no mental engagement on the part of the person doing them. Instead, one self-realises by building a set of skills and abilities that are unique to the person that they are: by exercising those skills in a manner that is consistent with their desires and interests; and by doing so in the company of others, where they can be recognised and affirmed as an individual and as a member of the community. On Elster's view, the opportunity for self-realisation is a necessary component of any conception of the good life, though each individual person may fulfil the process in different ways.

Self-realisation is another important capability associated with work, though I do not think it is necessary to agree entirely with Elster's terms.[36] Even if one were to disagree with his particular conception, we may still acknowledge that work can provide a unique opportunity for a person to explore and develop her identity: not only through her personal preferences, desires and interests, but also through the skills she builds, and the way in which she applies those abilities to achieve goals that she cares about. Andrea Veltman describes meaningful work as work which provides something like this: the opportunity to situate oneself in the narrative of their own life and the lives of others they care about; to align one's values, desires, and abilities in a way that is unique to the person that they are.[37] This is similar to Elster's articulation, and it helps make sense of the way in which many forms of work give me a way to understand and express myself in the world.[38]

Work also affords us the opportunity to develop social capabilities, such as the ability to contribute to the lives of others. Gheaus and Herzog call this social contribution,[39] while Veltman frequently describes the way work provides the opportunity "to contribute positively to the lives of others."[40] All refer to the fact that work often offers a person the opportunity to contribute to their society by performing tasks that are necessary to keep that society running. In some cases, the connection

[35] Or what Elster calls *practices*. I refer to them here as *activities* to avoid confusion with a concept of practices I will discuss in Chapter 5.
[36] The concept of self-realisation is also sometimes explored under the terms self-determination or self-actualisation. For examples of each, see the following: Blustein et al., "The Psychology of Working"; Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation."
[37] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*.
[38] Several other authors also recognize a relationship between something like self-realization and work: Yeoman, "Conceptualising Meaningful Work as a Fundamental Human Need"; Clark, "Good Work"; Schaff, "Work, Technology, and Inequality."
[39] Gheaus and Herzog, "The Goods of Work (Other Than Money!)."
[40] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*.

between work and contribution will be obvious, such as in the case of nurses, teachers, or social workers who hold important social roles and perform socially necessary tasks. In other cases, the connection will be more abstract. A researcher or computer programmer may also make a social contribution through their work, by adding to the catalogue of human knowledge or building and maintaining the digital systems that allow modern society to function. It is also worth mentioning that not all work will make a truly useful contribution – as in the case of David Graeber's bullshit jobs – and not all work that makes a contribution will be recognised for it – as in the case of the lonely gravedigger offered up by Gheaus and Herzog, who performs a socially necessary task but is nevertheless ostracised and marginalised.[41]

If my basic, non-contingent needs as an individual include important relational, political, and personal requirements, which can only be fully met if I develop certain abilities and am able to exercise those abilities in the company of others, then this is another way that work can be understood to answer our individual needs. Thus, we can say: ***Work answers our relational, political and personal needs by providing opportunities to develop important capabilities along relational, political and personal dimensions.***

Since we cannot get on without developing these capabilities – that is to say, it is not enough for us simply to have access the resources – then this further supports the conclusion that we hold a necessary relationship to work. But still, we need to ask: What sort of necessary relationship is it?

Capabilities seem like a good candidate to ground a need *to* work because capabilities, unlike resources, are not transferable. We cannot buy them from others who have acquired them through working. This means that we cannot simply trade work for the things we require, as is possible when considering material goods or even some non-material resources. This point could easily lead us to think that the need to be able to develop capabilities amounts to a need to work.

However, even though capabilities are not transferable, they can be developed in the context of activities other than work. Although work may be one of the primary contexts in which we have the opportunity to develop certain capabilities, it is far from the only one. For example, mastery of

[41] Gheaus and Herzog, "The Goods of Work (Other Than Money!)," 76.

specialised skills is available in the pursuit of leisure activities and hobbies. Developing a skillset through these activities can be as much a source of fulfilment, sometimes more, as doing so through work.

As evidence of this: my partner is an excellent chef. He is largely self-taught, but technically quite accomplished, and he regularly learns new culinary techniques. He does so because he genuinely enjoys the challenge of improving his skillset, the reward of producing a technically complicated dish, and the satisfaction of serving food to people he cares about. However, he has never been interested in pursuing cooking as an occupation: not for a lack of passion for the craft, but because he has the same opportunity to meet certain needs from practicing it as a hobby as he would have had performing it as a job.

We can perhaps also develop important capabilities through our association with groups and the formation of relationships which are typically found outside of the domain of work. For example, we often develop relational capabilities in the context of our families. A family offers one of the first opportunities we have to develop deep, loving interpersonal relationships in a cohesive, social unit. But these social units are different in significant ways from the communities we will form later in life. They are not usually voluntary, in the sense that a person does not choose her biological family members or elect to be adopted by certain parents or guardians.[42] We do not always have to work within these social units in order to be granted membership in them. As a result, a family offers a good example of the way that we can develop capabilities outside of work.

All in all, many forms of non-work offer us the opportunity to develop as broad a range of capabilities as we are afforded through work. In addition, we may find opportunities to develop capabilities through other forms of association and social relationships. Therefore, as I have shown in the two preceding sections, neither material resources nor capabilities are grounds for an individual need *to* work.

Of course, the line between work and non-work is not black and white. In our daily lives, we do not just work, but also labour, play, and rest. Much of what we do does not clearly delineate between each

[42] Even chosen families can be bound and governed by rules which are often very different from public-facing relationships.

of these different types of action but involves elements of each. This means that identifying where and through which activities, precisely, we meet our basic, non-contingent needs is never straightforward. However, this seems to support rather than contradict the conclusion presented here.

4.2.3 A Final Note on Whether Work Must be Meaningful to Meet Needs

It is important to note that, in addition to work not being necessary for many of these individual needs, it is in many cases, not even sufficient. Some work is boring, monotonous, and unrewarding and therefore does not always answer needs by providing the opportunity for material resources or the development of capabilities. Some work is actively harmful, degrading, or dehumanising.

However, I would argue that many types of work – a much wider range than simply those jobs that are viewed as a passion or a vocation – can allow us to meet basic, non-contingent needs. This list may sometimes *include* boring, monotonous, and unrewarding work.[43] That is because work does not need to be meaningful or intrinsically valuable in order to be needs-meeting. Paid work which I pursue exclusively for the paycheque that it provides can also allow me to meet my minimum threshold of requirements for decent social contact, for example.

I have argued that work allows us to satisfy many of the basic, non-contingent needs that we have as individual persons, by providing a way to acquire material goods and by offering the opportunity to develop capabilities. Being able to do so is necessary for full participation in the economic, social, and political domains of human life. The question that remains is whether work is the only way to meet such needs, and it is to this question I now turn.

4.3 Whether Work is the Only Way to Answer Individual Needs

As I have discussed in the previous two sections, at the individual level, a need *to* work cannot be defended, since neither a person's need for material resources nor capabilities can be shown to ground

[43] It could also include work that is harmful in certain respects but needs-meeting in others. For example, consider a job which is high paying (thereby meeting one's material needs) but extremely isolated (thereby failing to meet one's need for social resources).

a need to work. What remains to be discussed is whether there is some separate need *for* work at the level of the individual.

If there is a need *for* work, the justification would go something like this: although I may not have a need myself to work, I may still have a need for it – for others around me to do it. This is because I cannot fulfil all my basic, non-contingent requirements without work entirely. Therefore, if there is a need for work, it must be based in the need for some requirement that work fulfils, but which is transferable. Since capabilities are not transferable – that is, I cannot buy, be given, or exchange goods for the capabilities that someone else has developed through working – a need *for* work, if it exists, must be grounded in the need for material and non-material resources. However, I have already shown that work is not the only way we can acquire material goods and non-material resources. This clearly suggests that we do not hold an individual need, either *to* or *for* work.

But this still leaves open the possibility that we each, as individuals, might need *others* to work. This is why remaining confined to the individual-focused perspective that is offered by need-to claims significantly limits our ability to explore the meaning and value of work in a philosophically interesting way.

It limits our ability to ask and explore interesting philosophical questions because it can be, in part, reduced to an empirical question: whether I need work materially can be determined by simply calculating whether we have the means and capability – financially, technologically – to outsource all work. It is also limiting in that it presents an understanding of work as a need as merely a contingent fact of existing conditions. If work could be eliminated by relegating production of resources to non-members of society – as has been achieved in the past through slavery, or as it might be achieved in the future through full automation – then (as far as individual material needs go) work could be done away with entirely. That it is not done away with is simply contingent on our current forms of social organisation.

This, as I will discuss in Chapter 7, is the sense of need on which the anti-work literature focuses, and it is the reason that the vast majority of that literature identifies work as a necessary evil. However, this dissertation aims, in part, to show that this sense of need is not the philosophically interesting one. It cannot reveal anything about how work could be essential to who and what we are. Instead,

the sense of need that would philosophically more interesting is our possible need *for* work, not grounded in an individual sense of need but in a social one. This need is grounded in the reality that, while I myself may not need to work, I may still have a need for it to be present in my social environments. I may need others around me to do it – again, not on the grounds of the individual needs it answers for me, but on the grounds of things we need by virtue of being members of social groups.

4.4 Up Next: A Community-Based Need for Work

In this chapter, I investigated whether we – meaning each of us, alone – have a need to or for work. I did so by first outlining our basic, non-contingent needs and discussing the various ways that work answers these needs. By offering us the opportunity to acquire material and non-material resources and to develop skills and capabilities, work acts as one of the primary ways that we fulfil many of our basic material, psychological, relational, and political requirements.

Ultimately, I argue against any sense of work as a need at the level of the individual. Both cases – a need *to* and a need *for* work – would require that there is no alternative to work, not only for our material and resource-based needs, but for the full range of the relational, political, and personal requirements which can be understood as basic and non-contingent. Whether work is needed to satisfy our material needs is an empirical question, depending on the technological possibility of full automation. Even for the opportunity to develop capabilities, work is not the only way to do so. Therefore, it is not clear that we have an individual need to or for work.

This, however, does not entirely eliminate the question of a need for work, but instead pushes it into the domain of the community. If we need others in our community to work, does this constitute a community-based need for work? I will turn to this question in Chapter 5.

As members of communities, we are still individual persons. But we are also community members, and as such, we have different needs. We have needs for things which reproduce the structures that make collective life possible: for example, in a community, we need connections to form between individuals, on the basis of shared identities, aims, or interests, in order to establish the cohesion on

which collective life depends. As such, we can say that a community *needs* these connections. Just as work allows us to meet individual needs, it may also allow us to meet community-based ones.

I will expand on these needs in the following chapter and examine their relationship to work. But much like the conclusions I have drawn about an individual need to work, it is also not at the level of community that a need for work can be defended. This is because while work offers many ways to fulfil community-based basic, non-contingent needs, work is not the only way to do so. As a result, there are many examples of communities in which members are able to fulfil their community-based needs without work.

5 Who Are We?
Community and the Need for Work

I have argued that we do not have an unforsakeable need to work, at least as individuals. But what about as members of communities? This chapter considers the central question in relation to the second understanding of 'we', by examining the way that work answers community-based needs.

Following the structure of the previous chapter, this chapter begins by drawing boundaries around what constitutes a community and examines what our needs in this respect might be (§5.1). As members of a community, I suggest we can be understood to have requirements for things which allow us to continue living in a community – things that are preconditions for our communities to exist. I discuss the general category of community-based basic, non-contingent needs under the concept of social reproduction, or "the myriad activities which enable individual lives and collective life to be maintained."[1] I offer some examples of the processes that allow a community to reproduce itself, such as the processes for acquiring new members and regulating membership, the mechanisms of communication through which members can discuss the conditions of membership and their shared identity, or the building of connections between members.

From these processes, I derive at least three central community-based needs: ***the need for some number of individuals with shared characteristics or common activities; the need for connections, or social capital, to form between these individuals; and the need for a system of norms that govern membership and allow members to communicate with each other.*** I then consider the relationship between work and these community-based needs (§5.2). Work plays a central role in answering community-based needs in three corresponding ways: ***by allowing us to engage in practices which serve as the basis for the shared experiences and identity of a community;***

[1] Deranty, "Post-Work Society as an Oxymoron," 5.

by promoting solidarity, or the building of social capital; and by providing a system of norms which govern membership and allow members to communicate with one another.

Work is thus an important avenue by which communities meet basic needs. However, as was true in the case of the individual, work is not the only way communities are able to do so. Work is not the only context in which individuals come together to engage in practices. Many practices are forms of leisure, and therefore offer an opportunity to meet community-based needs outside of work. As a result, in Section 5.3, I find the same conclusion to be true for communities as for individuals: although work offers the opportunities to answer important community-based needs, those needs can still, in theory, be met through the exercise of other, non-work practices. Thus, I argue work does not itself constitute a need for any particular community.

5.1 Our Needs as a Community

In this section, I first put forward a definition for community, along with several examples. I then examine what a list of community-based basic, non-contingent needs might include.

5.1.1 What is a community?

Communities come in a range of shapes and sizes, and there is considerable debate about what constitutes a community.[2] I define it here as the following:

> ***Community:*** *a cohesive group of individuals that possess shared or common features, such as identity, interests, or aims.*

In doing so, I include, as Daniel Bell does, a wide variety of types of groups within the definition, including those that inhabit a common geographical space, share a cultural tradition or belief system, or share common goals and interests.[3]

What are some examples of a community defined as such? Here is a brief list.

1. A group of employees at a coffee shop.
2. A group of academic colleagues who belong to the same philosophy department.

[2] Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging.*
[3] Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics.*

3. A group of neighbours who share an apartment building and share responsibilities for upkeep and maintenance.
4. A bowling club.
5. A football team.
6. A group of regular customers who congregate weekly at a local bar.
7. A group of people who are members of the same faith community, such as a church, mosque, or synagogue, who come together to worship.
8. A group of people who are members of a political party.

These examples are representative of a variety of different kinds of communities. For example, the first and second are examples of work communities, where members cooperate and deliberate together in other to achieve common aims. Others are structured around a shared identity, such as the religious congregation or the political party. Others describe groups which come together for the purpose of some common leisure activity – like a bowling club, sports team, or groups of pub regulars – which is another way that people can build community together. In general, communities can come together over all sorts of shared features of identity, such as ethnicity, historical or cultural traditions, religion, or political beliefs.

One could distinguish, as Mason does, communities from associations, where an association consists of "people who interact with one another primarily on a contractual basis, in order to further their own self-regarding interests."[4] This distinction echoes the position of André Gorz: Gorz distinguishes communities as groups that are "based on common interests and endeavors" and which are "devoid of commodity relations."[5] This view treats the category of *community* as a narrower phenomenon, by defining it as a group of people who share a way of life, identify with the group, and recognise others as members of the group.[6] It is worth noting that, on this view, cooperative activity is a fundamental building block of community: it is embedded into the idea of what it means to share a life.

If I take Gorz's position, I must exclude groups which are based on transactional relations. However, his position does imply the inclusion of some very broad cases, in which group membership is not always intentional. One example of this might be the inclusion of national political groups as a category

[4] Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging*, 20.
[5] Gorz, "On the Difference Between Society and Community, And Why Basic Income By Itself Cannot Confer Full Membership of Either," 178.
[6] Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging*, 21.

of community, as Andrew Mason does. According to Mason, such a group qualifies as a community since common features of identity are present, and most members of a national community identify with the group and recognise others as members.[7] Michael Walzer takes a similar approach when he describes the political community, or the community of the nation state, as "the closest we can come to a world of common meanings."[8] For those who ascribe to this view of community, the political community can reasonably be understood as cohesive, although it may be the broadest example of such a group.

Here, I include associations under my definition of community. I think there is good reason to do so. Even groups that interact on a primarily contractual basis may exhibit a certain kind of cohesion. For example, I belong to a group of regular customers who convene at the local brewery on Friday nights. The regulars have built personal relationships with the staff members and are interested in the continued wellbeing of the brewery as a business and as a community. All, including staff members, perceive each other as members of a special group, which is distinct from the larger group of anonymous customers that come and go. So, although these regular customers hold an exclusively contractual relationship with the staff of the brewery, there is a legitimate sense in which they constitute a community. Thus, I include such examples within the scope of my definition.

My account, however, does not take the nation state to be a true example of community. Instead, I align more closely with the sentiments of Alasdair MacIntyre, who argued, "The nation state is not and cannot be the locus of community" since "a genuinely Aristotelian conception of the polis… has to be a relatively small scale and local form of political association."[9] Although I do not necessarily adhere to an Aristotelian conception of community, I take MacIntyre's point to have broader meaning: the category of community refers to a level of collective life in which certain kinds of interpersonal communication, organisation, and deliberation are possible. In contrast, the example of the nation state would be more appropriately categorised as an instance of society. I therefore discuss it further in the following chapter.

[7] Mason, *Community, Solidarity and Belonging.*
[8] Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, 28.
[9] MacIntyre, "A Partial Response to My Critics," 302–3.

This being said, it is worth underlining the following point. If collectives are understood as falling along a spectrum, there may be no discrete point below which all members are able to know and interact with each other, make decisions together, or communicate with each other and above which they are not. Instead, I treat the general distinction between community and society as conceptually useful because there is an important difference between the types of communication, decision-making, and control that are possible at either end of the spectrum.[10]

A Note on Whether All Individuals Must Belong to a Community

I have, up to this point, treated all individuals as belonging to a community or communities. To clarify this assumption, I do not deny the possibility that some individuals do not belong to communities and do not need to. There have always been people who display an unusual tolerance – sometimes preference – for extreme isolation. Richard Proenneke, an American naturalist, lived alone in the mountains of Alaska for over thirty years in a cabin he constructed himself, documenting his experiences through photography and writing.[11] And as far as one can tell from his writings and documentation of his time alone, he displayed no evidence of mental instability or of having experienced any of the detrimental psychological effects of solitary confinement discussed in Chapter 3. Thus, I accept that no person *needs* to belong to a community, and may choose not to, if they wish.

The fact, however, that some individuals can (or choose to) endure such isolation does not undermine my assumption that most people cannot endure such isolation and as a result, normally belong to social groups (both communities and societies). I treat this assumption as justified for a couple of reasons. First, individuals who genuinely thrive in such conditions are extremely rare. Further, many who attempt to endure such experiences fail to do so successfully. One example is the case of Ed Wardle, a documentarian who attempted to live alone in the wilderness for the purposes of filming a documentary series but was unable to cope and had to be rescued before the series was completed.[12] Another is the case of Chris McCandless, made famous by Jon Krakauer in the book and subsequent film, *Into the Wild*. McCandless was a recent college graduate who, after giving away his life's savings

[10] Many factors can influence where that line falls, including advancements in technology. For example, social networking tools have undoubtedly affected the breadth and efficiency of mass communication, allowing a person to connect with and spread information instantaneously to a much greater number of individuals than was previously possible.
[11] Proenneke, Keith, and Offerman, *One Man's Wilderness: An Alaskan Odyssey*.
[12] CBC News, "Filmmaker Rescued from Yukon Wilderness."

and hitchhiking across the United States, eventually died alone in the Alaskan wilderness when he failed to account for the number of rations he would need for the winter and ran out of food prematurely. After his death, a notation was found in the margin of one of his books: "Happiness only real when shared."[13] For the majority of people, belonging to social groups and participating in social life with others, in all its forms, is something they *must* do to meet their basic material needs and relational requirements.

In addition, the use of such extreme examples as counterpoints does not always take into consideration the value of non-human social contact as a meaningful kind of social contact. This could include interactions with animals, but also might include, in the not-so-distant future, interactions with robots. Smids et. al., for example, discuss the possibility that robots may come to be seen as co-workers and collaborators.[14] The authors highlight an example of a military robot named "Boomer" with whom soldiers developed emotional attachments, even though it did not resemble a human or animal. They reported it having "a personality of its own" and even wanted to give it a military funeral when it was destroyed on the battlefield. While such a suggestion might seem utopian (or dystopian), it is not unimaginable that meaningful and beneficial relational interactions could occur between robots and humans.

5.1.2 Community-Based Needs

As individuals, we can be understood to have a wide range of basic, non-contingent needs which are unforsakeable (in that we cannot get on without them) and shared (in that all human beings can be understood to have them). In the previous chapter, I discussed examples of these material, social, political, and personal needs. However, within a community, we are not only individuals but also members of a cohesive group. Therefore, we can be understood to have additional needs in this respect.

Here, I will again employ Reader and Brock's conception of basic, non-contingent needs. Recall that non-contingent needs are the necessary requirements for conditions that a needing thing cannot go on without. Basic, non-contingent needs are shared by a constituency, such as the species of human

[13] Krakauer, *Into the Wild*, 562.
[14] Smids, Nyholm, and Berkers, "Robots in the Workplace."

beings. But a species is the broadest category we can belong to (and somewhat trivial, besides). We also belong to narrower categories of social group, such as communities and societies. In this chapter, I will discuss the basic, non-contingent needs that are community-based: that is, shared by people who exist in communities together.

If we think of the basic, non-contingent needs of individuals as, broadly speaking, the set of requirements which are necessary for a person to engage in the processes by which she is able to exist – not only biologically and physiologically, but also socially, and as the individual person that she is – then we can think of community-based needs in an analogous way. One idea which may help make sense of what I mean by these processes – by which a community perpetuates itself – is the concept of social reproduction. Central to Marxist and post-Marxist feminist thought, social reproduction refers to "the myriad activities which enable individual lives and collective life to be maintained,"[15] and includes not only the processes that supply material needs, but the wide range of social and cultural practices which uphold collective institutions and make shared life possible.[16]

Needs-meeting is central to social reproduction, since the process begins in the meeting of our basic, material needs. "As [humans] reproduce their material and social life," writes Martha Gimenez, "they produce their language, consciousness, and historically specific traits."[17] It is therefore important to note that biological reproduction is not separate from social reproduction, but a part of it, since even the sustenance of our material needs relies on our cooperative relationships with other people.[18] Although Marx and Engels do not offer many explicit examples in their discussion of social production, they are clear on this: 'The production of life, both of one's own in labour and of fresh life in procreation, now appears as a double relationship: on the one hand as a natural, on the other as a social relationship. By social we understand the co-operation of several individuals, no matter under what conditions, in what manner and to what end."[19] Since cooperation is, in some sense, unavoidable,

[15] Deranty, "Post-Work Society as an Oxymoron," 5.
[16] Life can be shared in the context of a community, but it can also be shared in the context of a society. Therefore, I return to the concept of social reproduction again in Chapter 6 when addressing the relationship between work and society-based needs.
[17] Gimenez, "Capitalist Social Reproduction," 323.
[18] "Biological reproduction, then, is just as much a social relation as is the production of one's own life in labour." Cammack, "Marx on Social Reproduction," 79–80.
[19] Marx and Engels, *The German Ideology*, 18.

social reproduction describes the way in which our reproductive processes (broadly construed) cannot help but to involve social processes as well.

Social life is reproduced through all sorts of regular activities. On the most basic, individual level, I engage in social reproduction by ensuring my own material needs are met on a regular basis: my need for food, shelter, and clothing, as well as my needs for decent social environments, reliable heath care, and education. I also engage in social reproduction through activities that ensure the material needs of others are met: by raising children, bringing meals to a sick relative, or volunteering at a local homeless shelter. However, social reproduction is not only about meeting material requirements. Therefore, I also engage in social reproduction by contributing to the structures which uphold social institutions: by paying my taxes, voting in local elections, or acting as a community organiser. A person does not need to recognise that they are engaging in social reproduction for it to count as an example of such. To borrow an example offered by J.P. Deranty, "Simply speaking my language helps to ensure my linguistic community continues to exist."[20]

I use the concept of social reproduction here to make sense of the sorts of basic, non-contingent needs that a community can have. A community needs to (be able to) renew and reproduce itself. It can do so in a variety of ways: by acquiring new members and regulating membership, by having mechanisms of communication through which members can discuss the conditions of membership and their shared identity, by transferring culture and traditions from older members to newer members, by generating connectedness between members, etc. These are at least some of the central processes that a community must be able to engage in if it is to exist and continue to exist through time.

Putting these processes into the format of a need claim, I can then say that a community has the following needs:

> first, ***it needs some number of individuals with shared characteristics or common activities;***
>
> second, ***it needs connections to form between these individuals;***

[20] Deranty, "Post-Work Society as an Oxymoron," 5.

and third, ***it needs a system of norms that govern membership and allow members to communicate with each other.***

This list is not meant to be exhaustive, but to highlight several of the most basic requirements that a community must meet in order to be able to reproduce itself and the social structures which make communal life possible.

Let me expand on these needs. First, by definition, a community needs individuals who hold shared or common features, such as identity, interests, or aims. Without individual members, a community will not exist at all. But these members must also have relevant commonalities – they must all ascribe to the same beliefs, hold the same interests, or engage in the same activities. Without shared characteristics, they will simply exist as a collection of isolated individuals.

Second, a community needs connections to form between members who hold these shared features of identity or common interests and aims. Another way to talk about 'connectedness' is through the concept of social capital, a term used by sociologist Robert Putnam.[21] According to Putnam, social capital is a term which describes "the connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them."[22] Social capital is a resource, just like financial capital, physical capital (tools or materials), and human capital (education or specialised training).

Communities that are high in social capital exhibit "a dense network of reciprocal relations" which are valuable for a variety of reasons, not in the least because they "affect the productivity of individuals *and* groups."[23] On the other hand, low social capital can have a profoundly negative affect on the health and well-being of community membership – to the extent that communities which lack such capital entirely will often cease to exist. Putnam's empirical research showed that a community which lacks access to adequate social capital will deteriorate over time. This deterioration is visible, and measurable, across a wide range of metrics: education and children's welfare, economic prosperity, and even democratic practices, to name a few.

[21] Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.
[22] Putnam, 21–22.
[23] Putnam, 21–22.

This supports the argument for community-based needs as a form of community-level social reproduction, since communities are entities which can, and do, die. Creating and renewing connections between members is a process which communities must engage in to be able to reproduce themselves. Therefore, we can say that a community has a basic, non-contingent need for social capital. It is non-contingent, in the sense that without it, a community will cease to exist. It is basic, in the sense that all communities, regardless of their particularities, share it. A business, a neighbourhood, a voluntary organisation, and a religious congregation can all be understood to require adequate social capital in order to exist.

But social capital, or connections between individuals, is not enough. As Putnam points out, the connections between individuals that form the basis for social capital subsequently lead to the creation of "social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness." This is the third community-based need that I have highlighted: the need for a system of norms that governs cooperative membership, allows members of a community to communicate with one another, and allows them to recognise other members as belonging to the same community as themselves.

A system of norms allows members to decide which activities constitute a legitimate social contribution and, as a result, which members of a community can be understood as belonging to and participating in that community. It also allows community members to decide how membership is determined, what the core features of a community are, or the laws and standards that govern belonging in that community. All communities can be understood to have such a need, since without norms that all members understand and recognise, a group of individuals with shared features will lack overall cohesion, even if individual members hold connections to one another.

In sum, I have defined a community here as a cohesive group of individuals that possess shared or common features, such as identity, interests, or aims. I have included associations and groups which are made up of individuals who interact on a primarily, although not exclusively, contractual basis. However, I have excluded broader examples which have been considered communities by some, such as a national community, since I consider these to serve as examples of a society on my view. Communities, and by extension their members, can be understood to have needs which are basic – that is, shared by members of a community, or by members of all communities – and non-contingent – that is, unforsakeable. These needs, in general, refer to a community's need to reproduce itself. In

particular, they can include, among others, the need for individuals with shared characteristics, the need for social capital, and the need for a system of norms that govern membership and allow members to communicate with one another.

5.2 How Work Answers Community-Based Needs

Work allows us to answer community-based needs in three ways. First, work gives us the opportunity to apply our developed skills and capabilities to socially established, cooperative activities with others. These activities, which I refer to as *practices*, form the basis for shared activity that contributes to community-based needs. Second, work promotes solidarity, which contributes to the formation of social capital. Third, work contributes to the creation of a system of cooperative norms that govern membership and allow members to communicate about and recognise each other's contributions.

5.2.1 Engaging in Practices

First, work allows us to apply our developed skills and capabilities to cooperative activities with others, by offering the opportunity to engage in practices. Practices form the basis of work-based communities, as a category of shared activities which are socially established and cooperative. They are, in other words, activities which we do on a regular basis that bring us into contact with a group of others who share that practice or related practices.

The concept of a practice is drawn from the work of Alasdair MacIntyre, according to which it is "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially definitive of, that form of activity."[24] Traditional examples of practices might include "flute-playing, war, or geometry" as well as the game of football or portrait painting. MacIntyre points out that building a house is not an example of a practice, while architecture is. Intellectual inquiry, whether scientific or humanistic, also count as examples. The author also notes that "[i]n the ancient and medieval worlds, the creation and sustaining of human communities" was generally taken to be a practice in this sense.[25]

[24] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 187.
[25] MacIntyre, 189.

Many forms of work are themselves practices, such as being a professional football player or professional artist. Sometimes the practice is only one component of a person's job responsibilities, like in the case of my work as barista.[26] As a barista, I have learnt and developed competence in the complex practice of brewing specialty coffee, which involves knowing how to operate different forms of brewing machinery, becoming proficient in their use, and understanding the technical relationship between temperature, pressure, and time in the brewing process. But I must also attend to other aspects of the job – such as opening and closing the store, working the register, interfacing with customers – which do not pertain to the practice of brewing coffee.

Practices offer two categories of goods. On one hand, there are the external and contingent goods involved in the exercise of a practice: the candy that incentivises a child to play chess, or the paycheque that I receive in compensation for my work at the coffee shop. On the other hand, there are also goods internal to a practice, "which cannot be had in any way but by" engaging in that particular practice, "or some other game of that specific kind."[27] In chess, these might include "the achievement of a certain highly particular kind of analytical skill, strategic imagination and competitive intensity, a new set of reasons…for trying to excel in whatever way the game of chess demands." As a barista, these internal goods will include the sense of satisfaction I get from mastering a particular brewing method or pouring technique, or the pleasure that comes from discussing a complex flavour profile with a customer.

According to MacIntyre, practices are valuable for a number of reasons, the least of which includes the particular kind of pleasure they afford to us as individuals. More importantly, they offer an arena in which to develop virtues, define our relationships to others who engage in the practice, and situate us in historical and cultural traditions. Thus, while the internal benefits of making coffee are important for my personal development, it is of equal (if not greater) importance that they situate me in relationships to others and in a broader social context.

[26] If brewing specialty coffee (or working as a barista) is an example of a practice, making a cup of coffee is not. The first involves engagement in a craft, which requires developing various kinds of manual, technical, and intellectual skills. It is also a context in which one's skills and abilities can be assessed in reference to agreed-upon standards. One need not participate in the craft to make a cup of coffee.
[27] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 189.

If a community holds a basic, non-contingent need for individuals who share relevant features of identity, interests, or aims, then work satisfies this need ***by allowing individuals to engage in practices which form the basis for those shared interests and aims.*** As a skilled barista in the specialty coffee industry, my engagement in that practice also placed me in a social context, amongst other baristas who engaged in that shared practice, which offered the possibility of community. Generally speaking, work offers an environment in which communities can grow, since it provides a unique context for individuals who engage in practices to do so together.

It is helpful to point out that while I frame this discussion in relation to needs, other authors have framed a similar point as a benefit or 'good' of work. For example, Gheaus and Herzog identify this as one of the four central goods of work beyond money: that work provides "the experience of doing things together with people with whom they stand in relatively free and equal relationships."[28] Veltman also identifies this as a core feature of meaningful work when she describes work's ability to "integrate elements of a worker's life, such as by building or reflecting personal relationships or connecting a worker to an environmental or relational context with which she deeply identifies."[29] Here, both sets of authors suggest that work is a unique experience that situates us in a social context where we can experience belonging and recognise ourselves as holding meaningful relationships to others. With the discussion I have presented here, we are better positioned to understand *why:* practices form the basis of this unique opportunity for community that becomes available to us through work.

But simply to share practices with others is not enough. This leads to the second way that work answers community-based needs, since it is only when we build connections with others that community can form.

5.2.2 Promoting Solidarity

Engaging in cooperative practices together with others contributes to a strong sense of comradery between people, which in turn leads to the building of more substantial, lasting connections between them. As discussed in Section 5.1.2, these connections are a form of social capital. Since communities

[28] Gheaus and Herzog, "The Goods of Work (Other Than Money!)," 76.
[29] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*.

need social capital in order to reproduce themselves, this is the second way that work meets community-based needs.

Following Prainsack and Buyx, I define solidarity as "enacted commitments to accept costs to assist others with whom a person or persons recognise similarity in a relevant sense."[30] Solidarity in community means members feel bonded to, connected with, or responsible for their fellow members and regularly act on those feelings. Connection can be triggered by something as fleeting as bonding over a missed flight or by commonalities that lie at the heart of a person's or group' identity, "such as a religious faith, a commitment to specific values, or suffering from a specific illness."

Prainsack and Buyx argue that, in particular, working together with others functions as a motivational trigger for solidaristic practices, or "other directed, pro-social practices" that help oneself and others to flourish.[31] Working together with others often leads to a sense of shared experience, which can contribute to bonds formed on the basis of that connection. These bonds need not be as strong or as deep as friendship – they can form on the basis of something as fleeting as a missed flight – and they are not only formed by cooperating with others – they can be based on shared ethnic or religious identity rather than something people do. But work, which situates people in relationships formed around shared goals and requires that they cooperate on a regular basis, provides a unique breeding ground for solidarity.

At the coffee shop, it never seemed to matter much whether I had any other characteristics in common with my co-workers. We felt connected to each other on the basis of our work and the work goals we shared. Cooperating regularly to fulfil those goals, in turn, led to the development of mutual respect and care for each other, which often went beyond the confines of the work environment. If you were sick, you knew someone would step in to cover your shift. But you could also rely on co-workers as a broader social support network, and many were always happy to lend an ear, or a hand, to support each other. Many enjoyed sharing experiences together outside of work, such as playing a game of pick-up football or attending a concert. Over time, I built deeper, more complex emotional connections with those I worked with, which became the basis for meaningful personal relationships that extended beyond the work context.

[30] Prainsack and Buyx, "The Value of Work."
[31] Prainsack and Buyx.

If a community holds a basic, non-contingent need for social capital, then work also satisfies this need ***by encouraging enacted solidarity between members***. In doing so, work promotes interpersonal connectedness between individuals who engage in shared practices. Two co-workers at a café might differ entirely in ethnicity, religious background, and political beliefs. But when he covers her shift while she is ill or when she offers to help him with extra clean up after a busy day, they may both feel a sense in which they are on the same side or invested in a common pursuit. Without such connectedness, a group of individuals who share practices would have no reason to maintain groups, or to hold commitments to one group of individuals over another.

A Note on the Difference between Solidarity and Social Cohesion

A separate, but related concept is social cohesion. Up until this point, I have referenced it – for example, by defining community and society as 'cohesive' groups – without explaining the relationship between the terms. To limit confusion, let me say something about how I am defining it, and why I treat the two concepts as distinct from each other.

In this dissertation, I treat the term *social cohesion* as denoting a characteristic of groups in which positive individual membership attitudes (i.e., desire and intention to remain in the group) and behaviours (i.e., decisions to sever, weaken, or maintain membership in the group) are present.[32] Social cohesion and solidarity could then be understood as existing on a spectrum of social capital, where cohesion is a weak form of connectedness while solidarity is a stronger form. Solidarity requires that members feel bonded to, connected with, or responsible for each other and regularly act on those feelings. On the other hand, social cohesion simply requires that members prefer to stay in a community rather than leave it. This allows for the possibility that "a stable group membership may be coerced", meaning "a group may endure without any attraction-to-group or positive interpersonal ties among members."[33]

For example, an Amazon warehouse or Apple manufacturing plant may bring people together only in a minimal sense: workers share a space, work for the same company, and contribute to the common creation of products, but hold no more substantial relationships to each other. In some cases,

[32] Friedkin, "Social Cohesion," 410.
[33] Friedkin, 418. This categorization does, however, exclude mobs or aggregates of individuals that lack any shared features.

substantial relationships may be actively discouraged, such as might be the case in workplaces where competition is used to create incentives for increased productivity.[34] But even in this example, we can think of work as contributing to cohesion in a weak sense, since it does contribute to the creation of some connectedness between members. I will discuss social cohesion further in the next chapter, as connectedness at the level of society often need only be as weak as social cohesion in order to meet society-based needs.

5.2.3 Providing a System of Cooperative Norms that Govern Membership and Facilitate Communication

The third way that work answers community-based needs is by providing cooperative norms that govern membership and allow members to communicate with one another. In cooperative communities, work itself can be the mechanism by which members are distinguished from non-members and the standard by which a person's belonging in the community can be judged by other members. In this way, work provides a system by which members can communicate about what counts as legitimate forms of contribution, who should belong to the community on the basis of those contributions, and more generally, about the terms of membership in their community.

For example, imagine I am a faculty member in the St. Andrews philosophy department (and therefore a member of that work community). As a department within a broader university structure, this community uses academic work as a norm governing membership in that academic community. For example, one becomes a member by agreeing to work – by being hired by the university to perform teaching and research duties in exchange for compensation. Members are distinguished from non-members by entering into this contract. And as long as they fulfil those responsibilities, or until the terms of their contract are fulfilled, they are afforded membership. Those who fail to perform the work they agree to will usually lose their membership status in the work community (in other words, their contract will be terminated).

The community also uses work as a norm which allows members to communicate with each other about and recognise each other's contributions. Since work is centred around shared goals and goal-

[34] For some examples of gamified workplaces and their effects on workers, see Gabrielle, "How Employers Have Gamified Work for Maximum Profit."

oriented activity, the degree to which a certain member contributes to the achievement of those goals (or fails to do so) can act as a concrete indication of the status, position, or power within that community. Thus, within communities, work may provide norms by which contribution and participation can be measured and evaluated by other members.

For example, my work as a philosophy academic can be measured, accounted for, and in turn, rewarded by others based on the degree to which I achieve, fail to achieve, or go above some objective measure of contribution. Did I meet the minimum teaching requirements, or go above and beyond my basic duties? Did I achieve the expected REF score and publish an appropriate number of articles, or did my research make a unique and notable contribution to the field? On the basis of how these questions are answered by my colleagues and superiors, I may be offered various rewards for my contribution to the academic community. Rewards can be constituted by anything from public recognition and praise to a promotion or a prestigious title.[35] If I fail to meet the minimum threshold of contribution, this can serve as grounds to remove me from the community altogether.

However, it is worth noting that not all of these norms offer standards which are objective and formalised. For example, within a philosophy department, it is often not enough to perform only the work you are paid for. You may be expected to volunteer your time to committees and associations and the organisation of conferences. You often must perform research on your own time, in between teaching responsibilities and various administrative tasks. Failure to participate in accordance with these informal norms may not result in a member being fired, but it could result in their being ostracised by the rest of the community or passed up for important opportunities to advance.[36]

If communities hold a basic, non-contingent need for ***a system of norms that governs membership and allow members to communicate with and recognise each other as members***, work fulfils this need directly. Although work is a simplistic mechanism – and sometimes an unfair one – for

[35] Sometimes rewards are wholly symbolic and not attached to greater work responsibilities (i.e., responsibility to contribution), such as honorary degrees. This could be interpreted as showing the degree to which the academic community values certain kinds of contributions – for example, a lifetime of service to the profession is rewarded by essentially being excused from formal responsibilities to the community.

[36] It is especially in respect to informal norms that disagreement about norms can arise. For example, members of an academic hiring committee may disagree about whether a particular candidate has produced good work or met the achievement standards required for the position. But it is precisely the fact that we often disagree about what constitutes good work, or whether a person has performed the work expected of them, that confirms the role that work plays in setting these standards and regulating these norms.

distinguishing who should belong to community from who should not, it gives members an important tool: the ability to decide and communicate about which activities constitute a legitimate social contribution and, as a result, which members of a community can be understood as participating in that community. This allows a community to regulate the admission of new members – ensuring that the community can exist – and to determine whether members are fulfilling their responsibilities as members. Since the ability to do so is essential to a community's ability to reproduce itself, we can think of work as answering a basic, non-contingent need of communities by providing this function.

5.2.4 A Final Note on the Grey Area Between Community and Society

I have argued that work should be understood to answer community-based needs in three ways. First, work gives us the opportunity to apply our developed skills and capabilities to practices, which form the basis for shared activity and identity between individuals. Second, work encourages solidarity, which contributes to the formation of social capital. Third, work offers a system of cooperative norms that govern membership, which directly answers the third community-based need. These functions are needs meeting in so far as they allow a community to reproduce or engage in the processes which are necessary for it to exist and go on existing.

It is worth noting that, in answering community-based needs, work may also provide benefits for society. For example, *dugnad* is a Norwegian tradition of voluntary community work, usually centred around manual labour and the outdoors, that is done periodically by members of a given community to provide labour that benefits the community in some way. Although the terms *voluntary work* and *dugnad* may sometimes be used interchangeably, there are certain core elements of dugnad: that the work is unpaid, that people meet face to face, that they join in tasks with a defined start and end, and that work is followed by a social gathering, such as a meal.[37] While a historical practice, it is still firmly a feature of modern Norwegian society, and continues to capture an overarching cultural commitment to strong social norms around communal work. Apartment complexes will hold seasonal dugnads, which all residents are expected to attend, bringing food to share, and devoting a few hours to help with various maintenance tasks. Schools may hold dugnads to construct a new playground or install a school garden.

[37] Lorentzen and Dugstad, *Den Norske Dugnaden: Historie, Kultur Og Fellesskap [The Norwegian "Dugnad": History, Culture, and Community]*. Cited in Simon and Mobekk, "Dugnad."

The tradition of dugnad is often highlighted when discussing the unique kind of solidarity and social cohesion that exists in Scandinavian cultures, since even amongst neighbours who have little else in common, the atmosphere of such events always creates a strong sense of cooperation and a spirit of togetherness. Work, in its best forms, does this: creates a spirit of togetherness which allows people to feel as if they belong to something larger than themselves. This sense of togetherness, while it is formed within the specific experiences we have as members of specific communities, will often transcend the boundaries of those communities and contribute to a broader society-level cohesion.

Veltman identifies this feature as one of the key elements of meaningful work, when she writes, "Through purposeful work, a worker can find she has a place in the world, which can engender justified feelings of belonging, being needed, and contributing to a broader totality beyond oneself."[38] Finding a place in the world, through work, can have two meanings. It can refer to the way that work gives us a place within the communities and relationships that matter to us, as I have discussed in this section. For example, Veltman discusses the way that working for a family business or using one's skills and talents to work for others who we care about, "enhances the meaningfulness of work on account of broader personal purposes and relationships served through the work."[39] But it can also refer to the way that the work I do within a given community in turn gives me a place in my broader social context. This may be one way that work answers the needs that we have as members of a society, which I will address in the following chapter.

5.3 Whether Work is the Only Way to Answer Community-Based Needs

The practice of work answers needs for communities. But is work the *only* way that communities can do so? I argue here that it is not. As with the goods of practices, "There are always alternative ways for achieving such goods, and their achievement is never to be had only by engaging in some particular kind of practice."[40] Work is a kind of practice, and as such, it is not the only avenue by which we can secure our community-based needs. As I will show, these needs can be fulfilled in a variety of ways, only one of which is constituted by work.

[38] Veltman, *Meaningful Work*, 125.
[39] Veltman, 133.
[40] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 188.

To begin, work is not the only context in which individuals engage in practices together. Many of the examples I discussed – the game of football, flute-playing, or architecture – can also be engaged in as leisure practices. Recall that one of the features that distinguishes leisure from work is the primary pursuit of pleasure – although what distinguishes an individual person's specific activity as leisure or work may depend only on the context in which it is pursued, or the orientation of the individual. Therefore, identifying the difference between whether my flute-playing practice counts as work or leisure will require knowing more about the context in which I do it. But ultimately, MacIntyre argues that practices *necessarily* involve belonging to and participating in groups of others who also engage in the practice.[41] This means that any engagement in a practice, be it work or leisure, may be the basis for the formation of communities.

Next, practices are not the only way to establish connections between individuals. Solidaristic relationships can form between people as a result of working together, but they can also form as a result of a shared religious belief or social practice, the engagement in rituals or cultural traditions, or familial bonds. They can be formed purely on the basis of a recognised, shared identity, such as belonging to the same linguistic community.

What's more, a community need not always be bound by the strong social capital that solidarity offers. A linguistic community does not need much solidarity at all to be cohesive. Instead, a defining characteristic of a cultural community might be the presence of shared rituals or practices that preserve the continuity of a cultural, linguistic, or historical tradition over time. Thus, I need not care about the good of my fellow English speaker or other members of Welsh heritage in order to play a role in keeping those communities alive. I only need to use my English regularly or pass down some basic knowledge of Welsh ancestry to my children. Further, I do not have to cooperate with anyone in my community in order for us to make sense of our community as a legitimate example of a language community.

[41] I do not mean this in the strict sense – I can, of course, play the flute alone. But to learn to play the flute involved my learning from someone, who also learnt to play from someone else, and so on. To play music often means playing what others have written. Engaging in the practice therefore means interacting, directly or indirectly, historically or in the present moment, with a network and legacy of others who engage and have engaged in the practice.

Finally, while work does offer a system of norms that govern membership and allow members to communicate with each other, it is not the only way that such a system of norms can come about. Some communities will use other mechanisms to distinguish between members and non-members. For example, membership in religious communities is often conferred through ceremonial induction or familial legacy, rather than on the basis of the actions of individual members. Even if the members of a Catholic church have no interaction with each other beyond showing up for mass on Sundays, they may still be understood robustly as a cohesive community. They are cohesive in the sense that members tend to remain members for the entirety of their lives, often inducting their children into the community. And members share common features of identity, such as a common belief system and adherence to shared traditions and customs.

There can also be a disconnect between the way work provides a system of norms at the level of community and at the level of society. At the level of society, the way work signals membership can be very course-grained: if all that it takes to indicate that I am contributing to my social group is that I work, in some form or another, then a wide variety of work activities will serve as an indication that I am a member of my social group. I will further discuss this coarse-grained function of work in the following chapter. Within distinct communities, however, there is often a much more fine-grained mechanism in place for discussing the degree to which my work counts as a contribution, and the degree to which that contribution should be recognised and rewarded.

Here is an example of this point. Being a member of the military can, in some societies, mark a legitimate and important social contribution. To those on the outside of the military community, it often does not matter much what particular position a person holds within the military, but only that they participate at all. In other words, for civilians, military involvement is a simple binary: if you are a member of the military, you can be understood as contributing to society. If you are not a member, you do not satisfy that particular standard of contribution.

Within the military community, however, there is a more fine-grained language for discussing the value of individual contributions made to that community, including titles, ranks, or special honours. Some forms of participation and contribution are more valuable than others. For example, in the American military, the Purple Heart Medal, which is awarded to members who have been wounded or killed while in the line of duty, signifies that the recipient has sacrificed (and therefore contributed)

something greater than other, ordinary service members. Therefore, within the military community, the standards of contribution and participation are more nuanced.

While some communities may use work to play this role, others will not. Communities in which work does not play a central role usually have their own ways of identifying and recognising contribution and participation that are relevant to the values of the particular community.[42] That is to say, communities often use non-work activities and norms – including rituals, traditions, or other social mechanisms – as standards for membership and contribution. For example, in Catholicism, work that advances the interests of the church is valued, but so too is religious devotion. Those understood to have especially strong faith, above and beyond the average member, are likely to be recognised by the spiritual community in some concrete way. Positions, such as priesthood, or symbolic titles, such as sainthood, function to allow members to make sense of a person's role as a spiritual leader in the community.

At the same time, some communities will depend entirely on work to fulfil their community-based needs. One type of community for which this might be the case is what Daniel Bell refers to as *psychological* communities, or communities that are based primarily on in-person interactions and are made distinct by the presence of mutual trust and shared cooperation.[43] He includes, under this designation, schools, families, and small work-based communities. A central feature of these types of communities is their formation on the basis of shared goals and goal-oriented activity, and they rely, for their identity as a group, on some concept of a common good. It is plausible that a community of this type, formed on the basis of cooperative aims and activities, will fulfil its needs primarily through work.

But ultimately, work may benefit a particular type of community without being necessary for it. Since communities can fulfil their needs in other ways, through practices other than work, I argue here that work does not constitute a need for all communities. This mirrors the conclusions drawn in the

[42] Recalling that I have defined work as an activity which produces economic or symbolic value beyond itself, one might wish to raise the following concern here: If an activity (any activity) is connected to contribution – that is, if it symbolises contribution – should it not be considered an instance of work? I can answer this, however, by reminding the reader that not all activities that are symbolically valuable are also productive and goal-oriented, two of the other core characteristics of the definition. Not all activities that produce symbolic value with will therefore be considered work.
[43] Bell, *Communitarianism and Its Critics*.

previous chapter regarding an individual need for work, since a person can, in theory, meet many of their basic, non-contingent needs outside of work and through other kinds of activities.

5.4 Up Next: A Society-Based Need for Work

In this chapter, I explored what it might mean for a community to have needs and proposed several community-based needs which may be understood as basic and non-contingent. These needs, in general, should be understood as requirements for which there is no alternative that a community must meet in order to reproduce itself. In particular, they include needs like the need to have mechanisms for renewing and regulating membership, the need for a system of norms which allow members to communicate with each other about the terms of membership, and the need for social capital.

I showed that work answers all of the basic, non-contingent needs that community can be understood to hold, by giving us the opportunity to engage in practices, by promoting solidarity, which contributes to the formation of social capital, and by contributing to the creation of a system of cooperative norms that govern membership. However, though work may play an important role in answering community-based needs, it is not the only way to do so. Therefore, I ultimately argue, again, that it is not at the level of community that we can defend a need for work.

In Chapter 6, I will turn to the final view of who *we* are. We are not only members of communities, but members of a broader society as well, which we may participate in as both individuals and as members of smaller communities. As members of a society, we also can be understood to have basic, non-contingent needs which concern our ability to live together in a society and engage in the processes that allow a society to reproduce itself. These needs, although they share some similarities with the needs that exist at the level of communities, are distinct. I suggest that it is amongst these needs, and the way that work answers them, where we can find a more convincing case for a need for work.

In brief, by signalling my social contributions to others in my society, work plays a necessary role in regulating societal membership and how members of a society communicate with one another. What's

more, this function cannot be straightforwardly replaced by other forms of human activity, such as leisure, because these activities are not linked to contribution in the same symbolic ways. I argue that this grounds a society-based need for work. While I myself may not need to work in virtue of any specific individual material needs or any community-based needs that work meets for me, I can still have a need for an established institution of work to exist, due to the function it plays for society at large.

6 Who Are We?
Society and the Need for Work

So far, I have examined work as something *I* do, by examining the relationship between work and our basic material, social, political, and personal needs. Although work is an important activity through which individuals can meet many of their basic, non-contingent needs, I ultimately argue that it does not constitute a need at the level of the individual. As individuals, we do not need to work for our materials needs, since these can be supplied by the work of others. Nor do we need to work for the other benefits we can acquire through work as individuals – such as various non-material resources and capabilities – since these can be acquired through our engagement in other, non-work activities.

I have also considered work as something *we* do together, by looking at the relationship between work and our community-based needs. Again, although I found work to be important for communities, I also argue it is not necessary at this level of social life. As communities, we do not need work to provide the opportunity to engage in practices, build solidarity, or to provide norms to govern membership and contribution. Other, non-work activities can play these roles. As such, I have not yet established that we have a need for work, either as individuals or as communities.

But work is something that others in my broader social landscape do as well. Therefore, in this chapter, I will consider yet another sense in which work is something we can do together, not as members of the same community, but as members of the same society.

I begin in Section 6.1 by defining a society as a cohesive network of communities and individuals who are relevantly connected to each other through interactions linked by a common fate and governed by a shared system of reciprocity. Like a community, a society must also reproduce itself. Therefore, I again use the concept of social reproduction to explore the general category of society-based basic,

non-contingent needs. I explore what some of those needs might entail. Communities and societies use many of the same processes to reproduce themselves, but in a society, they occur at a different scale. I discuss some examples of how the reproductive processes of communities and societies can differ.

Just as in the case of the community, these processes allow us to derive some central society-based needs. I argue that a society needs ***mechanisms to communicate about the norm of contribution, in order to secure a sense of a common fate and a shared system of reciprocity.*** Contribution is a foundational aspect of full membership of many complex and diverse modern societies, in which members rely on a wide variety of goods and resources that they themselves do not produce.

Next, I show that work answers these needs in two ways (§6.2). First, work ***promotes a sense of a common fate through belonging and pro-social behaviours***. Second, it ***contributes to a shared system of reciprocity through a signalling mechanism for value***.

Finally, I build upon the signalling function of work, in particular, to defend a need for work at the level of society (§6.3). By conveying signals about one's social contribution, work plays a necessary role in regulating societal membership and how members of a society communicate about social contribution. However, most importantly, this function of work allows us to transcend norm boundaries of our distinct communities, so that we may communicate intelligibly with other members of a diverse society about what kinds of norms we wish to have about contribution in that society. Thus, work is not just another norm governing societal membership. It is the central one.

Further, I argue that this function cannot be straightforwardly replaced by engaging in other forms of human activity, such as leisure, because these activities are not linked to contribution in the same ways. Therefore, although new activities could, in theory, emerge to fulfil the signalling function of work, I argue that we can presently understand work as a societal-level need. I ground a societal need for work in the way work functions as a signalling mechanism for the value of a person's social contributions, which forms the basis for the shared systems of reciprocity that societies need. While I myself may not need to work in virtue of any specific goods that work provides to me, I can still have a need for an established institution of work to exist, due to the function it plays for society at large.

6.1 Our Needs as a Society

In this section, I define a society as a cohesive network of communities and individuals who are relevantly connected to each other through interactions linked by a common fate and governed by a shared system of reciprocity. I argue that we can be understood to have needs in respect to our belonging to a society. I then explore what some society-based needs might include.

6.1.1 What is a Society?

Although its array of uses is a broad and varied, *society* is a recognised and meaningful category of social groups. It is most often and most generally used to refer to the broad-scale social groups to which most of us cannot help but belong. It sometimes denotes the sense of a shared social project. It is also a concept which relies, to some degree, on imaginary, rather than concrete, social boundaries.[1] Examples might include 'Western', 'capitalist' or 'American' society, but they can also include organisational or associational societies, such as collegiate honour societies. In this section, I will assemble a definition for *society* as a category of social group which is broad, but still meaningfully cohesive.

To remind the reader, I draw the distinction between community and society in order to delineate broadly between two general levels of collective life. Groups lesser than a certain size or population number – what I have called communities – are groups in which certain kinds of communication, deliberation, and organisation between individual members is still possible, where members can know and interact with each other, make decisions together, and directly manipulate or control the forces which shape their collective life. Groups greater than a certain number – which I will call societies – are groups in which not all members can know and interact with one another and many of the forces which shape collective life are out of the control of individual members.

[1] I draw on the concept of the social imaginary to capture "the creative and symbolic dimension of the social world…through which human beings create their ways of living together and their ways of representing their collective life" (Thompson, *Studies in the Theory of Ideology*.). According to Taylor, it is "that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (Taylor, "Modern Social Imaginaries."). As opposed to social theory (knowledge held by an elite segment of society), both discuss the social imaginary as a pre-theoretical form of knowledge that all members of a society have access to and can participate in.

Therefore, a society is like a community, in that it is cohesive as a result of some shared commonalities. But it is different in important ways. The workings of its structural systems are usually beyond the power of any individual members to control. And unlike community membership, which can be strictly regulated through clearly defined rituals and practices (such as showing up at the office, or paying your membership dues), societal membership is often guided by interacting and overlapping formal and informal social norms, status symbols, and standards of behaviour.

Therefore, in order to try to settle on a definition for society, I will begin by returning to a distinction previously discussed, between Andre Gorz's macrosocial and microsocial communities.[2] According to his categorisation, a society could be understood as a group of communities and individuals with shared or common features, such as identity, interests, or aims.[3] In other words, they could be defined as what Gorz labels "macrosocial communities": broad-scale human collectives which recognise themselves as a distinct, cohesive social entity, made up of individual members, but which are in some sense beyond the control of those individual members.

This definition is a good place to start. Gorz accurately captures the breadth of society while offering a plausible account of what makes such a group cohesive. I, however, think there is more to be said here about the shared characteristics which connect members of a society to each other. On one hand, they are weaker than the ties that bind community members – I may share a society with someone else without having any features of identity, background, interests, or aims in common. At the same time, a society must be minimally cohesive in some identifiable way – that is, it cannot simply be a collection of random individuals or individuals who share some trivial commonality, such as being brown-haired or being allergic to shellfish. The characteristics that define a society must therefore account for a wide diversity of relevant social bonds – meaning, bonds that matter – including everything from my closest relationships to the transactional relationship I have with my bartender.

Society: A 'Public' United by a Common Fate and a Shared System of Reciprocity

[2] Gorz, "On the Difference Between Society and Community, And Why Basic Income By Itself Cannot Confer Full Membership of Either."
[3] Here, I ignore cases of a society comprised exclusively of individuals. See Footnote 11, Chapter 3 for further discussion of this point.

In order to account for ways that societal-level bonds are different from community-level bonds, I will employ John Dewey's concept of the public. For Dewey, the public "consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for."[4] Thus, a concept of the public gives coherence to a group of individuals who are relevantly connected to each other, not only through formal connections such as shared citizenship, nationality, religious or ethnic membership, but also through shared interactions and transactions. In doing so, Dewey's concept formally recognises the relational connections that are an important component of societies, but which can be difficult to categorise and are often neglected as a result. On his account, these transactional interactions are important enough to be 'systematically cared for' and to place demands of care on other members.

This element of systematic care is important for the conception of society that I propose here. Transactional relationships are often impersonal and random. If that was all there was to it – if a society was simply a collection of communities and individuals bound by transactional interactions – members would be unlikely to recognise themselves as belonging to a cohesive social group, unless other features of shared identity were present, such as ethnicity or religious belief. However, we intuitively recognise that a society is something slightly more cohesive than this. We can also recognise that societies are groups which do, in some capacity, 'care' for the most basic of their transactional relationships – that is to say, they systematically maintain the membership bonds that exist even between strangers. How do they achieve this?

First, I suggest that a society achieves this through a common fate, a concept which is based on the fact that "we find ourselves in webs of relations with other human beings that profoundly shape our lives, whether or not we consciously choose or voluntarily assent to be unmeshed in these webs."[5] According to Melissa Williams, in order to live together with others, to share a social life, there is simply no plausible alternative to sharing such a fate: "[O]ur futures are bound to each other, whether we like it or not."

A common fate can be understood as a shared concern for a set of common resources – or more broadly, things we collectively value – that all members require in order to bring about a future of

[4] Dewey, *The Public and Its Problems: An Essay in Political Inquiry*, 15–16.
[5] Williams, "Citizenship as Identity, Citizenship as Shared Fate, and the Functions of Multicultural Education," 229.

their choosing. I focus here on a *non-voluntary* common fate: that is, one I do not need to actively or intentionally choose in order for it to matter. A voluntarily chosen common fate is often referred to as a shared fate in the literature, although precisely what is meant by that term can vary widely.[6] For the purposes of this project, I do not argue that members of society need to make conscious commitments (either formal or informal) to share the fate of others in their society. For our futures to be bound to each other, they need not be intentionally bound together.[7]

When I share this concern about the resources which affect my individual life with others in my society, my fate is indirectly linked to their fates. We may each have our own projects and life goals. But we are still bound to the projects and life goals of each other by the fact that, at the very least, we must interact, deliberate, cooperate, and sometimes even compete with each other to determine how those shared resources will be divided up. As a result, a common fate is a feature by which, even without any other features in common, a group of people can still plausibly be understood as a meaningful social group.

A common fate motivates a need for a shared system of reciprocity, which is the second feature of a society that allows it to care for its transactional relationships by maintaining bonds between strangers. Members of a society share a common fate in so far as they hold things in common and collectively value them. These things may include material resources, as is the case for many existing societies, but are not limited to them: even in a possible future in which resources are not scarce and humanity has eradicated strict material need, a society can still reasonably be understood to share a common fate if holds things in common that it values collectively.

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[6] For example, Michael Zhao discusses voluntary fate-sharing as a basis for solidarity, when members make a conscious commitment to share the experiences – for better or for worse – of other members. This can be seen in the way, for example, a labour union may forbid a group of members from reaching an independent agreement with an employer if it does not benefit all, or in traditional Christian wedding vows in which partners agree to share each other's lives, "for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health" (Zhao, "Solidarity, Fate-Sharing, and Community," 5.). In this conception, Zhao credits Rawls: "In justice as fairness, men agree to share one another's fates." Other conceptions include a shared fate as a sense of mutual obligation (Sandel, *The Case Against Perfection: Ethics in the Age of Genetic Engineering*.) or a shared fate as a common lot in which "goods and harms are necessarily collective and indivisible (Feinberg, "Collective Responsibility."). A common lot is shared by a community of mutual interests, "of the sort that exists when each member's integrated set of interests contains the integrated interest set of each other's" (Feinberg, 677.).

[7] Neither do our futures need to be the same future. However, within a society, all members of that society must recognise that they *do* share a common fate, even if they have not chosen it.

For example, a society which has achieved full automation (thereby eradicating strict material need) might still place a high value on security from internal and external threats, peace, knowledge, or sharing a common language and culture. Holding these values in common can generate a sense of a common fate even without the scarcity of material resources, since even the pursuit of a peaceful society requires some management of contributions towards that goal.

Therefore, whatever the content of that common fate, members of society share one. As such, they will need a system of norms that allows them to govern interactions between members and evaluate their contributions to society. Being able to recognise and communicate about contributions to that shared social project is fundamentally important. For societies whose main concern is resource scarcity, this is obvious: members of society must have some way to make sense of a fair distribution of resources, of who should get what and according to which principles. But even for societies which are no longer concerned with limited resources, in a society which values seashells or social connections, the need for a system of norms would still exist.

I refer to this as a shared system of reciprocity because the principle of reciprocity has been identified by a number of authors as one of the most universal principles used to govern societal level norms. It can generally be understood as "a matter of making a fitting and proportional return for the good and ill we have received", although a wide variety of articulations of the principle can be found in philosophical and sociological literature.[8] John Rawls described it as a "deep psychological fact", without which "fruitful social cooperation" would be fragile, if not impossible, and used it to ground his theory of justice.[9] Lawrence Becker argued that "every society on record has an elaborate set of social practices that amounts to a pre-theoretical conception of reciprocity, that such pre-theoretical conceptions differ significantly from each other, and that they are everywhere regarded as defining something fundamental to human life."[10] Other authors have treated it as a "fundamental norm" and a core principle of democratic societies.[11]

Even if an explicit principle of reciprocity is not as universal as these claims suggest, it has at least been shown that "many people have a tendency to voluntarily cooperate, if treated fairly, and to punish

[8] Becker, "Reciprocity, Justice, and Disability," 33.
[9] Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 494–95.
[10] Becker, "Reciprocity, Justice, and Disability," 18.
[11] Schedler, "Democratic Reciprocity"; Gutmann and Thompson, *Why Deliberative Democracy?*

non-co-operators," suggesting that reciprocal principles are a "powerful device for the enforcement of social norms."[12] Since such a system needs a central identifying characteristic, *reciprocity* appears to be a strong contender. However, my argument remains open to the possibility that reciprocity may look radically different across different societies.

Therefore, bringing together all of the components discussed thus far, I define a society in the following way:

> ***Society:*** *a network of communities and individuals who are relevantly connected to each other through interactions which are linked by a common fate and governed by a shared system of reciprocity.*

This is not to suggest that the boundaries between specific examples of communities and societies are ever black and white. Large communities can masquerade as small societies, even sometimes referring to themselves as societies. One example might manifest itself in the collegiate organisational 'societies' that one can join at university, which are often local chapters of national or international organisations. Many such societies are bound together by more than just a sense of a common fate and shared system of reciprocal norms. They are also linked by common values, goals, features of identity, and interests. Therefore, although they often refer to themselves as societies and support a broad membership, they might be better understood as large, associational communities.

In the same way, very homogenous societies will often look like excessively large communities. For example, Amy Chua hypothesises that American society is an example of a super-group, or "a group in which membership is open to individuals of any background but that at the same time binds its members together with a strong, overarching, group-transcending collective identity."[13] Looking at the overarching group-transcending common features of identity, such a group would appear to be an example of a community. But the size of its membership, as well as the fact that membership is open to anyone, even those who do not share the features of the common identity, suggests that such a categorisation might not be the most appropriate one.

[12] Fehr, Fischbacher, and Gächter, "Strong Reciprocity, Human Cooperation, and the Enforcement of Social Norms."
[13] Chua, *Political Tribes*, 38.

6.1.2 Society-Based Needs

We then have corresponding needs in virtue of our being members of a society.[14] Drawing on the concept of social reproduction introduced in the previous chapter, we can think of basic, non-contingent society-based needs as requirements for conditions that allow a society to engage in the processes necessary for its existence. These are needs which allow a society to renew and reproduce itself. They are shared by all members of a society and are so essential that we simply cannot go on without these needs being met.

If a society is a network of communities and individuals that are relevantly connected to each other through interactions linked by a common fate and governed by a shared system of reciprocity, then its needs will concern its two central features. ***Stated simply, we can say that a society needs a common fate and a shared system of reciprocity: these features are preconditions for living in a society.*** But what do these needs actually entail?

A society needs a common fate because this allows all members to recognise what is collectively valued. What is collectively valued might include material resources, but it can also include social resources and more abstract concepts, such as security, peace, or the pursuit of knowledge. ***In order to possess a common fate, a society must have a shared system of reciprocity, since having such a system allows society to manage its common fate, and that which it collectively values.*** It does so by governing interactions between members and allowing members to recognise and communicate about contribution.

Why does a society need to manage that which it collectively values? As members of a society, we need to be able to recognise the common fate that binds us together, to determine who contributes to the advancement of that fate, and to what extent they contribute. When what is collectively valued are material resources, the answer to the question is fairly intuitive: at some point, resources will need to be shared and common use negotiated. A society (or set of societies) on the brink of extinction as

[14] The needs of a society will encompass all of the needs of its members, which will include their individual and community-based needs. For example, as an individual, a member of society will have material, social, political, and personal needs which are basic and non-contingent for their existence as an individual. If they are a member of a community, they will also have needs which are basic and non-contingent for the existence of their community, such as the need for other members with shared characteristics, for connections between those members, and for a system of norms to govern community membership.

a result of their contribution to globally warming temperatures simply *must* find ways to limit their use of fossil fuels, manage the amount of carbon released into the atmosphere, and transition towards cleaner energy sources if it wishes to carry on existing.[15] However, it is also necessary when what is collectively valued are social resources or more abstract concepts. In a society which has eradicated strict material need, but which places a high value on social resources, members will still be concerned with regulating access to social goods and keeping track of who makes socially valuable contributions to society.

In order to possess a shared system of reciprocity, a society must have objective (i.e., agreed-upon) mechanisms and norms that regulate contribution. A society must have ways for members to identify what counts a legitimate social contribution, recognise the contributions made by themselves and others, and have ways to communicate about those expectations and standards. It is especially important that they are able to transcend the boundaries established by different community-level value systems.

For example, imagine that I have just published an exciting new paper in the Journal of Social Philosophy on the social need for work. The value of my contribution to the academic community is easily recognisable to those within the community. Even those who might disagree with my thesis will recognise that, because I have been peer-reviewed by a top journal, my research can be understood as original and worthy of publication based on a series of standards that we, as academics, agree on.

But that paper, and the ideas within it, might also be valuable to my broader society. Perhaps it represents a contribution to the advancement of human knowledge, or for furthering a human understanding of our relationship to work. Since the activities we do to contribute to our personal, local communities may have meaning for society at large, we need a way to compare and weigh various disparate types of contribution against each other.

Therefore, ***in order to recognise and reinforce a common fate and shared system of reciprocity, a society needs mechanisms to communicate about the norm of contribution. This allows a***

[15] The 'death' of a society need not be as abrupt as an extinction event: societies which fail to construct a necessary dam or build required transportation infrastructure may over time contribute to their own demise when their cities are repeatedly flooded, or the continued use of outdated infrastructure causes them to fall behind the modernisations of neighbouring societies.

society to manage that which is collectively valued, or that which forms the basis of the common fate.[16] Being able to do so is necessary for collective action, allowing members of societies to engage in large-scale, cooperative projects, like constructing a dam, building a road, or addressing climate change. It allows members of a society to act on shared norms, standards, and expectations of behaviour and to judge whether someone has succeeded or failed to meet those standards. It allows members of a society to deliberate about social norms and which society-wide projects are valuable. Without both, a society becomes reduced to a collection of isolated individuals and communities that may be unable to communicate with each other or achieve shared goals together as a society.

6.2 How Work Answers Society-Based Needs

Work allows us to answer society-based needs in at least two ways. First, it promotes a sense of a common fate by giving members the opportunity to feel a strong sense of belonging in their society and by promoting pro-social behaviours. Second, work contributes to a shared system of reciprocity by functioning as a signalling mechanism for value. I refer to this function as a *signalling mechanism* because a person's work signals to themselves and to others the value of their economic, social, or symbolic contributions to society. While I will discuss both ways that work contributes to society-level needs, I discuss the signalling mechanism in depth, since I argue that work is one of the primary mechanisms by which societies regulate contribution.

6.2.1 Promoting a Sense of a Common Fate Through Belonging and Pro-Social Behaviours

Just as, at the level of community, work contributes to the building of social capital which solidifies the connections between members, at the level of society, work promotes a sense of a common fate. It achieves this in two different ways: ***by allowing members of a society to feel a sense of belonging to that society*** and ***by encouraging pro-social behaviours.***

Belonging

[16] These are notably similar to the needs that I discussed at the community level: a community also needs norms to regulate contribution. However, these needs at the society level serve to uphold different kinds of connections between members – a society requires much weaker social bonds than a community does. See discussion in Section 5.2.2 regarding the difference between solidarity and social cohesion.

Let me begin with the first. Work offers a unique context in which we can see ourselves as part of broader social project. By doing work together with others, we learn to cooperate and collaborate successfully, and this allows us to build a sense of comradery with others. Cooperation and collaboration shape the nature of our connections to others – not only within the specific context of our particular communities, but also in a broader, society-level way.

Some authors refer to this as the way that work "condition(s) our social relations."[17] When we work directly or side by side with others, the experiences create "a meaningful bond between agents that emerges as a consequence of specific courses of their reciprocal actions."[18] In communities, we build direct relationships with our co-workers with through reciprocal, cooperative activity that aims at shared ends. These relationships determine how we relate to and interact with one another. In society, some of our social relationships will be more abstract. But work can still condition these relations in a similar way.

For example, as a teacher, I am connected to other teachers in my society because we share a practice and a way of life. This is true even for teachers I have never met. I relate to their experience and the expectations faced by their social role, because I, too, have occupied that social role and faced those expectations. I recognise their social contribution because I, too, aim to contribute to society in the same way. As teachers, we share an understanding of common professional aims, such as concern for the wellbeing of our students or the desire to provide them with a quality education. In this way, my work as a teacher directly shapes my relationship to members of society with whom I have no direct, personal relationship.

As a more general point, a society in which most people who can and would like to work are given the opportunity to do so may be one in which most members feel a strong sense of equality with their fellow society members. Gorz, for example, argues this point when he writes, "To feel anyone's equal, you also need to feel that you are useful to society as a whole, and that it needs whatever skills and capabilities you may have."[19] Work provides a concrete experience through which a person can contribute their unique skills and abilities to others in their society, in a way that can also be recognised

[17] Rodriguez-Lluesma, García-Ruiz, and Pinto-Garay, "The Digital Transformation of Work."
[18] Rodriguez-Lluesma, García-Ruiz, and Pinto-Garay, 158.
[19] Gorz, "On the Difference Between Society and Community, And Why Basic Income By Itself Cannot Confer Full Membership of Either," 180.

and rewarded by the rest of society. Feeling equal to others within one's society may also contribute to a strong sense of belonging, which can reinforce the conviction that one is participating in a shared social project with others.[20] Recognising this shared social project is the basis for acknowledging a common fate.

Pro-Social Behaviours

Second, work can also promote a common fate by encouraging pro-social behaviours and discouraging anti-social ones. As one example, we can consider the way that workplaces offer uniquely diverse environments. As Robert Talisse has argued, many of the communities and spaces that we occupy in modern society are becoming increasingly more homogenous.[21] This can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the rise of social media platforms and their influence on public opinion, although Talisse argues that there has been a general gravitation towards homogeneity across society.[22]

This trend can be problematic, as homogeneity can lead to belief polarisation and radicalisation.[23] Diversity, however, can guard against these phenomena. When we interact with people who share our beliefs and views, our own beliefs and opinions are regularly confirmed, which can cause them to become more extreme over time. Conversely, interacting with others whose beliefs and backgrounds are notably different from ours on a daily basis can encourage us to moderate our own beliefs. This is especially true when we cooperate with a diverse group of others. Cynthia Estlund argues that workplaces – that is, places of employment – are one of the few locations left in modern society where many of us have the opportunity to cooperate with people who are different from ourselves.[24]

It is important that belonging to a workplace, in Estlund's sense of the term, is not entirely voluntary. One might think that this 'forced' diversity is somehow less beneficial than diversity which is chosen or intentionally cultivated. But Estlund argues that it is precisely the involuntariness of workplace

[20] Being appropriately recognised and rewarded for one's work may not always be so straightforward in practice, and the labour market is filled with jobs that many people, including themselves, would identify as bullshit (David Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs*, 2019). However, the fact that people recognise (and usually rail against) pointless work shows that, on some level, we do expect a person's work to represent their genuine contribution to society.
[21] Talisse, *Overdoing Democracy*.
[22] Social media platforms are now widely recognised as having a strong polarising effect on public opinion. Sunstein, "Democracy and the Internet"; Zuiderveen Borgesius et al., "Online Political Microtargeting."
[23] Talisse, *Overdoing Democracy*, 105.
[24] Estlund, *Working Together: How Workplace Bonds Strengthen a Diverse Democracy*; Estlund, "Working Together."

associations that "plays a constructive role" in promoting cooperative behaviour, sociability and solidarity across those of diverse identities, especially across gender and racial divides.[25] Whether we like it or not, most of us simply must show up for a job every day. And when we are at our job, it is usually in our best interests to get along with our co-workers, even those who are very different from us. As Estlund writes, "Where racial diversity is a fact of organisational life, employers and workers have their own powerful reasons…to make those relationships constructive, even amicable."[26]

If a society holds basic, non-contingent need for mechanisms which reinforce a common fate, work answers this need directly by promoting a sense of belonging and encouraging pro-social behaviours, which positively shape the nature of our connections with others. Through the experience of working together with others, members of a society can more easily recognise that they have a fate which is inseparable from that of their fellow society members.

6.2.2 Contributing To a Shared System of Reciprocity Through a Signalling Mechanism for Value

At the level of society, work contributes to a shared system of reciprocity by functioning as a signalling mechanism for value. By this, I mean to make a point that parallels one made in the previous chapter. For some communities, I argued that work provides a system of cooperative norms that functions to govern membership. Within communities, members then use a person's work to indicate a measure of their contribution to that community.

I argue here that work provides a similar function for members of a society, although this function is notably distinct from the one described in the last chapter. That is because a society is different from communities in a few relevant ways. As discussed in 6.1.1, even strangers within a particular society must be able to recognise each other as belonging to the same society and being subject to the same system of reciprocity and the norms that govern it. Further, the at the level of a society, the process of regulating membership is far less formalised. For example, societies do not often formally admit members, at least not through an intentional selection process such as hiring. Nor do societies often formally expel members – instead, members can become marginalised through a variety of different social mechanisms.

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[25] Estlund, *Working Together: How Workplace Bonds Strengthen a Diverse Democracy*.
[26] Estlund, "Working Together."

While there will certainly be exceptions to these rules, the point I make here is that the processes that occur at the level of society, often occur beyond individual intentions (they are, in one sense, subconscious). This is not to say that an individual's actions are out of their own control, but that we regularly enforce societal rules of membership without being fully aware that we are doing it. For example, I enforce a homeless person's marginalisation in society by ignoring them when they ask for my spare change. Perhaps I do not even notice that they call out to me as I pass. This enforcement is automatic or unintentional in the following sense: my actions are the result of society-level cultural conditioning, likely from an early age, to view homeless persons as undeserving of the same courtesies that I afford to other members of my society.

I argue here that we use work as a metric to make specific kinds of estimations about others in our society: specifically, estimations about the degree to which they are active contributors. For example, in Chapter 2, I described work as an activity that produces *economic value*. Now, work can produce economic value in a variety of ways, in the sense that *economic* can refer generally to the way in which work is involved in the transfer of important or necessary material resources. But another, perhaps more common way to understand economic value is as a kind of value that is identified through the labour market.

Through the labour market, we reduce a broad spectrum of radically different types of work into a standardised, economic measure: the cost of a wage, and the price of a product or a service. As a result, we are able to trade our own work and its products for the work and products that others offer, often across great distances, without any prior personal interactions or relationships. Not only does it allow us to engage in very practical transactions, but it also allows us to compare the value of different types of work, by comparing salaries, wage rates, or the price of a product or service.

I also defined work as an activity which produces *symbolic value*, which can be personally, culturally, or socially symbolic. Further, market-based value can and often does overlap with these other kinds of value. That is because markets are not purely economic institutions and thereby influence and shape cultural and political institutions in complex ways. As Samuel Bowles writes: "[H]ow we regulate our exchanges and coordinate our disparate economic activities influences what kind of people we

become."[27] Thus, "[m]arkets may be considered to be social settings that foster specific types of personal development and penalise others."

Debra Satz echoes this perspective when she states, "Markets not only allocate resources among different uses and distribute income among different people, but particular markets also shape our politics and culture, even our identities. Some markets thwart desirable human capacities; some shape our preferences in problematic ways; and some support objectionably hierarchical relationships between people."[28] Certain instances of paid work can convey economic value by being highly compensated, while also conveying social value by providing an important social role within society or symbolic value by satisfying cultural norms or expressing personal significance. For example, lawyers are highly paid (i.e., economically valued), but also widely recognised as serving an important, necessary social function as authorities of a collective system of justice (i.e., socially and symbolically valued).

Employment is not the only type of work that can convey symbolic value. Pursuing a vocation or fulfilling a role for which one might be paid nothing still allows a person to express certain values which are important to both themselves and their broader culture. Although a priest is rarely financially compensated, he fulfils a spiritual and pastoral role which some members of his society find to be valuable and necessary. Artists create things (things usually referred to as *works* of art) that are often materially or practically useless. Nonetheless, their works can still be recognised as culturally, ideologically, or conceptually valuable for society. But many artists are never adequately compensated for their contributions. As a result, some of the world's most famous artists have lived their lives in abject poverty. A similar point can be made for socially symbolic work. By performing work that is widely acknowledged as socially useful or necessary, work expresses my contribution to the concrete social needs which exist for the social groups I belong to.[29]

[27] Bowles, "What Markets Can—and Cannot—Do," 13.
[28] Satz, *Why Some Things Should Not Be for Sale*, 4.
[29] That many occupations in our own world – such as teaching, practicing medicine, or caregiving – correspond with the performance of socially necessary tasks serves to support this point. The fact that much socially necessary work is under paid, unpaid, or otherwise undervalued is even stronger support for it: that many people will perform tasks and occupy roles for which there is very little formal reward or recognition shows just how important we, as society members, consider these roles to be.

Thus, work does not only allow us to recognise and evaluate the contributions made to our particular communities by other members of those communities. It also functions to allow us to recognise and evaluate the contributions made to our broader society, by other members of society. This allows us to make sense of our social landscape: it provides the conceptual structures which allow us to have rules, expectations, and standards about society-level contribution. ***It is this particular function of the signalling mechanism of work – the function of signalling a person's contribution to society – which answers a society's basic and non-contingent need for norms that uphold a shared system of reciprocity.***

To work is to perform a role in society and fulfil the demands of reciprocity. By working and providing for myself and my dependents, I show that I am not a free rider. It is unsurprising, then, that one of the first questions I might ask a stranger is, "What do you do for work?" This is because work can tell me quite a lot about a person. A person's job or unpaid work can tell me about their income, their skills and abilities, or their aspirations. It may even give me some insight into their values, their personality, or their attitudes about the world. I can get a rough, but still very useful, picture of who this person is and where, within our shared society, they locate themselves and where others locate them. Their work serves as an indication that they are contributing to the shared social project of which we both are members and communicates to me (and others) that they should be recognised as a contributor.

That we can ask this question of a stranger, and make sense of their response, shows how universally work functions to fulfil this role – especially given the fact that they do not have to have a paid role in order for me to be able to make sense of their work as contributing to a shared social project. While I may hold all sorts of biases about unpaid work (e.g., that it is less valuable than paid work), I can still recognise what they do as a form of work and as contributing something to society.[30] Thus, a person can answer my question by telling me that they are a stay-at-home parent or a full-time caregiver, and

[30] There is one notable exception to this claim. If I do not recognise a person's unpaid role as *real* work, then I will likely not view it as contributing anything useful to society. But this only supports the point. Work signals contribution. If we do not identify an activity as genuine work, we tend not to see it as a genuine contribution either: for example, if I do not think of doing philosophy as real *work* (because, say, I hold the belief that work is defined by physical effort) I am unlikely to view it as making a valuable social contribution. What's more, the reverse is also true: if I do not view an activity as making a genuine social contribution, I will unlikely identify it as real work: for example, if I do not view Instagram influencing or professional video gaming as making a valuable social contribution, I will unlikely view it as real work, even though it is paid.

I would be able to recognise them as a contributor and member of society in the same way as if their answer been that they deliver mail or practice law. Paid or unpaid, work provides a language that allows people to recognise and understand each other's contributions.

I have argued here that we use work as a metric to make specific kinds of estimations about others in our society – specifically, estimations about the degree to which they are active contributors – by conveying different kinds of value. In this sense, work functions as a signalling mechanism for value. It then gives us objective standards by which we can identify the contributions of other members of society, as well as our own. If having such standards and measurements is an essential component of a shared system of reciprocity, work should be understood to answer needs for society in this sense.

Objection: False Signals

One objection that could be raised against this claim is that the symbolic value that work conveys can, in fact, communicate harmful stereotypes or false information about people and groups of people, and about the value of certain types of activities, which can present a concern for questions of justice.[31] For example, in an economic system that translates monetary value into social value, the most apparently useless tasks will be considered work if they are valued enough to be paid for.[32] In addition, status signalling through work perpetuates the stereotyping of unskilled or low-skilled work as requiring low intelligence or being low-class. The status signalling of work can lead to harmful marginalisation and the exacerbation of existing inequalities.

Answering this objection requires making a subtle distinction. Here, I am making a claim about the way work functions to communicate value in a society, rather than the content of the specific values it communicates. In other words, the difference is between "What function does work serve?" and "How well does it serve that function?" The normative implications of these claims are important, and I explore them in Chapter 8. For now, I focus on making this point: the signalling function of work may be on the whole beneficial for a social group, even though not every value that work signals is beneficial and may, in some individual cases, be harmful.

[31] Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*.
[32] Recall David Graeber's bullshit jobs.

For example, there are many things that we simply cannot do without for modern life. In the United States, this includes cars. A car is a tool that we use to get around, to secure basic needs (like when driving to the grocery store) and access necessary experiences (like when driving to the hospital). As tools, they can be abused and are frequently used to harm other people, intentionally and unintentionally. However, without contradicting ourselves, we can recognise that we have a need which cars fulfil and also recognise that there are many things wrong with them. In Chapter 3, I also raised the example of a shared language, which is beneficial because it allows complex social interactions to occur, even while it offers unique ways for us to harm each other. In a similar way, we can recognise that work answers basic society-level needs while also acknowledging that sometimes it does so in ways that are harmful.

6.3 Does a Society Have a Need for Work?

In the first half of this chapter, I showed how work answers basic, non-contingent needs for societies. In the remainder of the chapter, I will argue that work is not just one way, but the central way that societies answer these sorts of needs. As such, work can be understood as a society-level need: a need which we hold, not as individuals or in virtue of our membership in communities, but in virtue of our membership in society.

6.3.1 Argument Recap

At this point, it would be worth reminding the reader of some of the central claims made in previous chapters. In Chapter 2, I sketched out a definition of work which aimed to strike a balance between "the overly narrow focus on paid employment and the excessively broad inclusion of all human activity."[33] Drawing from work by Andrea Veltman and John Budd, I argued that the definition of work most useful for this project was one which defined work as purposeful or goal-oriented human activity involving exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that carries economic or symbolic value. I placed particular emphasis on the symbolic role that work plays in conveying value, since this appears to be the feature that unites many of the most disparate conceptions of work, such as formal employment, unpaid domestic work, and "works" of art. If work is understood as symbolic, each of the previous conceptions can be understood to represent a different form of activity that is

[33] Budd, *The Thought of Work*, 2.

valued collectively: formal employment is economically valuable, unpaid domestic work is socially valuable, and works of art are symbolically (or culturally) valuable.

In Chapter 3, I made the distinction between *need-for* and *need-to* claims about work. Need-to claims make up the bulk of existing debate in the philosophy of work about the necessity of work. They focus almost exclusively on an individual's need to engage in the activity of work. Need-for questions, on the other hand, are broader. They ask: do I require the products of work, or the opportunity for it, or the conditions of the world it creates, to carry on existing as the person that I am? Does my social group have a need for it, for these same reasons? Even granting objections to need-to claims about work, there is still a case to be made that I, along with the rest of my society, have a need for it. This suggests that while I myself may not have an inherent need to work, I still need others in my society to do it. In this final section of the chapter, I outline this argument.

In the previous three chapters, I explored the way work answers our various needs. In Chapter 4, I showed that it answers our needs as individuals by providing opportunities to acquire material goods and develop capabilities. In Chapter 5, I showed that work also answers our needs as members of community by allowing us to engage in practices which serve as the basis for the shared experiences and identity of a community; by promoting solidarity, or the building of social capital; and by providing a system of norms which govern contribution and the conditions of membership. However, work is not the only way we can fill the needs we hold as individuals or as members of communities. In both cases, we can fulfil many, if not all, of these needs outside of work.

In Chapters 4 and 5, the question of a need for work could be answered by simply evaluating whether work was the only way to answer basic, non-contingent needs. This strategy will not be so straightforward in the case of society. It is difficult to show definitively that no other human activity could answer society-based needs in the way that work does. Further, it is possible that some presently unnamed concept and set of practices could emerge, in the absence of work, to take its place.

But as it stands, very few other basic activities communicate the value of our society-level social contributions as clearly as work does. Work is a formalised activity that everyone within a given society can recognise, even when occupying very different communities with very different values. And it is precisely because it holds a central position in the way we communicate about the value of

contribution across a diverse society that we, as members of a diverse society, have a need for it. I argue here that it is work's function in signalling value – and the fact that very few other basic activities, like leisure, are able to fulfil this function – that grounds a society-level need for work.

6.3.2 Work's Central Position

In Section 6.1, I described a society as a group of people who share a common fate, which arises out of a concern for things held in common and collectively valued. A common fate gives rise to the need for a shared system of reciprocity, since as members of society, we need norms, institutions, and social structures which allow us to recognise the contributions that others make to our shared social project, and to communicate with others in our society about those contributions. When we contribute to our society, we are contributing to the common fate that binds each of us to each other.

I argued that a society needs mechanisms which reinforce a sense of a common fate and a shared system of reciprocity. A shared system of reciprocity is especially important because it is only through such a system that we are able to communicate with others about our common fate and how we are to collectively manage it. In Section 6.2, I showed how work answers these needs. By providing opportunities for members to feel a sense of belonging and promoting pro-social behaviour, work answers the first. By functioning as a signalling mechanism for value, work answers the second.

Altogether, I have argued that work answers social needs for the two types of social groups that I have explored in this dissertation: communities and societies. But work does not only answer these needs separately and distinctly. Work answers an additional need, for us as members of social groups, by acting as a bridge between social life at the level of community and social life at the level of society.

Let me break down this claim. I have previously argued that the signalling mechanism of work contributes to a shared system of reciprocity by signalling, in particular, the value of a person's social contribution to their society. This is important, not only because it answers society-level needs, but also because it allows a person to transcend the boundaries of their distinct communities to communicate with other members of a diverse society about what contributions matter for their society.

Since the activities we do to contribute to our communities may have meaning for society at large, we must have a way to compare and weigh various disparate types of contribution against each other. Further, it is important that we are able to do so across the boundaries established by the different value systems that exist within communities. What makes me a good philosopher may not be the same characteristics that make me a good Catholic, a good member of my bowling club, or a good neighbour. The norms that regulate contribution in accordance with these values can be so specific to a particular community that they are simply unintelligible to members of other communities.

For example, rock-climbing is a sport with very specific norms by which it judges its members. Climbers can recognise the value of a well-set pitch, reward an elegant send, or acknowledge the significance of particularly dangerous free-solo attempt because they participate in these norms and standards, and they understand the language used to communicate about them. But these examples will be relatively meaningless to non-members. If climbers wish to signal to the broader society the value of certain members' contributions, then they must communicate that value in a universally recognizable way. One way to do that is to attach a monetary prize to recognition. Enough competitions and prizes often facilitate the emergence of a professional industry, thus turning the activity into work and allowing members of that community to signal their value broadly in society.

Across different communities, sometimes norms and practices which regulate contribution will be shared, but sometimes they will come into conflict. Take, for example, the norms associated with manual (also called *blue-collar*) work and intellectual (or *white-collar*) work, respectively. The practices involved in many forms of blue-collar work, which are largely physical in nature and dominated by the use of one's body, are radically different from the practices involved in many forms of intellectual work, which rely primarily on the use of one's mental faculties. As a result, it is not surprising that the cultures and values associated with communities that adhere to either one of these categories can often be so different that members from opposing communities struggle to recognise the others as members of a related community. But the fact that both are forms of work allows people within those social communities to understand the other as engaging in an activity that has the same social meaning (i.e., contribution to society).

By providing the signalling function that allows members of society to communicate with each other about social contribution, work is an important society-level mechanism for answering needs. But by

allowing members of society to transcend the boundaries of their distinct communities to communicate with other members of a diverse society about what contributions matter for their society, work can no longer be considered *just another* social norm. It becomes the central norm by which many societies regulate societal membership. As the central norm, then, many people's lives revolve around their work. Satisfying the expected social norm can affect marriage prospects, self-esteem, and family stability.[34]

Failure to do so, on the other hand, can have devastating effects. Those who do not work, or cannot work, lose out in more than one way. Not only are they denied the opportunities to meet many of their individual material, relational, political, and personal needs that work often provides, they also often suffer serious social stigmatisation and marginalisation. For example, unemployment and loss of formal work are seen as some of the central problems for American inner-city ghettos.[35] Those who have studied these communities argue that this is due, in part, to lack of adequate opportunity for employment that is both good for the agent and socially recognised, coupled with strong cultural perceptions about fairness. In American culture, those who do not work are often perceived as undeserving of the social, economic, and political benefits afforded to contributing members.[36] There is also a strong sense of shame surrounding loss of formal work.

Something else which provides further evidence for work's central role in regulating societal membership is that refusing to work can be a legitimate social critique – a way to express the belief that existing societal structures are flawed. This could be why, for example, the refusal to work has been promoted as an appropriate critical response to capitalist society, a legitimate response to the "troubling disparity between our desire for the good life and capitalism's narrower focus on the constant expansion of production and consumption."[37] Critiques of capitalism argue that it promotes a society in which economic growth is prioritised above other metrics of social well-being, and many members are overworked and undercompensated.[38] Therefore, expressing a refusal to participate economically in such a society serves as a clear social signal that one does not accept the terms that have been set for full societal membership.

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[34] Wilson, *When Work Disappears*.
[35] Wilson; Shelby, "Justice, Deviance, and The Dark Ghetto."
[36] Uchitelle, *The Disposable American*.
[37] Frayne, *The Refusal of Work*, 4.
[38] Srnicek and Williams, *Inventing the Future*; Frayne, *The Refusal of Work*; Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*.

In sum, work provides the scaffolding for a shared system of reciprocity, which a society must have in order to manage its common fate and that which it collectively values. The degree of its importance, in this respect, is indicated by the central role it plays in regulating societal membership and in allowing a person to transcend the boundaries of their distinct communities to communicate with other members of a diverse society about what contributions matter for their society. However, it is still possible that this role could be fulfilled by non-work activities, such as leisure. In the next section, I turn to address that consideration.

6.3.3 Leisure and Play: An Adequate Replacement for Work?

One way to respond to the claim in the previous section – and a popular position in anti-work literature – is to show that, in the absence of work, we would be free to fill our lives with leisure-based meaning. An end to work does not, of course, mean an end to "doing things", as Bob Black points out. Instead, it could mean "creating a new way of life based on play."[39] Bertrand Russell made a similar point about leisure in his argument for a reduction of work time. "When I suggest that working hours should be reduced to four, I am not meaning to imply that all the remaining time should necessarily be spent in pure frivolity," he wrote.[40] A shorter workday would entitle a person to "the necessities and elementary comforts of life" while the rest of their time would be theirs "to use as [they] might see fit." In a world where work is eliminated or reduced, "every person possessed of scientific curiosity will be able to indulge it, and every painter will be able to paint without starving, however excellent his pictures may be."

However, I argue that activities like leisure and play cannot fulfil this signalling function because they are not connected to contribution in the same way as work. If we draw a very rough distinction, as Sarah Broadie does, between *doing something because one must* and *doing something because one feels like it,* we can approximate the differences between work and leisure.[41] Leisure is the subset of basic human activities which we do voluntarily and exclusively for pleasure and personal enjoyment. Examples of leisure activities include hobbies, recreational activities, games, as well as play more generally.

[39] Black, "Abolition of Work."
[40] Russell, "In Praise of Idleness."
[41] Broadie, "Taking Stock of Leisure," 185.

Play is a subset of leisure activities. Like leisure, it is exclusively voluntary – marked by our freedom to choose it – and superfluous, since "[n]ot being 'ordinary life' it stands outside the immediate satisfaction of wants and appetites."[42] Play, however, occurs in a special, temporary world that exists within the ordinary one, in which the rules of reality may be suspended – not removed entirely, but replaced, temporarily, with new ones.[43] Examples of play include make-believe and a wide variety of games, including sports.

In both cases, this kind of activity is distinct from the rest of ordinary life precisely because it exists outside of the scope of things we *must* do.[44] It is, by definition, the activity that humans are free to engage in once they have been released from the constraints of necessity. But for social contribution to be a condition for societal membership, it cannot avoid being constrained by necessity at times: members of a society are expected to contribute to it even when they do not feel like it. Therefore, contribution always contains some element of things we *must* do, both for our own well-being and the well-being of others in our society. As such, leisure (and by extension, play) does not appear to be a suitable replacement for work in this respect.

Notably, this claim is about whether leisure could replace the signalling function of work, as an institutionalised activity which regulates social contribution. I do not deny that an individual person or communities may be able to fulfil some, even many, of their basic, non-contingent needs through recreational activities or play. But these are all activities which, by definition, have no relevant causal connection to the needs of others. The recognition that *doing something that matters to me also matters to others* is not just nice to have: it is an essential component of the shared system of reciprocity which allows society members to recognise themselves as belonging to a shared social project.

Therefore, I clarify this point. Even if some basic, non-contingent needs can be met through leisure for the individual and the community, they cannot be met through leisure for society. This is because

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[42] Huizinga, "Homo Ludens," 7–9.
[43] Huizinga, 9–10.
[44] So far, in this section, I have not addressed the question of labour, since the argument for leisure as a replacement for work is the one overwhelmingly employed against work in the literature. But in Chapter 2, I identified labour as a non-work activity which is nevertheless productive and linked to the realm of necessity, to things we *must* do. As such, the reader might ask: what about labour? I answer this by reminding the reader that the main purpose of labour is to produce things for immediate consumption and answer basic survival and reproductive needs. In this sense, it is – like leisure – not connected to external value in the way that work is. Therefore, it cannot replace the signalling function of work.

leisure does not causally link our needs to the needs of others. Work, on the other hand, does provide this link.

By performing its signalling function, work contributes significantly towards the scaffolding of a shared system of reciprocity. Societies require robust social environments in which our individual and community-level social needs can be fulfilled in the company of others. A person can only make a social contribution, experience community, or gain social recognition if a meaningful social community exists. The meaning of a community-level social contribution can only be transcended, and its value recognised at the level of society, if a society-wide mechanism for signalling value exists. Work, then, provides the framework for these needs to be realised. Therefore, we benefit from belonging to a society in which at least *some* individuals work, for some part of their lives, and where work is a central feature of some communities.

I have focused exclusively on leisure and play here. This might motivate a concern: if what is necessary for society is a signalling mechanism, why couldn't some other concept and set of practices – perhaps presently unnamed or unknown to us – provide such a mechanism? If work were done away with entirely, any suitable concept or set of practices could emerge to fill the void. They would need not look anything like work or leisure, and could emerge alongside work and leisure, as long as they filled the symbolic role that I claim work currently fills. This would appear to undermine any argument that work is necessary.

It is important to emphasise that I am not making a claim about whether work could be replaced in its entirety, as a concept and set of practices. Rather, I am considering whether work's signalling function could be fulfilled by another set of activities. My argument remains open to the possibility that other concepts and practices could, in theory, emerge to fulfil this symbolic role. I simply argue that leisure does not appear to be a likely contender, since it is not linked to contribution in the ways that work is.

Why I do not at length consider the possibilities of presently unnamed concepts or practices: it is one thing to consider whether the signalling function could be fulfilled by a set of activities which are already a common feature of human life. It is quite another to consider this question in light of some entirely new set of activities or organisation of human life. At best, I can only speculate about what

these presently unknown or unnamed activities might look like, and this speculation would take the argument far beyond what is reasonable to prove. Therefore, it is enough for me to show that existing activities would fail to replace work's symbolic function as a regulator of societal membership.

6.3.4 A Society-Based Need for Work

I have argued that work functions to signal the value of a person's contribution to their society, communicating to others that I am a contributor. This is what makes work such an important criterion for full societal membership. By regulating the terms of societal membership, work plays a central role in how we make sense of our social landscape and understand our own roles and the roles of others. But more importantly, it mediates the way we communicate about contribution, which is one of the main conditions for societal membership.

This function, importantly, does not just answer the needs that exist at the level of communities and societies as separate and distinct needs. It also allows us to transcend the boundaries of distinct communities in order to be able to communicate with other members of a diverse society about what counts as contribution. It allows community-level contributions to have meaning at the level of society. Finally, it is notable that other existing non-work activities, such as leisure, are not connected to contribution in the same ways. They therefore fail to offer an adequate replacement for this function of work. While there may be presently unnamed practices which could emerge to fulfil the function, it is only possible to speculate about what those might look like.

The signalling function work fulfils allows members of a society to transcend the narrow worlds of their individual experiences and distinct communities. Being able to do so is critical for the existence and reproduction of a diverse society: it allows society to cohere, to be more than simply a collection of isolated community and individuals. Across a diverse society, which houses a multitude of different types of communities, there must be some sense of a shared social project that allows members of a society to recognise a common identity with each other. Members need some way to identify the contributions that they themselves and others make to that project. They need to be able to communicate about those contributions and the expectations they set for members of society: whether the purpose is to determine fair punishment and reward, to deliberate about what constitutes a legitimate contribution, or even to change the terms of membership. Work provides the framework by which members are able to do this.

I argue, then, that a need exists for work. It is not an individual or even a community-based need. It is instead a society-based need, grounded in a requirement for the conditions that are necessary to support a complex, diverse social life at the level of society and on the needs that members of such a society have. This need is based in the fact that work performs a signalling function which members of a complex, diverse society require in order to make sense of their society as a shared social project.

At present, this function could not be fulfilled if societal life was structured around a different set of activities, such as leisure. If members of society spent their time only engaging in things they would like to do, there would be no discernible way for members to make sense of or communicate about contribution. Therefore, I argue that, without work, we would be unable to live in a society – where, importantly, a society is the kind we are familiar with (as I have defined it here), and not some alternative version of a society that looks nothing like our own.

While I defend a society-based need for work, I do not assert that this need is permanent or unchanging. The signalling function of work may, at some point in the future, be fulfilled by another activity, or concept and set of practices. Another possibility is that boundaries around the concepts of work and leisure might shift. For example, automation could eliminate the strict need for many existing forms of human work, such as agricultural production and manufacturing. Over time, automated production and a restructuring of social policy would ensure that those material needs were always met for every individual, regardless of what activities a person filled their day with.

In this imagined future, the activities known as *work* might diminish in symbolic significance. But the importance of other activities might begin to dominate. It might, for example, become a standard expectation that all citizens hold public office, serve in a representative role, or contribute some of their time to the maintenance of community institutions such as schools, hospitals, or food distribution centres. While these tasks and roles might remain under the category of leisure, the attachment of the social expectation to contribute would fundamentally change the nature of those activities and the way members of society perceive them. If these activities are to be recognised as contributions towards managing a common fate, governed by norms of reciprocity and open to a transparent signalling mechanism, then it seems reasonable to infer that they will be purposeful, goal-oriented human activities involving physical or mental exertion that are not undertaken solely for

pleasure and that produce economic, social, or symbolic value beyond themselves. That is, by the definition in Chapter 2, they will be activities that can be categorised as work.

Other Arguments from Social Reproduction

I take this thesis to belong to a family of similar arguments, which argue that work is necessary for society because it plays a fundamental role in social reproduction. Jean-Philippe Deranty, for example, puts forward this kind of claim when he argues that all human societies are, by definition, work societies.[45] The author argues that work activities are, by definition, aimed at producing something useful towards socially necessary ends. As such, they are an essential component of any cooperative social scheme. Societies, as an example of such a scheme, must be reproduced if they are to maintain their existence over time. Work activities, then, play a central role in society-level social reproduction.[46]

It is worth drawing attention to Deranty's definition of work, as activities which are "specifically aim[ed] at producing some useful outcome, making something or doing something that is needed by someone in some way, or that helps along some socially significant process, an economic or technological or administrative one."[47] While distinct from the definition used in this dissertation, it bears resemblance. On both, work is a form of producing, making, or doing. It is directly connected to some kind of socially recognised value, by furthering the social, economic, symbolic, technological, or administrative structures and processes which the human world relies on. Therefore, I recognise similarity between the two arguments as relevant to this discussion.

Ana Dinerstein and Frederick Pitts also use a concept of social reproduction, or the "broad term for the domain where lives are sustained and reproduced" to critique post-work viewpoints.[48] They problematise the narrow focus on paid work which characterises post-work viewpoints, arguing that "many accounts… run the risk of reifying work as something apart from the social relations of

[45] Deranty, "Post-Work Society as an Oxymoron," 5.
[46] Deranty admits that the concept of social reproduction is broadly construed, but that does not mean that 'anything goes'. As he astutely points out, "the whole reason a job can be experienced as 'bullshit' is precisely that it is supposed to be making a real contribution when in fact the worker knows it does not." We recognise when jobs are pointless because we know, on some level, what a job that has a point or serves a purpose looks like. Deranty, 6.
[47] This is an understanding of work that is recognized in anti-work literature. See, for example: Cholbi, "The Duty to Work."
[48] Zechner and Hansen, "Building Power in a Crisis of Social Reproduction." cited in Dinerstein and Pitts, "From Post-Work to Post-Capitalism?"

subsistence and social reproduction in which it is imbricated."[49] Separating only employment or wage-labour from the vast collection of purposeful, goal-oriented activities which contribute to social reproduction is a failure to accurately recognise what work is.

The claim that I put forward here – that work is a society-based need – is simply a narrower claim about social reproduction: it sketches out one particular way that work contributes to social reproduction, by providing a signalling function which serves to reproduce a society's complex system of reciprocity. This particular reproductive function of work can, like many of Deranty's examples, be both symbolic and concrete. Through its signalling function, work contributes to the symbolic reproduction of society by providing a conceptual framework by which members of society can communicate about contribution. And it contributes to the concrete reproduction of society by putting a quantitative value, such as a salary, on different forms of contribution.[50] Quantifying the value of a person's contribution to society allows members of society to differentiate between contributions of greater and lesser value.

A society could, in theory, fulfil this function without work. But to do so would require the creation of a kind of 'super-community', such as Amy Chua's super-group of American society: a society which regulated contribution through a high degree of homogeneity around shared cultural values and practices. The values and practices that bind such a super-group together might involve shared cultural traditions, ritual activities, and pre-ordained social roles, and would allow for widespread cultural agreement on what counts as legitimate social contribution without the need for work. But ultimately, such a high degree of homogeneity is difficult to regulate and enforce at the vast scale of membership that many societies contain.

6.4 Conclusions

In this chapter, I considered the central question in relation to the third and final understanding of *we*, by examining how work might be necessary for society. I defined society and argued that, as members

[49] Dinerstein and Pitts, "From Post-Work to Post-Capitalism?," 472.
[50] Here, I am specifically discussing the ways in which work, when serving as a social signalling mechanism, contributes to social reproduction. There are, of course, other ways that activities of work contribute to social reproduction: through the domination of natural resources, the creation of material products, or the organization of society, to name a few examples.

of society, we have distinct, society-level needs. A society, which contains members who share a common fate, needs a shared system of reciprocity to govern members' contributions to that fate. This allows a society to ensure that members are meeting expectations concerning their contributions to society. More generally, it allows a society to – echoing John Dewey – systematically care for transactional interactions between members. I argued that work provides this, by functioning as a signalling mechanism. This mechanism allows members of society to communicate with other members about social contribution and its value to society. Ultimately, I used this function to defend a society-based need for work.

In the remainder of this chapter, I address one major objection to the view I have presented here. Much of my argument is based on evidence that work currently occupies a central symbolic role in many societies. A serious objection could be raised against this choice, in the form of a critique made by John White: "The centrality of work is…deeply embedded in the culture. But this fact does nothing to shore up the evaluative conclusion that in our society work is a well-being (or self-realisation) need… We may, for all we know, do well to reject the view that work determines our identity: perhaps we would flourish better if attachment to work were not so indelibly a part of us."[51] On this view, the central position of work does not prove a need for work but only shows that work has become so deeply embedded in certain societies that it appears as an immovable feature. According to this objection, assuming that the centrality of work implies the necessity of work is wrong. Further, it is practically problematic, as it may discourage us from looking into how we can change the cultural features that make work as central as it currently is.

In answering White's critique, I will begin by agreeing with him. We *would* do well to reject the view that work should, or does, determine our identities. But it may still, at the same time, be important enough to be necessary. This is the position I take here. Answering this objection also requires, again, emphasising the distinction between a *need-to* and *need-for* claim about the necessity of work: work can be necessary in a distinctly social sense, without being necessary in a purely individual sense. While I myself may not need to work, I can still have a need for work to be a feature of my society, due to the function it provides to society at large.

[51] White, "Education, Work and Well-being," 238.

Work presently fulfils an important symbolic function which makes complex, diverse social life possible. While it is theoretically possible that work's role, in this respect, could change, or that it could be eliminated as a concept and a practice, to do so would require changing the fundamental nature of our societies, which rely on work to fulfil their cooperative needs. Therefore, while there is perhaps nothing *inherent* that makes work special beyond its existing role in maintaining the sort of societies we currently inhabit, its existing role at the centre of our social life makes it special. As such, we should understand it as a current society-based need because it is necessary for the establishment and reinforcement of the societal systems, political structures, and economic institutions that allow us to exist in society as we know it.

The objection that these conclusions are practically problematic may have more purchase: my arguments here could be interpreted as supporting a system of work which many argue is bad for workers and fundamentally flawed. Further, objectors may also charge these conclusions with being too conservative since I restrict available alternatives (and eliminate the possibility of eradicating work) by making work a necessary feature of society. I address these potential objections in Chapter 7, where I discuss the anti-work position and its bearing on the central thesis, and Chapter 8, where I explore some of the major normative implications of these conclusions for social policy.

7 The Case Against Work

Even the best work can be a physical and mental burden – and much work today does not reflect the best that work has to offer. Many are employed in occupations that do not pay them enough to live. Many work for free, doing domestic, reproductive, and emotional labour currently unrewarded by the market. Many others are employed to perform tasks which are boring, degrading, or down-right harmful. Anti-work rejects work on the basis of these ills and thus appears to present a direct challenge to the central thesis of this dissertation.

The chapter will lay out this challenge in greater detail and provide a response it. In doing so, I offer a novel analysis of some of the most common anti-work strategies and ultimately show that the claims of this dissertation may not be as incompatible with anti-work views as they might initially appear.

To begin, I review existing anti-work and post-work literature (§7.1). While many variations exist, most versions of the argument rely on the same two main claims in order to make their case. Thus, I outline the general anti-work position, as derived from these two main claims. In addition, I lay out what appears to be a fundamental conflict between the anti-work position and a society-based need for work: while the former aims to show how we would be better off in a world without work, the latter aims to show exactly the opposite. This conflict constitutes a direct challenge to the conclusions of the central thesis, in so far as it asks the following question: How can we need work, in any sense, if it is often so bad for us?

However, before the challenge can be addressed, I argue that the burden is on the anti-work position to clarify the terms of this question. In Section 7.2, I highlight three core disagreements present in the literature which contribute to a significant lack of clarity in this respect. The first concerns the anti-work position's definition of work. The second concerns competing accounts of what makes work bad. The third concerns ambiguity regarding the end goal of an anti-work project: whether it should

preserve existing society in some form or destroy it entirely and replace it with a radically different version of society. Highlighting and exploring these disagreements can bring clarity to determining what kind of challenge is presented by the anti-work view for the central thesis.

As it turns out, the conclusions presented here are compatible with all but the most radical interpretations of the anti-work position. In the most radical cases, the two positions are incommensurable, since any anti-work argument which advocates for a truly workless society must demand the destruction of existing society, in order to replace it with a radically different model of social construction which does not rely on the concept or practice of work. In relation to the basic premises of the central thesis, this option is nonsensical, since work is, by definition, an irreplaceable feature of society, due to the role that it plays in meeting society-based needs and in the reproductive processes that allow a society to exist.

Thus, considering work to be a basic building block of cooperative societies, this dissertation takes a more cautious approach. On this view, the only genuinely viable option available for rejecting bad work is through the preservation of existing societies, by improving the conditions or transforming the concept of work.

7.1 The Anti-Work Critique

7.1.1 Review of Anti-Work Arguments

In this chapter, I will discuss a broad category of arguments which, generally speaking, can be understood to express the disvalue of work. I will refer to these arguments throughout the chapter as *anti-work*, but this includes a range of arguments which are also often referred to as post-work. These are distinct from the more general social and political arguments against work that humans have explored for most of our history and which have, at times, led communities and societies to take active steps to diminish work in their social structures or to reduce to an absolute minimum the amount of time spent in work.[1] Instead, the specific anti-work arguments that I will draw from here are exemplary of a contemporary body of philosophical work which has become prominent in academic discourse in recent decades.

[1] Graeber and Wengrow, *The Dawn of Everything*, 133.

There is also a growing body of non-academic writings and public discourse that have emerged on the topic. Arguments which challenge the hegemony of work have become commonplace in news and opinion-based publications.[2] Full length books, including James Livingston's *No More Work* or David Frayne's *The Refusal of Work*, have been devoted to denouncing many of the traditional ways of thinking about work as a central source of meaning, fulfilment, and security.[3] Other authors, such as Juliet Schor and more recently, Byung-Chul Han and Amelia Horgan have extensively explored the harms of overwork and burnout, advocating for a shift away from work-centred life.[4] Many of these discussions have arisen in response to global events that have contributed to the worsening of conditions of work, such as recessions, stagnating pay, worsening conditions, and the COVID-19 pandemic. However, they could also be understood more generally as a symptom of an exhaustive work culture reaching its tipping point. While I will draw from many of these public debates and discussions, I will focus here on formal arguments which explicitly articulate an anti-work or post-work position.

There are many versions of the anti-work critique. However, some generalisations can be made. Most anti-work arguments are linked by a set of common attitudes towards work which are then reflected in their assessment of what should be done about it. First, they share the assessment that work is bad. Further, the badness of work is so great that it outweighs any benefit that might come from any attempts to reform it. By "[a]ssuming… that labour is, on the whole, disagreeable," anti-work arguments rely on common intuitions about the undesirability of work to motivate its position.[5] Following from these two premises, they then share the conclusion that we *should* do away with work to the extent that we are able, which may be entirely.

First Premise: Work is Bad

[2] For examples, see Naddaff-Hafrey, "Is the Utopian Workplace Just a Ploy to Keep Us All at Work?"; Livingston, "What If Jobs Are Not the Solution but the Problem?"; Black, "Let's Bring Back the Sabbath as a Radical Act against 'Total Work.'".
[3] Livingston, *No More Work*; Frayne, *The Refusal of Work*.
[4] Schor, *The Overworked American*; Han and Butler, *The Burnout Society*; Horgan, *Lost in Work*.
[5] Russell, "In Praise of Idleness."

Let me offer a few examples of the first shared assessment, that work is bad. Anti-work authors have accused work of being "the cause of all intellectual degeneracy, of all organic deformity"[6] and "the source of nearly all the misery in the world."[7] Kathi Weeks problematised "both its quantity and quality" and viewed work as a complex social system that can embed and reinforce structural injustice.[8] Other contemporary authors, such as David Graeber and David Frayne, have highlighted the particular ills of modern capitalist work, including the preponderance of "bullshit jobs"[9] and the "casualties of a work-centred society: the time for politics, contemplation, conviviality and spontaneous enjoyment, which have been displaced by capitalism's narrow focus on commercial production and consumption."[10] All of these attitudes aim to challenge "the ethical status of work itself," which has been, in mainstream modern society, an accepted status.[11]

Although different authors take different approaches to critiquing work, John Danaher outlines at least three main strategies: the necessity strategy, the contingency strategy, and the structural badness strategy. The *necessity* approach takes the hard-lined position that work is necessarily and inherently bad because, for example, "working for economic reward is *inherently* unjust or freedom undermining."[12]

John White offers an example of this approach when he writes: "Heteronomous work, as constrained, is *prima facie* in conflict with the ideal of an autonomous life and would seem to diminish one's well-being rather than promote it."[13] Heteronomous work, which White argues constitutes most of the work in the world, is "work which for some reason one has to do, is constrained to do." Since we can be materially or socially constrained to do certain things that we are not literally forced to do, heteronomous work is not limited to employment or work that is necessary for survival. But in all cases, heteronomous work is necessarily bad for us because it infringes on our autonomy.

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[6] Lafargue, "The Right to Be Lazy."
[7] Black, "Abolition of Work."
[8] Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*.
[9] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*.
[10] Frayne, *The Refusal of Work*.
[11] Frayne.
[12] Danaher, *Automation and Utopia*, 86. This is a position that Danaher has himself previously argued for ("Will Life Be Worth Living in a World Without Work? Technological Unemployment and the Meaning of Life", 2017) although he has since opted for taking a more moderate approach to the problem. Emphasis added.
[13] White, "Education, Work and Well-being," 242.

Bob Black takes the same approach in the "The Abolition of Work": "My minimum definition of work is *forced labor*, that is, compulsory production… This is what work necessarily is. To define it is to despise it."[14] As illustrated here, this approach takes work to be defined by the qualities that make it antithetical to an ideal vision of human life. The ideal may differ – for White, the ideal is an autonomous life, while for Black, it is a ludic life based on play – but the approach bears in common a general rejection of work as any kind of human good.

On the other hand, the *contingency* approach argues that the badness of work hinges on the particular conditions of different types of work. Taking this approach, one would "point to specific forms of work and argue that they are bad in one or more senses," such as being harmful, degrading, dehumanising, or poorly compensated. Danaher characterises this method as the weakest form of the anti-work argument, since contingent features of bad work can, in theory, be reformed or eliminated. A person, facing the problem of bad work could solve the problem by simply finding a different form of work.

This kind of approach can be found in literature highlighting the harms and ills of monotonous factory work, pointless jobs, or low-wage labour, which place the 'bad-making' qualities of work in its contingent features. In the early 1980s, for example, Adina Schwartz criticised modern industrial jobs for providing workers "with almost no opportunities for formulating aims, for deciding on means for achieving their ends, or for adjusting their goals and methods in the light of experience."[15] Such occupations and the systems which proliferate them fail to respect members of society as autonomous agents, which a just society presupposes. A just society therefore demands "that no one be employed at the sorts of jobs that have just been described." Schwartz's conclusions have since been echoed by many of those who have spent even brief amounts of time engaged in low-skill, low wage occupations.[16]

David Graeber's *bullshit jobs* are also an excellent example. Graeber uses the term to refer to work and occupational roles which are entirely pointless and unnecessary, created "just for the sake of keeping us all working."[17] Conducting extensive interviews with bullshit job holders, Graeber found that these

[14] Black, "Abolition of Work," 3.
[15] Schwartz, "Meaningful Work," 634.
[16] See, for example: Bloodworth, *Hired*; Ehrenreich, *Nickel And Dimed*.
[17] Graeber, *Bullshit Jobs: A Theory*, 12.

jobs are especially harmful because they enact a "profound psychological violence" on the worker. "How can one even begin to speak of dignity in labour when one secretly feels one's job should not exist? How can it not create a sense of deep rage and resentment?" he writes.[18] In denying a person the opportunity for meaning and the chance to play a socially useful role in society, bullshit jobs are "a direct assault on everything that makes us human."[19]

Finally, the *structural badness* approach argues that the badness of work "is the result of the social or institutional structure within which it takes place."[20] The social and institutional structures are usually understood as themselves bad, and in some cases, beyond fixing without major institutional change.

For example, Danaher lays out his own anti-work argument in this way: "The labor market in most developed countries has settled into an equilibrium pattern that makes work very bad for many people, that is getting worse as a result of technical and institutional changes, and that is very difficult to reform or improve in such a way as to remove its bad-making properties."[21] Kathi Weeks, too, aims her critique of work at a work society, since work is not only a productive activity, but also "the primary means by which individuals are integrated not only into the economic system, but also social political, and familial modes of cooperation."[22] Her approach is yet another example of the structural badness strategy, since she locates many of the problems of work in its organisation, as opposed to the activity itself.

Second Premise: Work Isn't Worth Fixing

So far, I have outlined three distinct strategies that anti-work theorists use in their critique of work. If work was bad but had little effect on any other domain of human life, however, we might not feel so compelled to eradicate it. Therefore, in order to defend the view that it should be eliminated, the anti-work position must offer a secondary critique of ideology: not only is work itself bad, but it permeates our social systems and institutions to such a degree that it makes many other aspects of life bad as

[18] Graeber, 15.
[19] Graeber, 126.
[20] Danaher, *Automation and Utopia*, 87.
[21] Danaher, 87.
[22] Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*, 8.

well. This negative effect is so significant that it outweighs any benefit that might come from attempts to change it.

The critique of ideology can take many forms. Authors that prefer the necessity approach to the work critique will often target the general negative effects of a work-centred culture in their critique of ideology. These could include the monopolisation of time or prioritisation of work over other meaningful activities, like leisure and recreation,[23] or the prevalence of burnout and other poor health conditions related to overwork.[24]

The structural badness approach to the critique of work often targets a capitalist work ideology and the wage-labour model of production. In her anti-work project, for example, Weeks advocates for "a refusal of the ideology of work as highest calling and moral duty, a refusal of work as the necessary centre of social life and means of access to the rights and claims of citizenship, and a refusal of the necessity of capitalist control of production."[25] Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams also argue for the "desirability of a future without work", or a future without the wage-labour which is at the centre of the capitalist 'crisis of work': "the breakdown of stable jobs in developed countries, the rise of unemployment and surplus populations, and the collapse of 'work' as a disciplinary measure holding society together."[26]

In all of these cases, the authors aim to reject work, not only for its own problems, but for the broader social problems which manifest as a result of work occupying such a central location in moral, political, social, and economic culture. Thus, the general anti-work position can be understood as one which connects the badness of work with a harmful cultural ideology, arguing that work should be removed from human life to the extent that we are able to do so. Across the board, this is the shared conclusion of anti-work and post-work arguments.

A Final Note: Anti-Work's Take on People Who Love Their Work

[23] See, for example: Schor, *The Overworked American*; Hunnicutt, *Free Time*.
[24] See, for example: Malesic, *The End of Burnout*; Han and Butler, *The Burnout Society*.
[25] Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*, 99.
[26] Srnicek and Williams, *Inventing the Future*, 85.

Before concluding this section, it is worth mentioning that it is entirely consistent with anti-work arguments to admit that some people could enjoy, or even love, their work. As Danaher states in a chapter on "Why You Should Hate Your Job": "There may be pockets of joy within the structure of suffering."[27] The anti-work perspective makes sense of this in a few different ways.

Even if work itself and the systems within which it exists are bad, people might be able to find conditions or aspects of work which are not. I may like, or even love, my office job for the community it provides and the fulfilling relationships I have built there, even while that same job restricts my freedom and autonomy.

Alternately, people may simply be expressing an "unconscious manifestation of 'adaptive preferences'" when they express a desire for work.[28] An adaptive preference is a preference developed under unjust conditions. The conditions of most work, Michael Cholbi argues, are unjust: they do not offer workers a fair balance of effort and reward, they are associated with undue burdens, such as the opportunity and financial costs of working, and they infringe heavily on personal liberties. Therefore, since work is "a preference for an option formed in contemporary industrialized societies wherein the primary alternatives to working have been foreclosed by a combination of policy and culture," policymakers should not assign the desire to work as much weight as non-adaptive preferences.[29] On this reading, I only *think* I like my job because I have been raised in a culture which promotes holding a job as an ultimate good. Although I may suffer as a result of losing that job, my suffering should not be the basis of policy, since I am ultimately mistaken in holding that preference.

Finally, it could even be consistent with anti-work claims to admit that some forms of work are, in fact, good: that is, they are genuinely beneficial for the people who engage in them. On this reading, I may like my office job because my office job is a genuinely good form of work, in which I am able to express my full autonomy, build fulfilling relationships, and acquire all of the best goods that work has to offer. Even so, a bad system can corrupt everything that exists within it and those who have experienced good work may nevertheless still suffer the negative effects of living within that system.

[27] Danaher, *Automation and Utopia*, 88.
[28] Cholbi, "The Desire For Work As An Adaptive Preference."
[29] Cholbi, 11.

Given that this is the case, from the anti-work perspective, it is still rational for those who have experienced good work to support the rejection of it.

7.1.2 The Anti-Work Critique

The anti-work position, then, could be understood as presenting a serious critique of the claim that work constitutes a society-based need (or any kind of need at all). In drawing attention to the very real ills of bad work and arguing that they constitute a significant enough reason to eradicate work, the anti-work position presupposes that we do not have a need for work – otherwise, we would not be able to abolish it. This presupposition places the two positions fundamentally at odds.

The critique, then, could be expressed in the following question: How can we need work, in any sense, if it is so bad for us? More specifically, the anti-work advocate will take issue with a need for work based in its society-level functions. They may concede that work – when it is good – can be important for individuals and communities. They may concede that some individuals and some communities might experience work as necessary for the fulfilment of their own individual or community-based needs. Finally, they may even concede that work – again, when it is good – can offer all of the aforementioned opportunities for society-based needs to be met. But work is rarely this good. In fact, work is most often undeniably bad, not only for individuals, but for society. It oppresses individual workers and embeds social hierarchies and economic inequalities. It is, at the society-level, fundamentally flawed.

Thus, it is all well and good to claim that an ideal of work meets society-based needs. But the ideal is not the reality. Further, the anti-work advocate could critique the central thesis on the grounds that its conclusions are too conservative because they restrict the available solutions by which we can deal with the problems of work. By making work a necessary feature of society, and eliminating the possibility of eradicating work, the central claim limits available solutions to only those which accept work as a central and necessary feature of social life.

In the following section, I will show that the burden is on the anti-work position to specify their terms of their challenge before the challenge can be addressed. First, they must specify what precisely they mean by the term *work*. Second, they must specify precisely what makes it bad. Any disagreement between the two positions on the meaning of these terms would constitute grounds to question

whether the anti-work position truly offers a robust critique. If the anti-work position is operating with a different definition of work, or the view that work is inherently unfixable, the two positions will be incommensurable since they will be dealing with two incompatible conceptions of work.

Finally, the anti-work position must specify exactly what counts as an alternative solution to the problems of work. If eliminating the possibility of living in a society (as we know it) counts as an alternative solution on the anti-work view, then it is true that my conclusions do restrict us from considering this possibility. However, the central thesis leaves open a wide variety of other radical alternatives of social organisation, examples of which I discuss in Section 7.2.3. Should these alternatives be considered reasonable alternatives – which I argue they should – then the society-based need for work can answer the challenge.

7.2 Three Core Disagreements in the Anti-Work Position

In this section, I highlight at least three clarifications which must be made in order to determine what precisely is the challenge presented by the anti-work position. For each, I first outline the clarification required and the disagreement that it reveals within the anti-work literature. I explain why this disagreement presents a problem for the anti-work argument. Then, I consider how, in light of each disagreement, the challenge is clarified. Ultimately, I show that a need for work may in fact be compatible with all but the most radical interpretations of the anti-work position.

7.2.1 First Disagreement: Competing Definitions of Work

First, the anti-work position must clarify precisely what it means by the term *work*. Many anti-work arguments commit an equivocation error when it comes to two competing definitions of work: although authors explicitly claim to be operating with a narrow definition, they then call for a rejection of a broader conception. This equivocation error leads to a lack of clarity about what kind of work the anti-work argument is actually targeting.

The Problem

Many anti-work authors go to great lengths to assure the reader that they are using a very narrow, very clearly bounded definition of work. For example, in their anti-work writings, both Kathi Weeks and John Danaher adhere to narrow definitions of work as paid employment. Weeks insists that her "…refusal of work is not in fact a rejection of activity and creativity in general or of production in particular," in order to reassure the reader that a broad conception of work as productive or creative activity is, in fact, safe from her critique.[30] Danaher makes a similar assertion, when he writes: "I am not claiming that all forms of physical or mental activity are bad—that would obviously be absurd. Some people have very broad definitions of work, and they sometimes think that this is what I am trying to argue. I am not."[31] In these statements, both authors aim to distance themselves from a broad definition of work.

The purpose of this move is to avoid a common objection raised against the anti-work position: that to reject work entirely would be absurd. I will refer to this as the *absurdity critique*. As the argument goes, if work is productive activity, and the anti-work position argues that we should eliminate work, then the anti-work position argues that we should eliminate productive activity from human life. This conclusion is absurd: it is not only impossible but improbable that all productive activity could be eliminated, since work is an activity that human beings have done since the beginning of time.

Danaher, for example, characterises this critique when he recalls the "irate objectors who insist that work is a fundamental part of the human condition, that humans have always worked, and that we will always work, no matter how sophisticated or intelligent machines may become."[32] This critique is typically directed at authors such as Bob Black, who, in his polemical but classic anti-work essay "The Abolition of Work," argues against work in favour of a life of pure leisure and play.[33] In the essay,

[30] Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*, 99.
[31] Danaher, *Automation and Utopia*, 88.
[32] Danaher, 43.
[33] Black, "Abolition of Work."

Black devotes little attention to defining work, and instead focuses on propounding the benefits of the 'ludic life', in which people spend their days pursuing various "pleasures and passions."[34]

Drawing a narrow boundary around the concept of work allows the anti-work advocate to avoid this critique. If anti-work authors are not rejecting *all* productive activity, but simply one specific type of work (such as paid work or employment) this protects their argument from the some of the strongest objections to the view. Thus, anti-work authors are often careful to spell out the scope of their terms, as I will illustrate in examples below.

However, at the same time, many of these same authors make their cases under the banner of "bold, attention-grabbing titles" to capitalise on the ambiguity surrounding the concept and make their claims appear more radical than they actually are.[35] Both Danaher and Weeks are guilty of this. Danaher has written about the topic under titles such as *Automation and Utopia: Human Flourishing in a World Without Work* and *In Defense of a Post-Work Future: Withdrawal and the Ludic Life*,[36] while Weeks presents her central arguments in *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Anti-Work Politics and Post-Work Imaginaries*.[37] These are just a few examples in a sea of literature which actively promotes conceptual imagery of a world without work[38] or the abolition of work.[39] Others prefer the term *post-work* to imply that there is future time after which work will have been eliminated.[40]

This presents a conflict for authors who claim to be operating with narrow definitions of work, since the implications made in many of their titles and opening arguments would suggest that there is actually no relevant difference between their arguments and the arguments of authors who openly acknowledge that they are operating with a very broad understanding of work, such as Black. He takes no issue in making sweeping claims about all forms of productive activity: "What might otherwise be play is work if it's forced. This is axiomatic."[41] Here, Black also makes no specification about what counts as 'forced', suggesting that any productive activity engaged in for any reasons other than pure

[34] Black, 2.
[35] Dinerstein and Pitts, "From Post-Work to Post-Capitalism?"
[36] Danaher, *Automation and Utopia*; Danaher, "In Defense of the Post-Work Future."
[37] Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*.
[38] For example: Srnicek and Williams, *Inventing the Future*.
[39] For example: Black, "Abolition of Work."; Ford, *Abolish Work*.
[40] For example: Aronowitz and Cutler, *Post-Work*.; Schaff et al., *Debating a Post-Work Future*.
[41] Black, "Abolition of Work," 5.

pleasure will constitute work. This equivocation error, then, presents an issue for authors who intend for their anti-work arguments to offer a more moderate alternative.

Examples

To illustrate this problem in more detail, let me expand upon the example presented by Weeks' argument. Weeks defines work as productive cooperation organized around, but not necessarily confined to, the privileged model of waged labour.[42]

But the author introduces some competing conceptions of work when she states, "Work is, thus, not just an economic practice,"[43] or asserts that, instead of targeting work itself, she is targeting a modern ideology of work. She writes: "The refusal of work is not a renunciation of labor *tout court*, but rather a refusal of the ideology of work as highest calling and moral duty, a refusal of work as the necessary centre of social life and means of access to the rights and claims of citizenship and a refusal of the necessity of the capitalist control of production."[44] This suggests that, instead of targeting the activity of work, the author intends to target a more general work-oriented culture, in which hard work broadly construed is upheld above other ways of spending one's time. In this case, one may reasonably wonder: Which one is it? A broad conception of work or a narrow one?

If the author means to include paid work and *only* paid work and intends only to target the culture associated with it, then targeting an ideology of work is somewhat misleading. As I showed in Chapter 2, the distinction between paid work and unpaid work is mostly arbitrary. There is nothing particularly special about which purposeful, goal-oriented activities get to count as jobs and which do not. Determining which work activities count as employment often comes down to arbitrary power relations in society and demands of the market.

As a result, the ideology of work extends beyond the domain of paid activity. For example, the concept of productivity and what counts as a full workday can bleed outside the boundaries of employment to influence conceptions of success in other areas of life. Further, some forms of unpaid labour, such as

[42] Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics, and Postwork Imaginaries*, 14.
[43] Weeks, 7.
[44] Weeks, 99.

caring labour and domestic work, have been brought under the domain of the market in an effort to provide greater social recognition to those who fulfil those roles.[45] Inevitably, the culture that developed around paid work has influenced the attitudes and norms of other kinds of work.

Therefore, Weeks' argument illustrates the first core disagreement at the heart of many anti-work arguments: an equivocation error between a broad and a narrow definition of work. To resolve this issue, authors must make their position clear: whether they consider unpaid work (and other types of work which do not fit into traditional economic models) to be relevant to their project. If not, then they must explain why unpaid or even voluntary work, such as work done for any non-material gain, is not a feature of the work society they are trying to eliminate. Even in the case that authors are using an *ideology of work* to refer to some specific set of beliefs and norms that could be psychologically determinable to only be held towards paid work activities, the terms of the anti-work argument require that this point is more substantially clarified than it is at present.

Challenge to the Thesis

How, then, does this lack of clarity around a definition of work affect the challenge presented by the anti-work critique? Since the thesis put forward in this dissertation does not operate with either the overly narrow or overly broad definitions of work, the anti-work position may not present as robust a challenge as previously imagined. Instead, I defined work by taking a middle-of-the-road, interpretive approach, as purposeful human activity involving physical or mental exertion that is not undertaken solely for pleasure and that has economic, social or symbolic value. Either way that the equivocation error is resolved – targeting paid work specifically or a broader conception of work – the anti-work arguments are operating with a different sense of the term *work*.

If the anti-work position resolves the error by using a narrow definition, then their claim is too narrow to present a challenge to the central thesis: since many forms of work that are recognised under an interpretive definition are not be recognised under a narrow definition, a society-based need for work offers a broader claim. If, on the other hand, the anti-work position resolves the error by using the

[45] Since the second half of the 20th century, many feminists have sought to bring caring and domestic labour under the domain of the market, as a way to provide social recognition for work predominantly conducted by women in the home. See, for example, the International Wages for Housework movement. (Toupin, *Wages for Housework*.)

broadest definition, then they are making a controversial argument about all productive activity. Importantly, although this approach would, in theory, include the interpretive definition within its scope, arguments of this kind face the absurdity critique. As a result, they typically fail on their own terms to provide a convincing and legitimate case against work.

The definition of work employed in this dissertation has the added benefit of offering a potential middle way for the anti-work perspective to take, one which does not allow any room for the equivocation error. Using the interpretive definition of work put forward in Chapter 2, work is acknowledged to be more than simply employment or wage-labour.[46] It therefore avoids concerns raised by the equivocation error, which requires that that the anti-work position defend the exclusion of other forms of work, such as unpaid work. But at the same time, this definition does not take an overly broad vision of work, as all coerced activity, or any activity we are forced to do. For this reason, it avoids the absurdity critique that any overly broad conception of work will fall prey to.

7.2.2 Second Disagreement: Competing Accounts of What Makes Work Bad

Second, the anti-work position must clarify what makes work bad. Since there are a variety of strategies that the anti-work position can take to do so, the strategy it chooses will be important for determining precisely what kind of challenge it presents to the society-based need for work. However, many anti-work arguments present competing accounts of work's badness – not just between authors, but within the same argument. This makes clarifying the scope of the anti-work challenge difficult. It also contributes to confusion regarding the final clarification (§7.2.3), which concerns the anti-work position's proposed solutions to the problem of work and its vision of society. In order for me to respond to the challenge brought to the central thesis by the anti-work position, I must get clear on which strategy the anti-work position takes and the scope of its proposed solutions.

The Problem

Recall that, as discussed in Section 7.1, anti-work arguments typically use one of three different approaches to critique work. The contingency approach locates work's bad-making properties in existing conditions of work, while the necessity approach asserts that these properties are inherent to

[46] Importantly, this also offers a more accurate reflection of the realities of work in most people's lives, especially those who are responsible for much of the unpaid domestic and reproductive work that our societies rely on.

all work. Finally, the structural badness approach locates work's bad-making properties somewhere in between: work is bad only because it is situated in the conditions of a broken society. If society could be reformed, work could have the potential to be good again.

The contingency approach is the weakest strategy. It makes it difficult to defend the need for structural or institutional reform. If work is only bad in certain instances, the problems of work can be resolved by simply pursuing a different line of work. On the other hand, the necessity approach is the most hard-lined strategy. It does not always cohere with people's lived experiences of work as a meaningful and rewarding feature of their lives and therefore must defend itself from the critique that it presents an inaccurate depiction of what work is.

The structural badness approach is often presented as an attractive, middle-ground option between two less desirable extremes. However, I argue here that, rather than offering a distinct alternative to those two views, the structural badness approach simply disguises the same conflict under another name. In other words, the purported middle-ground approach often collapses into contingency- or necessity-based arguments for the badness of work.

This problem, if left unaddressed, contributes to a central conceptual conflict. Is anti-work trying to argue for the elimination of all work, on the grounds that all work is inherently bad? Or is it arguing for a transformation of the conditions of work, which may also involve a transformation of society? Without knowing where the anti-work position falls on this, it is difficult to know what sort of challenge it presents for the central thesis. More generally, it may be difficult for proponents and opponents alike to genuinely engage with the view.

Examples

As an example of this disagreement, I turn to consider John Danaher's case against work. Here, I will show that, while Danaher claims to use the structural badness strategy to defend work's badness – which he treats as the most effective approach to arguing work is bad – his reasoning can often be reduced to contingency or necessity-based arguments. This is problematic because it introduces significant confusion about which argument Danaher is actually making about work's bad-making

features. Further, it ultimately leads to ambiguity about Danaher's proposed solutions to the problem of work.

Danaher begins by making the claim that "work is bad and getting worse, and we should welcome its technological elimination."[47] He goes on to outline the various strategies that one can take to defending the badness of work: the contingency strategy, the necessity strategy, and the structural badness strategy. He claims to favour the final strategy, which "hovers between the two extremes of contingency and necessity" and "means that [work's] badness is not wholly contingent on the form of work nor intrinsic to all forms of work, but is the result of the social or institutional structure within which it takes place."[48] Danaher views this as the most reasonable – and therefore most effective – of the three strategies, since it is not susceptible to the criticisms or weaknesses that plague the two, more extreme options.

He goes on to defend the structural badness of work by outlining five features of work that make it bad for most modern workers. These include: *dominating influence*, or the ways that work "undermines the freedom of workers"; *fissuring and precarity*, which make working life "unpleasant and stressful"; *distributive injustice*, by which a small number of elite workers hold the best jobs; *temporal colonisation*, or the ways that work monopolises our time; and *unhappiness*.[49] These points are presented as his "distinct anti-work arguments," as he uses each to present a slightly different argument for the elimination of work.

Importantly, all five of these features highlight ways in which the conditions of work, rather than work itself, can be bad for people. This is where we first encounter confusion: on Danaher's own description, these reasons would be categorised as an example of the contingency strategy, which uses the contingent features of work as the basis for its badness. This would lead the reader to believe that Danaher's structural arguments against work, supported by these five features of badness, in reality favour a contingency-based approach to the badness of work.

[47] Danaher, *Automation and Utopia*, 85.
[48] Danaher, 87.
[49] Danaher, 89.

However, within each of these five arguments, Danaher goes to great lengths to paint a portrait of bad work as inevitable and impossible to change. In doing so, he makes several claims and presents several examples which are reminiscent of a more hard-lined approach, such as one might find in the necessity strategy. For example, to the problem of dominating influence, he considers the following objection: that very few workers are dominated by their work and their employers. However, he takes the objection to be defeated when he shows that we have good reason to believe that, in fact, most work subjects most workers to oppressive workplaces and power structures.[50] The implication of this defeat is that the bad features of work are ultimately irreconcilable because they affect too many people in society and are too deeply embedded in our social structures.

As another example, to the fissuring and precarity argument for the elimination of work, Danaher raises the following potential objection: "[R]egulatory reform could stop fissuring and precarity from being so bad."[51] If this were possible, work could be reformed to reduce its bad-making properties. However, Danaher argues that we should doubt "[regulations'] capacity to redress the structural badness of fissured work," especially given the fact that "regulatory reforms create perverse incentives," driving companies to look for loopholes in labour policy or to pursue automation in order to avoid having to employ costly workers.[52] Ultimately, Danaher uses these points to arrive at the conclusion that "[a]bandoning our commitment to work may be our best hope."[53]

Finally, Danaher's overall argument asserts that work must be eliminated because it cannot be salvaged, since it is "very difficult to reform or improve [work] in such a way as to remove its bad-making properties."[54] This, again, borders on a necessity-based argument, in that it presents work's bad-making features as ineliminable, and therefore work's badness as inevitable.

Thus, in some instances, Danaher relies on contingency-based claims, while in others, relies on necessity-based claims. But in order for me to respond to the challenge of the anti-work position, I need to get clear on what makes work bad according to the anti-work position. Danaher's argument

[50] Danaher, 94–96.
[51] Danaher, 108.
[52] Danaher, 109.
[53] Danaher, 109.
[54] Danaher, 87.

shows how some anti-work authors can remain, at best, agnostic, and at worst, unintentionally ambiguous about where they fall on this question.

Challenge to the Thesis

I can, however, extrapolate from existing arguments and attempt to answer the challenge in either case. If the anti-work argument takes a contingency-based approach of what makes work bad, this conclusion is entirely consistent with the central argument of the central thesis. Work can be a necessary feature of social life while still failing, as a result of its current conditions, to do what we need it to do.

On this view, the problems of work are not problems with work, but problems (perhaps with societal structures and institutions) which manifest themselves through work. Therefore, with a contingency-based view, we no longer need to explain away people's preferences for work by claiming that they are conditioned by unjust choices, as in Cholbi's account of work as an adaptive preference, or that they are making rational, but ultimately selfish decisions, as in Danaher's account.[55] If what makes bad work *bad* are contingent conditions, then it is not so obviously a sign that there is something wrong with our preferences. On the contrary, the fact that we recognise jobs as bullshit or that we are unhappy when our work tasks do not provide us with a sense of meaningful contribution can indicate that existing work is failing to meet our expectations for what work *should* be.

Therefore, this approach allows a preference for work to be interpreted as the human recognition of a society-based need. This recognition amounts to the understanding that it is good for us to do things that respond to the needs of others. This preference is not mistaken if work plays a necessary role in upholding the shared system of reciprocity that society requires. The central thesis also holds this view of work's badness, thereby aligning with any anti-work arguments that take the same approach.

[55] Danaher sees the problems of work as evidence of a collective action problem, "whereby the individually rational behaviour of workers and employers is resulting in a social arrangement that is bad (and getting worse) for most workers" (Danaher, 87.) The target of his critique is the individually rational behaviour of workers and employers: that they make decisions about work, time and time again, in accordance with a preference for work, but which creates and prolongs bad social arrangements for everyone. His solution is to convince workers and employers that their decisions are wrong – to 'hate their jobs'.

If, on the other hand, anti-work takes a necessity-based view to what makes work bad, this amounts to a different kind of conceptual conflict between anti-work and the thesis. I will examine this conflict in the final part of this section. On this view, if work is unimprovable and we need it, then we are stuck. This would suggest that the solution to the problems of work can only be an elimination of work: not just an elimination of *instances* of work but of work as a category of activities.

And if existing societies depend on work for the shared systems of reciprocity that they require to meet society-based needs and reproduce themselves, then eliminating work would demand nothing short of the destruction of existing society and its replacement with an entirely new form of social organisation. This constitutes a conflict with the central thesis in so far as it does not – in fact, *cannot* – engage with this approach as a genuinely viable option.

7.2.3 Third Disagreement: Competing Visions of Society

The final clarification which must be made concerns the ultimate aim of the anti-work project: whether it wants to preserve existing society in some form or destroy it entirely and replace it with a radically different form of social organisation. Many anti-work arguments are ambiguous about where they fall on this question, in part, because they remain agnostic about their commitment to a contingency or necessity-based account of what makes work bad. However, if this disagreement remains unaddressed, it is difficult to know what sort of challenge the anti-work position presents for the central thesis.

The Problem

As discussed in the preceding chapters, work currently functions as a fundamental feature of the social landscape – whether we like it or not. Therefore, a truly workless society would likely involve the destruction of existing social models of organisation and their replacement with new ones which do not rely on either a concept or practice of work as we know it. If the anti-work position takes the view that work is inherently bad, and still defends the rejection of work, then it must also advocate for the destruction of existing societal structures, in favour of replacing them with something radically different.

What might this look like? For an example, we could think about the human society of Pixar's animated film, *WALL-E*.[56] In the story, humans are living in a state of total leisure. Having left Earth polluted beyond repair, they inhabit a spaceship which is equipped to provide them with 'nonstop leisure and entertainment' until a day in the future when the planet once again becomes clean enough to sustain human life. The daily activities of the passengers are composed exclusively of rest, leisure, and consumption, all of which can be done from the comfort of their own hoverchair and holographic screen. While the concept of work is itself not explicitly mentioned, the narrative reveals that the current generation of humans have lost many of the concepts that they would have been familiar with from living on Earth (such as *farms* and *dancing*). Thus, the viewer can assume that society has lost not only the practice, but the concept of work.

But perhaps this is too cynical a view of how humans would become in a world without work. For a more optimistic version, we could instead look to the Star Trek universe. Having solved the resource problem through the invention of the replicator (a machine which can make nearly anything out of matter and energy), material needs are automatically met for everyone. In the absence of a need to work for survival, humans are left to apply themselves to higher level needs, like glory, curiosity, or fame. Some members occupy their time by joining Starfleet and exploring space, while others choose to start a vineyard, or open a restaurant. Note that, while these occupations may look like examples of a current conception of work, they are in fact examples of our conception of leisure: they are freely chosen activities, pursued exclusively in response to an individual's choice about how to spend their time, not in response to economic need (which does not exist in that universe, thanks to the replicators) or necessarily to any agreed upon social or symbolic value. Thus, in this universe, we also see a society which, although it may still have a concept that is labelled as *work*, has replaced both the concept and practice of traditional work with freely chosen activity.

Challenge to Thesis

As discussed in the previous section, many anti-work authors are not clear on which strategy they employ to explain what makes work bad. Therefore, this makes it difficult to provide clear examples, since they also remain unclear on which utopian vision they advocate for, even while readily challenging what they take to be the default society.

[56] *WALL-E*.

For example, taking the following view to be the default in our work-centred societies, John White argues, "We may, for all we know, do well to reject the view that work determines our identity: perhaps we would flourish better if attachment to work were not so indelibly a part of us."[57] And assuming that an ethic of work as an ultimate end is the predominant ideology preached, Bertrand Russell argues "that what needs to be preached in modern industrial countries is quite different from what always has been preached" because "immense harm is caused by the belief that work is virtuous."[58] Further, many anti-work authors *appear* to advocate for the radical destruction of existing social models, whether through attention grabbing headlines advocating for 'a world without work' or through their proposals to replace a work-based society with a ludic life based entirely in play, games or virtual reality.[59] But as discussed previously, this view is susceptible to critical objections, the most common of which is the absurdity critique.[60]

Once again, clarifying the true aim of the anti-work position can show whether it presents a real challenge for the claim that work is a society-based need. Therefore, I will entertain both of the solutions I have identified and consider what kind of challenge each presents.

If anti-work takes the radical pathway to rejecting work, then the two positions are, in fact, incommensurable. The central thesis takes the view that work plays a fundamental role in upholding the features and structures that allow society to exist. In this case, it is simply nonsensical, as Jean-Philippe Deranty writes, to imagine that societies could exist without work in some form, since work is inextricable from social reproduction.[61] The central thesis, in particular, shows why work is inextricable from social reproduction: by answering society-based needs for a common fate and a shared system of reciprocity.

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[57] White, "Education, Work and Well-being," 238.
[58] Russell, "In Praise of Idleness," 1.
[59] Some examples include: Black, "Abolition of Work"; Danaher, "In Defense of the Post-Work Future"; Suits, *The Grasshopper*.
[60] Another objection is that the possibility of a life lived entirely in a state of leisure is a myth, since historically, leisured classes have only been possible in the presence of institutions, such as slavery, that exploit the work of oppressed classes of people. Inevitably, someone must always work. Often, proponents of the ludic life argue that in modernity, we have the possibility of supplanting the role of the enslaved person with machines. However, this still raises significant questions about whether we would truly be better off by automating all work.
[61] Deranty, "Post-Work Society as an Oxymoron."

Many anti-work authors who advocate for a rejection of work, such as Danaher or Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams,[62] rely on the modern possibility that all work could be outsourced to machines. Instead, the central thesis holds that, if all socially reproductive activities were outsourced to machines, "such a society would be entirely dystopian" because we would give up human control of our collective lives. Even in a world where automated technologies make many forms of work redundant, there would still be socially reproductive activities that we would not want to hand over to robots. These "include activities of care, but also the activities involved in the material, affective and symbolic reproduction of both individual and collective life."[63] This position, importantly, does *not* suggest that technology cannot be involved in easing many of the burdens associated with certain types of work. But it does assert that there are some forms of work that we should wish to remain human.

If, on the other hand, anti-work takes the position that the problems of work can be solved by reforming existing society, it is effectively in agreement with the central thesis. This view advocates that certain current features of work could be eliminated, such as the wage or the employment contract, while other features of work, such as its necessary relationship to the common fate of society, would remain. So too would the way we relate to it, as an activity that we do, in part, to answer to the needs of others and the needs of our society. On this view, the practice of work or the principles that distribute it in the world might change while the core conception of it would not.

This view, importantly, does not exclude the possibility that radical changes could occur, either in the forms of work available or in the societal structures that house them. Take, for example, the anarchic communitarian society which is the setting for Ursula K. Le Guin's famous work of science fiction, *The Dispossessed*.[64] On the planet Anarres, everything belongs to everyone, and no written laws exist. But there are strong conventions which govern the society and ensure its functioning, such as that of work. In the story, work is an activity that is explicitly voluntary, but which all members freely choose to do because they recognise it is necessary for the proper functioning of their society. The society relies on a computer database to match voluntary work to necessary tasks and assignments. In Le Guin's imaginary future,[65] work is distributed differently but as an activity looks more or less the same

[62] Danaher, *Automation and Utopia*; Srnicek and Williams, *Inventing the Future*.
[63] Deranty, "Post-Work Society as an Oxymoron," 6.
[64] Le Guin, *The Dispossessed*.
[65] Although the example I present here is imaginary, several authors have argued for the real-life viability of such a future. Cockshott and Cottrell, *Towards a New Socialism*; Hahnel, *Democratic Economic Planning*.

as work does to us now: physical and intellectual exertion aimed at contributing something necessary and valuable to society.[66] Work is still an activity that we do in order to respond, not only to our own needs, but to the needs of others.

Thus, in either case, it does not seem like the anti-work position presents a robust challenge to the central thesis. If anti-work takes a hard-lined approach to the problems of work, and therefore a radical stance on the destruction of society as it currently exists, the two positions are incommensurable. On the other hand, if anti-work takes the contingency approach to the problems of work, and therefore a more moderate position on the reform of existing society, the two positions are ultimately advocating for the same conclusions.

The central thesis takes a more pragmatic approach in supposing that transformation, rather than destruction and rebuilding, is the more readily accessible option for broad scale social change around cultures of work. In doing so, it aims to offer a more nuanced analysis of the crisis of work – one which is attuned to many people's lived experience of work as a meaningful and rewarding feature of their lives. It shows how work can be both an essential and a flexible feature of human life, how it can be both necessary and in need of repair. In fact, *that* it is necessary is precisely what gives us reason to critique and fix it.

Further, in asserting not an individual need for work, but a social one, the central thesis admits that there are any number of possible social arrangements in which we could satisfy our need for work. Members of a society have the power to decide how the need for work is expressed and how society should then be structured around this need. Therefore, to say that work is fundamentally, and by definition, a necessary feature of social life does not mean that we have no agency in shaping the role that work plays in our society. While we might not have a choice about whether we work, we do have a choice in determining how. In structuring society and employing particular concepts to do so, we always have a choice, together with others in our communities and societies, about what is the best way to do so. In this way, the thesis allows for radical change, offering both anti-work and pro-work the opportunity to find common ground.

[66] In the story, this often involves the producing and securing necessary resources, but also involves activities that are not concerned with resources. Instead, these forms of work are simply aimed at reproducing what the society on Anarres deems as valuable, such as caring labour or intellectual research.

A Final Note on the Examples of a Workless Society

It is worth noting that both the examples of *WALL-E* and Star Trek, upon closer inspection, showcase our existing bias in favour of cooperative values over other kinds of foundational social principles. Thus, it may be the case that both *WALL-E* and Star Trek, although imagined approximations of a truly workless society, still ultimately reflect of our current ways of thinking about social organisation.

WALL-E does so by highlighting the failures of a society that has abandoned familiar principles: there is rampant obesity amongst the human characters, whose social interactions are exclusively conducted through their holographic screens and whose overconsumption is exploited by a monopolistic corporation. In the movie, the viewer is continually made to feel that this society has lost something important and meaningful by handing over its agency to huge corporations and machines. In the end, it is only when the humans must come together to solve a collective problem (returning to planet Earth) that they are able to renew their commitments to each other and experience any kind of meaningful social cohesion.

Star Trek reveals this underlying bias in a different way. Because the problem of economic need has been solved through the invention of the replicator, it can appear as if no needs are present at all, and that an individual is free to makes decisions purely on the basis of their own desires. However, time and time again, the right decision is always determined by reasons which are symbolic and relational. In other words, characters' individual motivations are overwhelmingly driven by a consideration of social contribution and what is good for others. The Star Trek world is filled with scientists, explorers, and inventors who devote their lives to the pursuit of intellectual pursuits or knowledge-based goals for its benefit to society. Therefore, even though it appears, on the surface, that all instances of work are individually chosen, those choices are overwhelmingly guided by socially cooperative ideals.

7.2.4 In Sum: A Response to the Critique

In this section, I have explored the anti-work critique of a society-based need for work by highlighting and clarifying three core disagreements found in the anti-work literature. The first concerned an equivocation error regarding anti-work's definition of work. I showed that, in the case that anti-work arguments adhere to either an overly narrow or overly broad definition of work, their position is

incommensurable with the central thesis. By taking an interpretive approach to defining work, the central thesis operates with a conception of work that is incompatible with these conceptions.

The second targeted a lack of clarity concerning what makes work bad. I showed that, in the case that anti-work arguments consider work to be contingently bad, their conclusions are entirely consistent with those of the central thesis. Work can be a necessary feature of social life while still failing, as a result of its current conditions, to do what we need it to do. I also showed that, in the case that anti-work arguments consider work to be inherently bad, this requires clarification of a third disagreement present in the anti-work literature, regarding exactly what counts as a legitimate alternative solution to the problems of work.

In addressing this third and final disagreement, I showed that a society-based need for work does not unduly restrict our options for improving society – as might be charged by the anti-work position. While the view I have presented here prevents us from considering the destruction of society as we know it to be a viable solution, it *does* consider a wide range of radical alternatives of social organisation. These other models of social organisation, such as the one presented in *The Dispossessed*, allow our concept and practice of work to change dramatically, while still maintaining its core relationship to contribution which allows it to fulfil society-based needs.

7.3 Conclusions

In this chapter, I explored some of the major arguments against work and considered whether they present a challenge for the claim that work constitutes a society-based need. In doing so, I highlighted three core disagreements which emerge in the anti-work literature, regarding the definition of work, competing accounts of work's badness, and a fundamental disagreement about the practical social outcome of the anti-work project. I argued that, once the position on each of these questions has been addressed, in all but the most radical cases, the social needs thesis is revealed to be compatible with the anti-work project. Acknowledging that work is a basic and fundamental feature of our social worlds, both the anti-work perspective and the account put forward in his dissertation support the view that bad work is a social problem which requires societal reform to change.

Showing how work can be both an essential and flexible feature of human life, the central thesis augments our perspective on the crisis of work and helps resolve some of the inconsistencies currently present in the anti-work literature. If work is a social need for cooperative societies, and we wish to preserve the possibility of living together in cooperative societies, then abolishing work is not a genuine option. Instead, the answer must be to reform and improve it. There are, of course, different ways to approach improving work. In the conclusion, I explore how these approaches might be expressed through policy and public dialogue.

8 Implications for (and Beyond) Philosophy

Conceptualising work as necessary and understanding its relationship to our needs has value for philosophical theory and significance for how we structure policy and organise societies. Therefore, in this final chapter, I offer some concluding remarks by briefly exploring the contribution of this thesis to the philosophical literature, and some broader implications for policy.

For theory, the dissertation offers an original contribution by synthesising a broad range of related literature, both within and outside of academic philosophy, and bringing it to bear on an important philosophical question which has previously been neglected in the field (§8.1). For policy, the thesis provides a novel, needs-centred perspective on work which resolves many of the shortcomings of the goods and rights- centred perspectives that have traditionally provided the theoretical foundation for work-related policy design (§8.2).

With the short time that remains in this chapter, I do not take a position on the social and economic feasibility of particular policies. Instead, I offer some generally evaluative considerations and questions that policy makers may find helpful in their deliberations and efforts to design better, more human(e) labour policies and institutions for the future. In that way, this chapter aims to lay groundwork, not only for further research, but for discussion outside of the academic realm about the place of work in our societies.

8.1 Contribution to the Literature

This dissertation has defended a need for work on the basis of work's role in meeting society-level needs. As such, it is not something we need as individuals or even as members of communities, although it plays a significant role in our ability as both individuals and community members to fulfil our basic, non-contingent needs. Instead, I have argued that work is something we need, where *we* are

viewed as members of a society of others with whom we share a common fate and a set of collective values. At the level of society, work helps establish and embed certain cooperative norms which are necessary for the complex shared system of reciprocity that allows society to exist and to reproduce itself.

To assert, then, that we have a society-based need for work is to say that work is *necessary* to our ability to meet our basic, non-contingent needs as members of societies. Its role is central to our ability to meet these society-based needs, in that it is often the primary activity we use to meet these needs. And its role is unique in that it cannot be straightforwardly replaced by other non-work activities, such as leisure and play. This central claim helps makes sense of why so many view work as an immovable feature of life – something they cannot get on without, even if they wanted to.

What does it mean, then, to make the claim '*I* need work', like the examples I gave in the introduction? In light of the central thesis, such a statement can be understood as a recognition that work plays this necessary role in upholding foundational social structures. Our societies are fundamentally cooperative, and therefore rely on a shared system of reciprocity to govern membership and contribution to society. Work is an activity by which members of society can fulfil their required contribution and, through the signalling function, communicate about their contributions to others. Therefore, that claim that 'I need work' can be understood as an acknowledgment that each member of society has a role to play in upholding the cooperative project of their society. I myself do not always need to work, but I do need others to do it.

So, when Frances McDormand's character asserts, "I need work. I like work," she is not just asserting that she would prefer to do it or that it plays an instrumental role in securing the material resources she requires for life (although it may serve these purposes as well). The expression of a need to work is also the expression that, if she is to be a member of a society and meet her society-based needs, she *must* have the ability to be recognised by others as a member of a shared social project and as contributing to it. Work gives her access to a social structure where she can meet her individual needs, be recognised by others within her communities, and be recognised by others within society as participating and contributing to society.

And while the central thesis focuses on work's role in meeting society-based needs, its role in meeting community-based needs and individual needs should not be ignored. In the course of constructing this argument, I have claimed that work is also *central* to our ability to meet many of our basic non-contingent social needs as individuals and community members. Even though it is not necessary in the case of individual and community-level needs, it is still an important avenue through which many people meet those needs. It is *necessary* at the society level, however, because the society-based needs met through work – for a shared system of reciprocity by which to regulate and communicate about contribution – cannot be met through non-work activities.

In constructing this argument, I have brought a wide range of related research to bear on a question previously neglected by in academic philosophy. And while much has been written on topics peripheral to, or related to, a need for work in philosophy – including work as a mechanism for goods acquisition and work as a right – very little literature has explored that question directly. As a result, the wealth of related literature that exists in other humanities and social science fields – such as psychology, sociology, economics – has rarely been incorporated into rigorous philosophical analysis on the subject. By bridging this gap, and bringing together related, but distinct arguments from other fields, I have contributed to the advancement of the literature on work and provided a framing through which further social and political philosophy on the topic can be explored.

I have also argued for the analytic separability of basic, non-contingent needs that we hold at different levels of collective life. This is one of the major advantages of a needs-centred perspective – both theoretically and practically – in that it allows us to consider the question from three distinct perspectives. Since every person in society is not only an individual, but also a member of communities and of society at large, any problem that concerns a person's ability to meet their individual needs will be multidimensional, in that it will also concern a person's ability to meet the needs they hold in other dimensions of social life. I will discuss the implications of this feature of the argument at greater length in the next section, where I apply the central thesis to assess different policies aimed at improving the future of work.

To our general understanding of the value of work, I have shown how work can be important, without being too important. According to the central thesis, work is essential because we cannot get on without it for current societal structures. However, it is essential *only* in so far as we do not choose

other modes of societal construction. Should we make collective choices to reform society into something radically different, which does not rely on cooperative principles, or a concept or practice of work to regulate those principles, we would have no need for work.[1]

This provides a theory which, in some sense, gives us the best of both worlds. I have made no claims about work as something inherent to our human nature: in this respect, we are free to choose the principles on which we construct our collective lives. We could eradicate a need for work if we determined that such a need was obsolete. But in doing so, I argue, we would not be able to continue living in the sorts of societies in which we currently find ourselves, or society as we know it.

I therefore claim that a current need for work is real and genuine, as a result of existing social structures, and choices that are continually made and remade through social policy and political action. Together, these conclusions bring us back to the line from Sean Sayers which opened this dissertation: "Through the activity of labour, man develops his powers and capacities, and creates new needs - including the need to work."[2] More specifically, we create the need to work by forming societies whose reproduction depends on it.

Finally, while beyond the scope of this project, my analysis acknowledges the need for further inquiry regarding principles of justice. If I myself do not always need to work, but need others to do it, this raises additional questions about how such work should be distributed: who should do it and when. This, in itself, is nothing radical – human beings throughout history have evaluated and re-evaluated their answers to these questions by, for example, restricting child labour or creating legal protections for retirement. However, the central thesis shows how those answers may yet again require re-evaluation and provides a unique framework by which to do so. Work is not *simply* some undesirable burden. It is also, in some cases, an essential activity which allows us to meet many of our most basic needs. Determining how to distribute work fairly, and the principles on which that distribution should be decided, must take these claims into account.

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[1] In Chapter 6, I offered a fictional example of what such a society might look like: the human society in the animated film, *WALLE*. Other examples might include a Hobbesian state of nature, in which the 'laws' of nature are the predominate concepts motivating individual action. If the reader is concerned that these two examples appear too far-fetched, I would point out that it is, in fact, quite difficult to come up with an example that does not appear far-fetched, given that the example must represent a society which does not share our own society's foundational principles.
[2] Sayers, "The Need to Work," 21.

8.2 Implications for Policy

In this dissertation, I have provided a novel, needs-centred perspective on work. This perspective is not only useful for further theoretical inquiry into the concept and value of work, but also helps to resolve many of the shortcomings of the goods and rights- centred perspectives. In this way, it should be recognised as an additional perspective that provides advantages over existing theories which have traditionally provided the theoretical foundation for work-related policy design.

8.2.1 Advantages Over Goods-centred Perspectives

In Chapter 3, I outlined a goods-centred perspective on work, which views work primarily as a mechanism for goods-acquisition. On this view, work is an activity, amongst other activities, which allows a person to acquire the various goods, which may include everything from material resources to other kinds of non-material resources and social benefits. Work is not the only activity by which a person can acquire goods, although it may be the primary activity through which people do so in the modern world. A goods-centred perspective and a needs-centred perspective do not contradict one another, but simply highlight different aspects of what is important about work: while a goods-centred perspective evaluates work through the lens of work as a mechanism for goods transfer, a needs-centred perspective values work as way to meet basic, non-contingent needs.

I argue here, however, that a needs-centred perspective provides several key advantages over a goods-centred perspective, as a theoretical framework to evaluate policy and inform policy design. First, the needs-centred perspective offers an advantage over a goods-centred perspective in that it allows us to evaluate normative problems concerning work from vantage points *other than* simply an individual one. In being able to evaluate a situation from the vantage point of, say, community-based or society-based requirements, we are able to see how work which provides a sufficient number of goods may nevertheless fail to meet basic needs. This is the second advantage of a needs-centred perspective, in that it shows how needs do not reduce to goods.

Let's refer back to an example I used in Chapter 3, of the young professional and bullshit job holder named Eric. Recall that, in the example, Eric is a recent college graduate who is hired by an architecture firm to perform a job which is, for all intents and purposes, simply a placeholder position: one which

is designed to achieve very little, while offering a pretence to satisfy senior partners at the firm. Thus, the job, while affording many of the obvious goods traditionally associated with work, such as high salary, social relationships, and social recognition, failed to give him a sense that he was doing something that actually *mattered*. He is so deeply unhappy that he eventually quits, even while being showered with promotions and pay raises in attempt to keep him at the company.

Using a goods-centred perspective to evaluate the problem, we find that Eric, as an individual, has access to many obvious goods of work through his job. He has a generous salary, the opportunity to apply his college degree, the experience of social recognition for his 'good' job, and the chance to build relationships and friendships in his work community. That some goods are lacking – such as, for example, a wider sense of social contribution to society – can be interpreted as simply a trade-off.

But if we take the general problem of bullshit jobs seriously, this explanation seems to neglect an important feature of what is wrong with Eric's situation. The problem is not for Eric *as an individual,* since as an individual he could make peace with his lack of social contribution by viewing it as a trade-off he must endure in exchange for other goods, like a high salary. Rather, the problem is for Eric *as a member of society*. It is only in viewing his work through the lens of his membership in society, recognising that his job serves no real purpose outside the company and very little to those within it, that he finds his work to be deeply unsatisfying and unsustainable. It is as a member of society that Eric experiences his needs as unmet.

The needs-based perspective allows us to draw this distinction and to think about different levels of collective life as separate, but distinct and non-transferable, which would be impossible within a goods-centred framework. Further, it reveals that needs cannot reduce to goods. Because *even though* Eric as an individual and as a member of community may have most, if not all, of his needs met, Eric as a member of society, does not. Because our individual, community-based, and society-based needs are all distinct – and all equally basic and non-contingent, in so far as they *must* be met – we cannot simply trade off some for the others. An unmet need will present itself as pressing regardless of the level at which it occurs.

Needs and Universal Basic Income

This perspective could improve our approach to work-related policy, especially as we confront an uncertain future of work. For example, let's consider how a needs-centred perspective can offer a unique outlook on an existing policy proposal which aims to remedy some aspects of that uncertain future.

Universal basic income (UBI), for example, can be understood as a policy often justified by a goods-centred perspective on work. A UBI is a grant paid to all members of a society, regardless of marital status, age, ability to work, or income. A state which implements a UBI, thus, ensures that all of its members receive some[3] income whether or not they engage in work. Since income, in the modern world, is the primary way that people acquire the goods and resources that they require to meet their basic material needs, a UBI promises to sever the link between work and material necessity.

UBI is therefore often defended on the basis that it would make working, at least in paid employment, unnecessary. While there are different reasons that advocates defend this claim – some do so because they believe that humanity is entering an age where there will not be enough work to go around[4], while others do so because they believe we would be better off in a world without work[5] – there is an overwhelming sense that disconnecting work and income is valuable because it would allow instances of work to disappear while its goods remained.

UBI promotes many individual freedoms and, as a result, has the potential to improve the conditions of work for many people, at least indirectly. By ensuring that my material needs can be met independently of my paid employment, this takes some of the pressure off what I do for a job. It makes it possible for me to take a lower paying job or to devote less of my time to paid employment. It also makes it possible for me to pursue a wider range of unpaid work activities, like care work, creative projects, or community engagement. Therefore, by promoting individual's autonomy and

[3] Here, I gloss over many of the particulars of UBI, since my point only requires a general understanding of the policy. This is not, importantly, to not deny that there are notable differences between actual proposals – on how much money should be given, how often, and to whom – and that these differences are important when discussing the feasibility of UBI.
[4] Ford, *Rise of the Robots*.
[5] Danaher, *Automation and Utopia*.

freedom, a UBI allows a person to pursue the work which offers themselves the greatest opportunity for the goods of work.

But this argument in favour of UBI still relies on an indirect relationship with work. In other words, UBI policy achieves positive outcomes, not by directly improving work or conditions of work, but by giving a person a choice about work, or a way out of bad work. UBI does not actually improve or protect work. Instead, it improves and protects individual autonomy and freedom.

A needs-centred perspective therefore offers a unique critique of UBI policy. In this sense, it is a policy which is only designed to remedy problems of work at the individual level. But as I have shown throughout the course of this dissertation, there are a number of other problems that matter, and which cannot be answered by an individual-focused policy like UBI. For example, a UBI does not ensure that there are adequate choices for work available to each particular person within society, or that the choices available include a sufficient number of opportunities for good work. Nor does it promote participation more broadly, incentivise individuals to donate their work to others, or otherwise encourage a culture of cooperation. These could be recognised as solutions which target the more community and society-based aspects of work.

Importantly, the purpose of using a needs-centred perspective to critique UBI is not to show that it is a *bad* policy or to argue against its implementation. Instead, the purpose of raising this critique is to show how it is a *narrow* policy. A needs-centred perspective highlights, in a unique way, what is missing from its scope: while it protects a person's ability to meet their individual needs through work, it does nothing to protect their ability to meet community or, most importantly, society-based needs. Having the ability to do so is extremely useful, and important, because it helps show what other sorts of policy solutions could complement UBI by making up for what it lacks. Since society-based needs ground a need for work, it is especially important that policy which purports to protect a person's ability to meet their needs through work provides some protections at the society-level.

UBI can be an extremely valuable tool, and the shortcoming raised by this point can be remedied in a few ways. First, we can protect needs-meeting abilities at the level of society by implementing a version of basic income that is, to some degree, conditional on social contribution or participation. Some have proposed models of participation-based income, where 'participation' is construed much more widely

than simply employment or engagement in the traditional labour market. Tony Atkinson, for example, also includes "people engaged in approved forms of education or training, caring for young, elderly, or disabled dependents, or undertaking approved forms of voluntary work."[6] What is important about this condition is that it "involves neither *payment* nor *work*; it is a wider definition of social contribution."[7] André Gorz has previously argued for guaranteed income for all that is "linked to all citizens performing the quantity of work required for the production of the wealth to which their income entitled them."[8]

However, participation income proposals come with their own shortcomings, especially in regard to feasibility and implementation, and it is for this reason that they are not readily considered as viable alternatives.[9] Therefore, a second option for remedying the narrow focus of a UBI is by making it one component in a broader package of income, labour, and social policies. Recall, a UBI is focused narrowly on ensuring that a person can meet their individual material needs without (or with significantly less) paid work. Additional policies could therefore complement UBI by ensuring that a person can meet their society-based needs through work, and that at least some members of society work. This could be done by designing policy which directly improves equal opportunity and equal access to good work for all members of society, thereby ensuring that more members of society have the opportunity to work if they want to. It could also be done through incentives, encouragement, or institutionalisation, with the primary aim being, not to force people to work, but to do what a UBI does not: promote participation more broadly, incentivise individuals to donate their work to others, or otherwise cultivate a culture of cooperation.

It is finally worth noting that many proponents of UBI are increasingly coming to the same conclusions about the shortcomings of the policy and proposing similar solutions. A needs-centred perspective simply gives an alternative (or additional) justification for these conclusions and solutions.

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[6] Atkinson, "The Case for a Participation Income," 68.
[7] Atkinson, "The Case for a Participation Income."
[8] Gorz, "Beyond the Wage-Based Society," 300.
[9] For example, Jurgen De Wispelaere and Lindsay Stirton argue that the challenges of determining individuals' eligibility would amount to an administrative nightmare, with the costs of implementation so high that it would be difficult to justify such a scheme on a practical level.
Wispelaere and Stirton, "The Trilemma of Participation Income."
Gorz's chief concern, regarding his own proposals, is that a basic income scheme conditional on participation will have the unwanted effect of bringing previously voluntary activities and 'spontaneous' familial or social obligations under the control of the market. This would thereby corrupt or contaminate those responsibilities which, in some sense, *should* be undertaken freely.

8.2.2 Advantages Over Rights-centred Perspectives

In Chapter 3, I also outlined a rights-centred approach to work. This perspective is best exemplified in the right to work literature, although I do not only include in this category authors who argue for a positive claim-right to an income. Instead, I refer to a more general theoretical standpoint which evaluates many human goods and experiences on the basis of whether or not they are the appropriate object of a right. In this sense, I include authors who may ultimately argue against a right to work as nevertheless upholding a rights-centred perspective, because work is still evaluated on the basis of whether or not it is a right.

I argue here that a rights-centred perspective, like a goods-centred perspective, also overstates the importance of the individual relationship with work, while neglecting to account for other ways that work can be important. I previously raised the point made by John Elster, that "[n]ot all good things in life can be provided as a right."[10] Work offers many valuable things – both for individuals and for social groups – which are not well-articulated by the language of individual rights. For example, the idea of a community having a *right* to something like cooperation is an odd one to get one's mind around. What would the right entail, and who exactly would hold it? On the other hand, the idea of a community having a *need* for cooperation is nowhere near as hard to make sense of. In fact, to most people, it might seem intuitively obvious.

For example, let me return the example of the Norwegian *dugnad* discussed in Chapter 5. The unique kind of social cohesion which exists in Scandinavian cultures is often attributed, in part, to practices like dugnad, in which neighbours or community members who may have little else in common nevertheless come together to work and contribute towards shared goals. Such events are characterised by a strong spirit of togetherness, in which community members come together to catch up, build a playground or plant some flowers, and eat. But it is also a tradition which has concrete benefits for the community: it recognised as tradition in which people learn important prosocial attitudes and cooperative behaviours, and as being responsible for higher rates of civic participation.[11]

[10] Elster, "Is There (or Should There Be) a Right to Work?," 62.
[11] Simon and Mobekk, "Dugnad."

It is also recognised as playing a significant role in explaining why Scandinavian countries, and Norway in particular, tend to score highly on measures of quality of life, happiness, and economic prosperity.[12]

Dugnad is a practice and tradition that is largely recognised as being beneficial for the communities (and community members) that do it because it promotes cooperation between members. Most can agree that communities require cooperation to function well and thrive. But using rights-centred language to capture this kind of requirement seems odd and ill-fitting: we would not say that a community has a *right* to cooperation, and therefore to the practices and traditions which provide it. Instead, we would say that a community *needs* cooperation, and therefore needs the practices and traditions which encourage and facilitate cooperation between members. Even if we were able to articulate a collective right to work, it is not clear how to determine which communities would hold one, or whom the rights give them a claim against.

And as discussed in Chapter 3, some might also want to argue that the things that I am referring to when I talk about collective rights simply reduce to individual rights. On this view, it is not the community, as an entity, which has the right to cooperative practices, like dugnad. It is, instead, the individual, who holds a right to participate in such a practice. However, there is an important distinction between having a right to participate in the practice, and having a right to the practice itself, or to the broad-scale cooperation that such a practice engenders. It is not at all clear that any individual holds the second kind of right.

This is where a needs-centred perspective offers an advantage. By treating communities and societies as things which can have needs, and making these needs the centre of our analysis, this perspective provides a more appropriate framework to make sense of the relationship between a community and a cooperative practice, like dugnad. Communities may not have a right to these practices, but they may feasibly have a need for them. The language and framework of needs also allows us to discuss, with a greater degree of nuance, the difference between individual, community, and society level requirements. A community's need for cooperation may be non-contingent, but not basic. A society may have similar needs for cooperation which are, at the level of society, both basic *and* non-contingent and therefore must be met.

[12] Simon and Mobekk.

Needs and Workfare

The needs-centred perspective can also improve upon the rights-centred approach when it comes to justifying and designing work-related policy. It is a downside of a rights-centred perspective that it can draw in *too much* of work – even the bad – under its protection. This can, in some cases,[13] promote an approach to work policy which is detrimentally focused on ensuring that individuals have *any* work, no matter how bad or harmful it may be for them.

Examples typically attributed to such a mindset might include make-work schemes or workfare programs. Make-work jobs are jobs created by the state during periods of high unemployment, usually involving low or unskilled, manual labour. They often cost more to the economy than they generate, but they ensure that members of society remain employed during periods when demand for labour is low. Make-work schemes may also be established as part of a policy of state-sponsored full-employment, as was the case in former Soviet Union.[14] Workfare, on the other hand, describes similarly fabricated jobs which are a condition of welfare benefits. A person, for example, may be offered a workfare job as a placeholder until they find a non-workfare job, the holding of which remains contingent on a continued search for non-workfare jobs. Workfare jobs also usually involve low or unskilled tasks. Examples include welfare programs which require proof that the recipient is looking for work or participating in job training or job-creation schemes which provide some 'contribution' to society, such as building infrastructure, providing public services, or performing land conservation.

Make-work and workfare more generally illustrate the downsides of too narrow a focus on ensuring everyone in a society holds some form of work.[15] Both are typically aimed at taking non-contributing members of society – those on welfare benefits, who rely on the state for resources – and turning

[13] Some authors in the field have sought to address this concern. For example, Virginia Mantouvalou argues that a right to work is not just a right to any old work but must be understood necessarily as a right to decent, non-exploitative work. Mantouvalou, "The Right to Non-Exploitative Work."
[14] Porket, "Full Employment in Soviet Theory and Practice."
[15] Not all examples of make-work and workfare are examples of failed policy. In addition, advocating for a right to work does not entail support for make-work and workfare schemes – there might be other ways for the state to guarantee full employment opportunities for every willing worker. However, I raise these examples because these make-work and workfare policies exemplify the view that a rights-centred view of work can promote: the view that, for the individual, having any work is better than having no work at all.

them into contributing members, in a few different ways. It can focus on turning them into economic contributors, or taxpayers, by providing them with options for employment, and therefore, with an income. It can also turn them into social or symbolic contributors, by applying their efforts to a wide range of socially beneficial projects, such as building infrastructure, providing public services, or performing land conservation.

However, the type of work that people are usually required to hold in order to satisfy such schemes is almost always some form of employment. As such, make-work schemes and workfare programs typically trade in *jobs,* rather than taking a broader view of what might additionally count as work. By forcing contribution to fit into the form of employment, rather than expanding contribution to include forms of unpaid work, such schemes often force people to take up jobs that lack many of the basic features of good, meaningful work. The jobs are often physically taxing and mundane. They may feel, to the worker themselves, as if they are purposeless, calling to mind the problems associated with bullshit jobs discussed previously. Further, the public may also hold the perception that such jobs are pointless and therefore a waste of public spending. These are some of the common critiques of make-work and workfare policy, as one way to ensure work is made available to everyone.

On the other hand, the needs-centred perspective offers a radically different way of thinking about policy which ensures work is made available to everyone. From this perspective, successfully 'fabricated' work should not only be evaluated on its ability to meet the material needs of the state by providing an economic contribution or essential infrastructure projects. Nor should it be evaluated solely on the basis of its success in turning welfare recipients into economic contributors, or solely in terms of the material or psychological benefits it provides to the individual worker. Instead, it must be evaluated on the basis of whether, and to what degree, it is *needs-meeting* at all three levels of collective life, for individuals, members of communities and members of society. Ensuring that more fabricated work is needs-meeting, especially for society-based needs, would improve make-work policy.

To illustrate this point, it is worth considering what might make such schemes successful. The Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), for example, is widely considered to be the most successful and most popular amongst the public of the New Deal era work relief programs. From 1933 to 1942, approximately 3 million young men were employed on various conservation projects which included reforestation, erosion control, and building wilderness infrastructure, such as fire towers and

recreation areas. It received overwhelming bipartisan support at the federal level, and approval was also evident in the local communities where camps were placed: most letters from communities to the CCC's director office were overwhelmingly positive, often "[requesting] new camps or [asking]…to keep already existing camps."[16] Many individual participants showed their support for the program by reenlisting once their six-month terms were completed.

There has been much deliberation about what made such a program so well-supported. Some accounts have sought to find "down to earth" explanations for the popularity, by studying the effect of variables such as the scope of the work project and its effect on local economies.[17] Other accounts have implied a romantic 'agrarian myth' at the foundation of this popularity: that the CCC represented, to the American public, a return to a simpler, more 'natural' time before industrialisation.[18] Although the program made a considerable number of concrete and measurable improvements to the American conservation movement, the fact that the CCC "captured the popular imagination" of the public should not be dismissed.

And so, perhaps another way to frame what might have made such a make-work scheme so widely supported by participants, citizens, and politicians alike was the sense that it was providing something valuable, even necessary, for society: that through work, these men were making a genuine social contribution. And not just any social contribution – one which was significant to a specifically American way of life and its values.[19] Therefore, taking a needs-centred approach to this problem shows that what may actually make fabricated work successful is whether it fulfils a broader social purpose *beyond* simply giving someone work to do. That work must also be in the service of something meaningful and useful for society – not just economically useful, and not just any society, but the particular society in which it is situated. [20]

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[16] Sherraden, "The Local Impact of the Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942."
[17] Sherraden.
[18] Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942; a New Deal Case Study*, 108.
[19] "The [Boston *Evening*] *Transcript* often voiced what became a common argument in favor of the CCC as expressed by groups normally hostile to the New Deal. To such individuals and organisations, the benefits of the CCC, unlike most New Deal measures, were tangible, immediate, and obvious. Furthermore, it was not a dole to keep city-bred youths from starving. The boys had to work, and work hard. In toiling with their hands in the wilderness, they recaptured for many people the spirit of a unique age now past whose memory was still all-pervasive. As the McKeesport *News* put it in a moment of semi-nostalgia, 'theirs is the American way.'" Salmond, *The Civilian Conservation Corps, 1933-1942; a New Deal Case Study*.
[20] Whether a policy counts as successful will be determined, in part, by how it is perceived within its own society – not just how it is perceived by other societies. Thus, it is certainly possible that examples I have used here as examples of 'failed' make-work or workfare policy, such as Soviet-era full employment programs, could have been perceived by Soviet

This has broader implications for policies aimed at promoting full employment, if they intend to avoid the pitfalls of creating a mass of jobs which are perceived as (and potentially are, in fact) pointless, mundane, or even degrading. One solution could be to broaden, within existing workfare programs and policies, what activities count as viable work, to include a wider range of socially useful activities, such as voluntary work, caregiving, and civic participation. Recall, from Chapter 6, that one of the central ways that work fulfils a society-based need for a system of reciprocal norms is by signalling a person's contribution to others within a society. Thus, workfare policies should ensure instead that *this* need is fulfilled, rather than simply ensuring that all members of society hold jobs.

Policies could achieve this by considering what sorts of activities the particular society in which they are situated deems as valuable – which will sometimes, but not always align with what is economically productive. Sometimes they will also align with what is socially or symbolically valuable, which can take a myriad of forms. Perhaps a particular society places a high value on sustainable conservation, environmental remediation, technological education, and anti-racism efforts or other activities which aim to create more inclusive social structures. In such a society, policy which aims to turn non-contributing members into contributors might focus on including such activities under the remit of possible work options.

Further, such policy could also incorporate plans to educate members of society on why certain activities are more valuable than commonly recognised. A society which presently, or historically, has placed a low economic value on socially useful activities such as caregiving, teaching, and nursing, or unpaid work in the home, may choose to invest policy in changing public opinion of such occupations. By educating members of society about the real value of these forms of work, policy may be able to lessen the social and economic costs of engaging in them, thereby incentivising and encouraging more members to participate in them.

communities as successful. Similarly, it is possible that the success of the CCC may be assessed differently outside of the United States. However, neither defeats the point I make in the preceding paragraphs. It is still possible that one of the features that plays a central role in determining the success of a policy is its perception within its own society as adhering to and promoting that society's perceived values, and ultimately, addressing its *needs*.

8.2.3 A Final Note on How the Individual Relates to a Society-Based Need for Work

Although I have grounded a need for work in a shared social life, such a need still matters for each of us as individuals. If a need for work comes not from my inherent individual need to do work, but instead from my social needs as a member of a society, then I will sometimes be required to work in order to contribute to the social structures of my world and to the well-being of others, which depends on those structures. There will always be some who cannot work. And this will occasionally generate, for me as an individual, a need to work – not based on my own needs, but on the needs of other members in my society.

Because a society-level need for work is ultimately expressed through the work of the individual, it motivates additional questions about the fair distribution of work, including who should do it and when. A needs-centred perspective can offer interesting answers to these questions. For example, it can offer novel justification for policies which lead to the redistribution of work in society, such as the four-day work week or six-hour workday. Such policies ensure that jobs – one major form of work in most modern societies – can be distributed amongst more workers, allowing more people to benefit from access to less demanding work. A person who spends less time in employment is then afforded more time to engage in other, socially important forms of work, like community service to caregiving, which would traditionally be unpaid. A person who spends less time in employment could also choose to pursue other forms of work which are more fulfilling or substantially needs-meeting. But since work is not the only way a person can meet her basic, non-contingent needs, a person who spends less time in employment would have the opportunity to pursue non-work activities in order to do so.

A society-based need for work explains why policies which ultimately protect institutions of work and conditions of work are preferrable to those which merely promote individual freedom or make work mandatory or a matter of individual rights if the aim is to preserve our existing societal structures. Policies which promote freedom of choice or make work mandatory run the risk of allowing much work to become undesirable or harmful, which further supports the argument that work should be eradicated entirely. But the central thesis shows why work cannot be completely eradicated, since it is the primary way by which we meet society-level needs for a complex system of reciprocity and cooperative norms. It sheds light on why we would not necessarily be better off in a world without it.

8.3 Final Thoughts

In constructing the central argument of this dissertation, I aimed to give a robust, theoretical account of the conceptual framework which would be necessary to recognise a need for work as real and genuine. This account is based on our existing relationship to work, and the role it plays in meeting basic, non-contingent needs that we hold as members of society. In this final chapter, I highlighted not only the contribution of the central thesis to existing philosophical literature, but also its usefulness for further theoretical inquiry as well as practical deliberation about policy. The needs-centred perspective that I offer here highlights a critical aspect of work that is neglected by other theoretical approaches: the fact that work is directly connected to our ability to meet society-based basic, non-contingent needs.

If work is a society-based need for cooperative societies, and we wish to preserve the possibility of living together in such societies, then abolishing work is not a genuine option. This being said, a need for work does not necessarily mean that we need to put up with bad work. The conclusions of this dissertation still leave us free to decide that the current state of work is not one we are happy with. In this sense, the conclusions drawn here are not at odds with anti-work or any other ideological position that looks at modern work and finds it lacking.

If work is not working, one possible answer is not to get rid of work but to expand what counts. Conceptually, I am talking about a kind of engineering project: changing the standard understanding of what work is, in the public sphere, to include a broader range of productive, goal-oriented activities which have symbolic, economic, or social value. This is not only a matter of persuading people to recognise unpaid work as being equal in value to paid work or as a legitimate avenue through which to fulfil one's responsibility to contribute. It is also a matter of changing the practical conception of work that the majority of people in the modern world operate with, away from a narrow, employment focused understanding and towards a more interpretive one. In doing so, a wider range of activities become available for people to make contributions and be seen by others as contributing, thereby expanding the range of activities which signal social value.

Of course, such an enormous cultural and conceptual shift is difficult (if not impossible) to enact intentionally and control. In this sense, the 'solution' I have offered could be nothing more than a philosopher's impractical pipedream. At the same time, it is generally accepted that concepts change,

as the communities and societies that use them let go of obsolete meanings and employ new ones. It is therefore not unimaginable that the concept of work, in particular, could change in this way as well.

In fact, we have good reason to think that it can: it already has. Even over the short span of a century, countless jobs have disappeared as new ones emerged to take their place. Activities previously treated as forms of leisure and relegated to the unserious category of *hobbies* – like gaming – have become full-blown professional industries, generating billions of dollars in revenue every year. Activities previously treated as the natural responsibility of women and other marginalised members of society and therefore relegated to the thankless category of *labour* – like domestic and caring activities – have (slowly) become socially accepted as legitimate, and socially beneficial, ways of spending one's time, even if they are not paid. Even within the same historical time period, different societies often operate with slightly different commonplace conceptions of what counts as work: while participating in a *dugnad* might be generally understood as a genuine form of work in Norway, a similar voluntary activity might not carry the same legitimacy in the United States.

Some might be concerned that this change would bring too many activities under the umbrella of the economic sphere. This concern is based the belief that "[t]he driving force behind social disintegration is the market – that is, the expansion of competitive commodity relations to the detriment of voluntary co-operation for the common good."[21] On this view, bringing certain activities – especially socially necessary activities or those that concern our relationships to others – into the domain of the market would diminish their value or authenticity by transforming them into transactional exchanges. One example of this phenomenon is offered by Samuel Bowles in *The Moral Economy*, where he recounts what happened after a day care centre in Haifa began fining parents who were late to pick up their children. Parents responded to the fine by arriving twice as late and continued showing up late even after the fine was revoked. As Bowles suggests, putting a monetary value on lateness "seem[ed] to have undermined the parents' sense of ethical obligation to avoid inconveniencing the teachers, leading them to think of lateness as just another commodity they could purchase."[22]

[21] Gorz, "On the Difference Between Society and Community, And Why Basic Income By Itself Cannot Confer Full Membership of Either," 179.
[22] Bowles, *The Moral Economy*, 23.

I, too, share concerns about the reach of the market and its effects on the activities we perform within it. However, there is an important difference between the umbrella of the economic sphere and the umbrella of work. Notably, the solution I proposed is not a suggestion that more work should be brought under the domain of the market, by simply being paid or compensated. Instead, it is a suggestion that more activities should be brought under the domain of *work*, to be treated as activities which can signal social value and be recognised by others as providing a genuine social contribution. Although this is a more complex solution, and one which could not happen overnight, it is a solution which coincidentally offers a way to address this precise concern. By bringing activities under the domain of work, we identify those activities as socially and symbolically valuable. By broadening the range of those activities that are available to people – as real and genuine options for how to spend their time – we offer people new ways to contribute to and be valued by the rest of their society. And in opening up new ways to contribute and be valued, we show that bringing activities under the domain of the market is not the only way to do so.

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