

IDLE, ABLE-BODIED AND UNDESERVING: THE PERSISTENCE OF UNDESERT
IN WESTERN POLITICAL THOUGHT

by

Kinnar Power

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Dedication

This project is dedicated to Dave and to everyone else who is inherently deserving of a good life but isn't treated as such.

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Abstract

This essay argues against the idea that desert of a good life must be contingent on work. To do so, I document the increasing preeminence, over time, of conceptions of desert based solely in the work ethic. The idea that some people wilfully choose not to work due to moral perversity – and are thus undeserving of social assistance – stems from these conceptions. I argue that this position suffers from normative and logical weaknesses and is increasingly anachronistic in advanced post-industrial societies. If the scope of analysis is limited in this manner, and we assume that, in this context, goods and wealth are increasingly abundant, and redistributable without adverse economic consequences, while opportunities for employment are scarce – particularly during recessions – then the force of these ideas is considerably weakened. However, their persistence is explained not by their philosophical force, but rather by how they sustain the diffuse power relations endemic to market society.

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1

Introduction

Poor people aren't really deserving of sympathy until their rib-cages are showing and their eye-sockets have swallowed their eyes.

Wise 2018: para. 2

Tyler McGlothlin is a young, able-bodied man from Grundy, Virginia, who was profiled in a Washington Post article in 2017. At the time the article was written, he wasn't working and instead spent most of his days and nights playing video games with his wife. He relied on his mother's disability checks to get by, but they were never enough to feed everyone for the month. When the checks ran out, he would resort to begging, as did Tyler's father, Dale. When David Hess, a wealthy, hard-working man encountered Dale begging, Hess offered him a job, which Dale turned down due to his painful disability. Enraged at Dale's refusal to work, Hess left, returning shortly afterwards to stand beside him and hold a sign that said, "I offered him a job and he refused." He then posted a picture of the scene on social media, a post which was subsequently shared thousands of times over. For Hess, asking for handouts instead of working was deeply immoral; people like Tyler or Dale McGlothlin who chose not to work deserved deprivation until they overcame their laziness and got to work. (McCoy, 2017a).

This line of thinking is quite pervasive in contemporary society. For example, espousing similar ideas to Hess (and citing a Heritage Foundation study), Bill O'Reilly remarked incredulously that most 'poor' people have things like microwaves, televisions, air conditioning, cable television, and cell phones. He wondered how they could be considered poor and deserving of government aid if they had all of these things. O'Reilly's comments are indicative of an underlying normative claim about social assistance: only those who are completely destitute are deserving of aid, and even these people are undeserving of any more than what is required for their physical survival. The moral norm underwriting this judgement is that a good life must be earned through hard work, and those who do not work are undeserving of a good life. This normative claim will be the focus of my essay. By a "good life," I mean one's ability enjoy oneself and

make choices that would contribute to one's comfort and enjoyment of life, as well as one's ability to experience personal dignity and social inclusion.¹

Moral objections to social assistance such as those espoused by Hess and O'Reilly are not only found in popular culture, they are also deeply rooted within western political thought. They continue to be deployed to argue against unconditional poverty-reduction mechanisms, such as the negative income tax and the universal basic income, both of which would ensure that a guaranteed level of income is de-coupled from work.² Even in a time where technological innovations are progressively making certain forms of labour obsolete (as demonstrated by Byrnjolfsson & McAfee (2011)), and threatening to drastically increase unemployment (Acemoglu, 2017), these objections continue to appear in popular discourse, political discourse, and even in the work of philosophers and economists who consider themselves classical liberals (e.g. Henderson, 2015; Whaples, 2015). There are, of course, concerns about the feasibility and potential adverse social or economic consequences of such mechanisms, such as budgetary constraints and the consequential need to increase taxes, the threat of capital flight if corporate taxes are increased, excessive inflation due to increased spending power, and decreased incentives for innovation, hard work, and investments due to diminished financial returns (e.g. Flassbeck, 2017; Zamora, 2017). However, this thesis is concerned specifically with the normative discourse of desert; policy analysts such as Forget (2011) MacDonald (2016), Sri-Kumar and Sohaili (2017), and Straubhaar (2017), amongst others, have addressed the practical concerns with regards to guaranteed income mechanisms.

While some might argue that the jury is still out with regards to the merits of guaranteed income, in this essay, I assume its overall utilitarian benefits. I assume further

¹ My idea of a good life is inspired by Amartya Sen's (2003) "capability approach" to human development and relates to substantive choice and social dignity. I elaborate on this concept in greater detail in Chapter 4 (see page 24-25).

² This program involves income transfers to ensure that no one's income is less than is enough to meet basic needs and actually above what a living wage would be. People's income begins not at \$0, but at a decent standard of living. Various particular schemes include the negative income tax, which has a means-tested element and a phase-out scheme (Linke, 2018a) and universal basic income, which is granted to all everyone, regardless of income (Linke, 2018b), these are particular policies, but they are based on the same normative principles.

that the practical barriers to redistributive taxation can be surmounted.³ This allows me to restrict the scope of my analysis to normative and ideological obstacles.

Moreover, the positive case for guaranteed income as an expansion of freedom and a solution to the injustices of capitalism has been persuasively argued by Phillippe van Parijs (e.g. 1997) and Karl Widerquist (2013), and its related norms can be traced to Amartya Sen (2003) and John Rawls (1999/1971). What I'm more interested in this thesis are the arguments *against* the normative foundation of guaranteed income policies: viz., the conceptions of desert that furnish *moral objections* to guaranteed income, the normative framework on which economic distribution is justified, and the way in which these normative frameworks are embedded within relations of power. The *ideological* aspect of opposition to guaranteed income (i.e. the way it's used to support particular interests) depends on its moral basis being obscured and misrepresented by the normative claim that benefits can *only* be deserved on condition of work.

Therefore, in this essay, I contend that we need to rethink – and clearly articulate – the conceptions of desert that guide political praxis with regards to the distribution of benefits in society. So, I challenge the idea that those who do not work are undeserving of a good life. This will not involve a sociological study of political attitudes towards social assistance and guaranteed income (although I will note some of these in passing). Instead, this is a philosophical essay that interrogates the coherence and normative force of the work-based conceptions of desert that give rise to such ideas. It also offers an explanation for their persistence by demonstrating that they reflect relations of power and secure different loci of influence.

I will argue that conceptions of desert that are based in the work ethic suffer from philosophical incoherencies and hold far less normative force than often assumed. Moreover, in this essay, I assume that in advanced post-industrial societies such as the United States and Canada, goods and wealth are abundant, and, as noted above, that they can be redistributed to some extent without significant adverse economic consequences. In this context, whatever coherence and rationality one could grant to these moral objections is further thrown into question due to their anachronistic character. They

³ A recent study by the IMF offers some support for this assumption (see below, page 32).

previously held a certain contextual rationality; however, they are not relevant to this post-industrial context. As such, it is a fundamental normative error to make such a strong connection between “desert” and “work” in a context where opportunities for employment are scarce,⁴ yet goods are abundant, although unequally distributed.⁵ Doing so means applying ideas that had a measure of contextual rationality in prior modes of production but have lost this contextual rationality when applied to market society, particularly in our contemporary context. In making this argument, I am of course taking the position that not all philosophical ideas are timeless and that some can indeed be anachronistic.

To briefly illustrate this argument, let us return to the story of Tyler McGlothlin. If Tyler lived in a small medieval farming community in which everyone had access to land, but goods were scarce – and even a small number of people neglecting work could lead to a disastrous economic outcome for everyone – he would, quite reasonably, appear wilfully idle and undeserving. He would have a clear opportunity to work, and the productive capacity of the community would not be large enough to support those who did not contribute to the material output. The community, therefore, would have a moral argument for sanctioning his behaviour by restricting the level of food they gave to him to the minimum he required to live, or perhaps even denying him food entirely. And, these *undesert* claims would hold substantial normative force because, one the one hand, he would have the opportunity and ability to work but would be refusing to do so, and on the other hand, community members could not provide for him without jeopardizing their own welfare and the welfare of the overall community.

However, as we know, Tyler lives in a post-industrial capitalist society wherein employment is scarce. The economy in rural Virginia had grown up around the coal industry. Many rural Virginians, over time, grew to depend on coal for jobs. When this industry collapsed, half of the jobs in the area went with it. Tyler’s father had worked in the coal industry before developing a disability through work-related injuries. He then

⁴ Even if the unemployment rate is relatively low, it is analytically sound to hold employment to be scarce in market society (see below, page 27-28).

⁵ The assumption that goods and wealth are abundant in advanced post-industrial societies is not entirely without basis (see below, page 31).

became addicted to the narcotics he was prescribed to deal with his painful injuries, and eventually ended up in jail on drug charges. Tyler's luck wasn't much better: he was consistently applying for jobs but would never receive call-backs for interviews. Before experiencing unemployment, Tyler had begun studying welding at a community college. But when he crashed his car, he had no way of making the long trip to attend his classes. After dropping out of welding school, he managed to get hired at McDonald's and worked there for some time. But upon missing a single shift – during a snowstorm – Tyler was fired and hadn't since been able to find work (McCoy, 2017a).

Considered in abstraction from context, one might come to the judgement that Tyler is undeserving of a good life. However, judgements about whether or not he is deserving of a good life, and more generally, whether desert should be contingent on work, hold little normative force if they are made in abstraction from concrete social and economic conditions. If we take into account Tyler's contemporary social and economic conditions and his lack of ability to find work or to create his own work (i.e. his lack of means of production), then the idea that he is undeserving must be seen, at the very least, as far more tenuous than we would assume if we did not consider his context. This idea would make some sense in a pre-industrial economy based in agriculture wherein everyone had access to land, but its normative force is drastically reduced in our contemporary context. It is, in a word, anachronistic.

The argument that am making here dates back to David Hume (1896/1748, 485-502). While Hume was not the direct source of my realization in this regard; he made the same contention regarding to justice and property when he argued: “the sense of justice is not founded on reason, or on the discovery of certain connexions and relations of ideas, which are eternal, immutable, and universally obligatory” (496). Rather, for Hume, the idea of justice as the respect for individual property arose out of particular conditions, namely, selfishness and scarcity. In a context in which humans either completely

embraced generosity (496),⁶ or in a context in which there was complete abundance, the idea of justice requiring the protection of property would thus be irrelevant.⁷

Nevertheless, as noted above, philosophical conceptions of desert that attach work to desert of a good life are prominent in western political thought and continue to enjoy influence. There are two main ideas at play in these conceptions. They mutually reinforce one another, and they are often found together; nevertheless, they are distinct and separable. The first is the idea that people deserve wealth because it results from their virtuous value-producing work. From this idea stems the contention that it is unfair to tax hard-earned income in order to provide for others beyond what is minimally necessary for their subsistence. The second idea, which might be seen as the reverse side of the first, was crudely demonstrated above by David Hess: it is the idea that unemployed people and poor people are undeserving due to their supposed wilful idleness, lack of work ethic and lack of personal initiative. This is what I will call *undesert*, and it also remains prominent. These ideas are closely bound together as they both stem from the tendency to attribute to work an inherent ethical value. Regardless of whether or not there is a need for more goods and services production, or a need for more human labour in the process of production (i.e. whether jobs are actually available), working is seen as inherently moral and good, while not working is seen as immoral and bad. Indeed, these ideas form the basis of some of the principal objections that are levelled against guaranteed income proposals.

It is important to emphasize here that I am not making the argument that work-based desert ought to be thrown out entirely. Indeed, the idea that those who work hard deserve more than those who work less hard (and that the latter group, in turn, deserves more than those who don't work at all) still holds a measure of normative force. I'm not suggesting that it cease to be a principle that determines differential remuneration. The same applies to market valuation of labour and to related norms according to which more socially valuable and highly demanded labour creates a desert-claim for higher

⁶ Though Hume held this to be impossible in the absence of complete abundance.

⁷ While abundance of all goods cannot actually be "complete" (mangoes only grow in certain parts of the world), the assumption of abundance of necessities, basic goods, and many non-necessities in advanced post-industrial societies is not all that far-fetched (See below, page 31).

remuneration. While there are weaknesses in these positive work-based desert-claims, I do not claim that they ought to be jettisoned entirely. Rather, I argue that their normative force is limited, and they have remained the privileged moral basis for desert at least in part because they secure power relations. Moreover, countervailing principles (such as those relating to inherent human dignity and the inherent deservingness of people) ought to limit the extent to which work-based conceptions of desert determine the distribution of benefits within society.

I also hope to problematize the attachment of these positive desert-claims to negative desert-claims connecting people who don't work - or whose work is not valuable - with moral perversity and *undesert*. Simply put, work-based conceptions of desert tend to connect positive desert-claims to negative desert-claims (or *undesert*-claims). However, positive desert-claims derived from the work ethic need not imply *undesert* for those who do not work. One might object that this is already the case: *undesert*-claims are almost always underwritten by the concession that the destitute should still receive a level of social assistance sufficient for survival (c.f. Horne, 1990). However, my focus is not restricted to problematizing objections to subsistence-level social assistance. Rather, this essay takes issue with the idea that people who do not work do not deserve benefits *beyond* what is needed for their subsistence (i.e. an amount that might meet the material preconditions that allow for the freedom to live a good life).

The essay is structured as follows: Chapter 2 will review the literature that relates to the topic problematized in this essay, considering sociocultural explanations to the persistence of work-based conceptions of desert as well as related work in political theory and philosophy. Chapter 3 will lay out the theoretical influences and methodology that informed the development of my argument.

The argumentation begins in Chapter 4, wherein I expand upon and fill out my core contentions, demonstrating how work-based desert serves different loci of power in market society. Then, in Chapter 5, I discuss the Protestant work ethic, how it brought about novel work-based conceptions of desert that were radically different to what Max Weber called the "traditionalist" attitude towards work. Here I will attempt to

demonstrate that this new faith in the inherent value of work reflected the shifting power relations of the time, namely the breakdown of feudal hierarchies. In this regard, it served the power of levelling forces while at the same time providing a justification for emerging forms of inequality. Thus, I will attempt to demonstrate the dialectical character of work-based desert: from its inception, it was both an egalitarian norm, as seen in the agenda of the Levellers and radical Protestants, and a normative justification for the new configurations of inequality that were emerging, which can be seen in certain aspects of Puritan thought.

Chapter 6 situates Locke's work-based argument for private property against the backdrop of the Protestant work ethic, discussing the affinities between Locke's political thought and that of the Puritans and the Levellers, discussing its potential to provide normative justifications to egalitarian desert-claims as well as desert-claims of the emerging capitalist class. I also discuss Locke's understanding of poverty, demonstrating how work ethic-based desert is often attached to ideas about the undeserving nature of the poor. I will evaluate the coherence of these two threads of Locke's work-based conception of desert – both in abstraction from context and in relation to the context of the emerging market society of Locke's time – in order to demonstrate how it has limited normative power and how its rationality exists in relation to contextual factors, rather than timeless, immutable principles and judgements. Moreover, this chapter will demonstrate that, although Locke did not intend to condone the property distribution of the emerging market society of early modern England, and although his theory had levelling potential insofar as it provided a basis for critiquing aristocratic privilege, it was nonetheless used to provide a justification for even a sharply unequal distribution of property. As such, its prominence reflected and secured the growing power of the property-owning bourgeoisie.

Chapter 7 discusses the political thought of Adam Smith, demonstrating that, contrary to how he is frequently represented, he was profoundly egalitarian and supported market society in no small part because he believed it would break down traditional hierarchies and allow for substantive economic independence. Therefore, I will demonstrate that to take Smith's thought as support for laissez-faire economic policy in industrial or advanced post-industrial market society, as some have done, would be to

commit “sheer anachronism” (to borrow Skinner’s phrase (1969, 7)). Nevertheless, I will suggest that certain interpretations and representations of Smith’s ideas have gained prominence and persisted because they serve to secure the power relations of market society.

In Chapter 8, I will examine the ideas of John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx with regards to work-based desert, demonstrating how ideas proper to certain political and economic contexts can become dated. To do so, I will contrast the contexts in which Mill and Marx wrote with the context of advanced post-industrial society. This will allow me to demonstrate, in Chapter 9, how work-based conceptions of desert became increasingly anachronistic under industrial market society and lose much of their normative power in post-industrial market society.

Overall, what I have tried to do in this essay, beyond demonstrating the prominence of such ideas within western political thought and challenging their coherence in relation to contextual factors, is to also explain their *persistence* – despite their limited coherence, limited normative force, and their anachronistic quality, by demonstrating how they reflect and secure the power relations endemic to market society. A number of questions come up in relation to this inquiry: what accounts for the development and persistence of philosophical conceptions of desert and merit that attach a person’s deservingness of a good life to their employment status? Why, in spite of the fact that the labour market structurally excludes some people from employment, do we hold onto ideas that judge some people, due to their supposed willful idleness, as undeserving of a share in the social benefits of industrialization that is adequate for living a good life? And finally, why do even egalitarian ideologies tend to hold work as the privileged basis for desert?

2

Literature Review

While there isn't much in the history of ideas that deals with these questions, there are a number of works in political theory that criticize the work ethic and argue that it is anachronistic in today's economic context. Notably, James Livingston (2016) argues that less work and more leisure are critical to saving our economic system and to creating a better society for everyone. Income, Livingston argues, "must be decoupled from work" (xxi) and the "slave morality of abstention and renunciation has outlived its usefulness" (xiv). He advocates a revival of the aristocratic idea that the good life is only possible by the release from necessary labour, insisting that this ideal is now attainable on a wider scale (43). Livingston also traces the philosophical roots of the work ethic to Martin Luther and other figures of the reformation, noting his influence on Hegel. He stresses that it is not only a feature of classical liberal thinkers such as Locke and contemporary conservatives. Rather, Marx, as a student of Hegel, "perfected" the "fundamentalist faith" in the inherent value of human labour, alongside Freud, who did the same in the discipline of psychology (2016, 36). It has grown to permeate the political spectrum since and was an important part of the thinking of figures ranging from Abraham Lincoln to Hannah Arendt (2016, 38).

Kathi Weeks (2011) presents a wide-ranging critique of the work ethic and its effect on politics, arguing from a Marxist feminist perspective for a politics that challenges work's dominance over our lives and its primacy as a marker of worth and morality. She also elaborates a critique of some major strands of Marxist thought – such as socialist modernization and socialist humanism – demonstrating how they have normatively upheld the work ethic.⁸ Weeks' critique of these dominant Marxist paradigms is instructive, and I shall make use of her work, as well as Livingston's, variously throughout this essay.

⁸ Nevertheless, Weeks holds that Marx's ideas on work and desert are more complex and variegated than some of his interpreters' and that his political thought – as well as autonomist and feminist Marxism – can support an anti-work politics that fights for less work and a "post-work future" (2011, 98).

There is also work in political psychology that addresses questions of desert as they relate to the poor and unemployed. As well, sociological work examines the social construction of deservedness and the interplay of these constructions with racial and cultural stereotypes. Although the scope and focus of this work is different in many ways from my own, it relates to some similar ideas, so I will briefly review this work. Furthermore, there is a substantial amount of contemporary philosophical discussion on desert; however, much of this is discussion concerns principles of comparative desert and is carried out in abstraction from real-world political issues and context. As a result, I will limit my review to one example in contemporary political philosophy that more closely relates to my own focus.

Looking first to the literature in political psychology, Applebaum (2001) demonstrates a substantial correlation between conceptions of desert and political attitudes. “Liberal” policies are more likely to be recommended by study participants when the target group are seen to be “deserving”, while “conservative” policies are more likely to be recommended when the target group was perceived to be undeserving. Furthermore, teen mothers, single mothers, and able-bodied men tend to be identified as the *undeserving*, whereas widows with children, the physically handicapped, and the physically ill tend to be identified as the *deserving poor*, because they “do not typically engage in any activities characteristic of the undeserving poor, such as being lazy, unreliable, or abusing drugs or alcohol” (Peterson, as paraphrased in Applebaum, 2001, 428). Furthermore, in an illuminating book-length meta-analysis of psychological research on the Protestant work ethic (PWE), Furnham (1990) notes substantial evidence to suggest a strong correlation between PWE-related traits (such as postponement of gratification, type-A behaviour patterns, belief in personal control over circumstances, need for achievement, moral value in work, etc.) and political affiliation (70), religion (119), parental transmission of PWE beliefs to their children (112), and an unsympathetic attitude towards the unemployed (193). This research demonstrates that pejorative views towards the unemployed (and attitudes with regards to work and desert generally) are socially-embedded and transmitted through socialization.

Furnham’s conclusions present a challenge to the assumed importance of my proposed research, as I am working with the assumption that political philosophy –

particularly the work that rises to prominence – *matters* in that it affects political discourse, the attitudes of politicians, thought leaders, and the overall political culture. If socialization plays a primary role in maintaining and forming social attitudes, and the limitations of our philosophical paradigms are constrained by socialization, then one might infer the effect of political philosophy and related popular discourses in forming attitudes to be fairly minimal, or as resulting from socialization rather than affecting it. Nevertheless, the fact that political attitudes are socially embedded is unsurprising and does not rule out the effect that political theory might have on political action and societal values. In fact, the work of the Christopher Hill in social history demonstrates the plasticity of socially-held beliefs with regards to work and desert, as he shows how the influence of Puritan religious leaders in 17th Century England had an important influence on attitudes with regards to work ethic and desert, propagating PWE values in English society (Hill, 1964).

On a somewhat related note, recent work in sociology examines how conceptions of desert become racialized and interact with public policy: Public policy constructs some racialized and income-based groups as “deserving” and others as “undeserving”; these constructions gain legitimacy, and “differences become amplified, and, perhaps, institutionalized into permanent lines of social, economic and political cleavage” (Schneider, 2005, 2). Furthermore, Schneider contends that “unless challenged by social movements and countervailing public policies, social constructions of deservedness and entitlement result in an “other”—an underclass of marginalized and disadvantaged people who are widely viewed as undeserving and incapable.” She goes on to assert that “marginalized people become alienated from the society as well as from one another. Often, they are unable to recognize their legitimate political interests or take political action that would protect their interests” (2005, 2).

In moral philosophy, much of the discussion surrounding desert is carried out in abstraction from the social and political context, without engaging with more concrete political questions such as whether the unemployed and poor deserve more than they have. Much of this literature doesn’t address desert as it relates to issues such as unemployment (cf. Olsaretti, 2003). Nevertheless, David Miller (1999) offers some important insights. He argues that, although egalitarians are suspicious of desert – which

he defines as the idea that someone deserves a benefit on the basis of an activity or performance (133) - its inclusion within a conception of social justice doesn't preclude a strong role for the principles of equality and need. He thereby exposes the fallacy in the contentions that 1) meritocracy requires that struggling people be left to their own devices, and 2) social assistance policies undermine meritocracy and the desire for recognition according to desert and merit. However, like the other literature cited, his work is largely carried out in abstraction of considerations pertaining to context and does not address *why* philosophically unconvincing ideas persist even as they become anachronistic.

A gap in the literature, of course, remains. Although ideas are socially-embedded and transmitted through various unintentional and intentional means of socialization, it is puzzling that the *philosophical* conception of desert that I have identified would persist in political theory – and as a dominant organizing principle of State policy and action – despite a changing context that is rendering it largely anachronistic and potentially threatening to economic stability in the long-term. Employing the theoretical frameworks discussed below, I will attempt to fill in this gap.

3

Theoretical Framework and Methodologya) Theoretical Influences

In order to understand *why* certain ideas persist while material and social contexts change, one must establish a framework for understanding the relationship between ideas and sociopolitical context. These different theoretical frameworks and ways of thinking about historically-inherited ideas will inform both my methodology and analysis. They include Antonio Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony, as well as Michel Foucault's understanding of the nature of power and its relationship to knowledge. Furthermore, given his explicit focus on the relation between political theory, context, and political action, Quentin Skinner, hailed as the founding father of the Cambridge school of intellectual history, will furnish my theoretical framework with some important insights.

Gramsci is important as he illustrates how the power of bourgeois ideology undermines class consciousness, constraining political action (Crehan, 2016, 51-52). Furthermore, contrary to Marx's claim that bourgeois ideology supersedes and destroys religious ideology (cf. Marx & Engels, 1994/1848, 161), Gramsci highlights how religious ideology persists as an important social force, and actually reinforces bourgeois ideas and sustains capitalism (e.g., Gramsci 1999/1971, 648). He attributes the persistence of religion to the ability of Church leaders to create "ideological unity" between its intellectuals and the masses, noting that philosophies that challenge religion have lacked this ability (Gramsci, 1999/1971, 634-635). From this perspective, while the persistence and change of ideologies and political formations is *ultimately* determined by material forces, the agency, work and initiative of intellectuals (broadly defined), and their ability to organise, propagate their ideas, and preserve or overthrow institutions are also crucially important.⁹ In this light, it is worth asking: might the idea that one must be employed to live a materially dignified life constitute part of bourgeois hegemony?¹⁰

⁹Crehan discusses the relationship between Gramsci's thought and Marx & Engels, addressing the validity of criticisms of economic determinism and teleology commonly levelled against Marxism and whether they apply to Gramsci (2016, 20).

¹⁰ Hegemony, for Gramsci, is ideological leadership that acts as a form of social control causing people to consent to systems of power (Femia, 1981, 24).

Could the currency of the idea that some are undeserving due to their apparent laziness be explained by the fact that it serves the interests of capitalists?

Michel Foucault's departure from a class-based conceptualization of power also provides some important insights on the relation of ideas to their context. He understands power as multifarious relations of force of that are diffuse throughout society, multi-faceted, not-necessarily intentional, and expressed through processes of everyday life. Some relations of force and mechanisms through which they are expressed, however, are colonized by larger forms of domination, such as those resulting from economic interests (Smart, 1983, 81-83). Furthermore, for Foucault "what makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (Foucault, 1977, 119). Relatedly, his term "power-knowledge" encapsulates the idea all forms of knowledge are nested within power relations and are inevitably influenced and constrained by them. Certainly, philosophical ideas related to desert and work would be contained within larger discourses that are produced within power relations.

This insight can account for the fact that industrial workers (and the trade union movement, which is an expression of their power) and white-collar workers – both of which fit the strict Marxian definition of proletarian – have distinct set of interests that are not restricted to those "objectively" determined by their material relation to capital. They may unite alongside capital in seeking state protectionism while not necessarily extending sympathy towards, for example, the rural poor or the unemployed. Therefore, the struggle of *who* deserves *what* is not as simple as a battle by the class-conscious poor (in solidarity with one another) against the rich. Rather, the configurations of such struggles depend on different classes' *conceptions of their own interests* and the tactics and coalitions through which they pursue them. This insight is particularly important for my essay, given that I also problematize Marxist conceptions of desert.

Quentin Skinner is more clearly concerned with the relation between the history of philosophical ideas and their context. While James Tully highlights certain similarities between Skinner and Foucault (1988, 15-16, 24), Skinner's focus is intellectual history

with regards to political theory, rather than scientific knowledge. Key elements of context, for Skinner, are the ideological debates and conventions existing at the time during which any given thinker was writing. Only by interrogating these factors, “dusting off” minor texts of the period, and gaining a deeper understanding of the ideological context of the time, can the historian of political thought ascertain the extent to which a given theorist was “accepting and endorsing, or questioning and repudiating conventions of political debate” (Tully, 1988, 10). Moreover, Skinner holds that ideology legitimizes social action, and that by modifying the “set of terms” that we use to describe and evaluate our own society – as well as the moral connotations we attach to existing terms – we can succeed at “altering its moral identity” (Skinner, 1988, 112). He also interrogates the practical forms of activity that set and hold ideologies in place, determining that 1) “the shifting power relations in early modern society explain, in general terms, ideological persistence and change” and 2) “the alterations in ideological conventions in response to, and in legitimation of, these shifts explain in detail the character the configurations of power relations take on” (Tully, 1988, 23). These contentions suggest an iterative relationship between discourse and power, while also bringing Skinner, as mentioned, in line with Foucault in some respects.

Furthermore, for Skinner, an untrue idea is not necessarily irrationally-held; it may be rational if it is based within a wider set of rational beliefs – in other words, in an intellectual context – that leads a thinker to reasonably believe it to be true. For Skinner, a belief of a historical community or thinker that appears untrue and hence irrational to the historian might well have been perfectly rational in the context of the community or historical thinker. Therefore, it is possible to hold a “false belief in a wholly rational way” (Skinner, 2002, 33). An important task for the intellectual historian, then, is uncovering any elements of context – which include not only social and economic factors, but also the existing beliefs and ways of framing, writing about, and thinking about a given topic – that might underpin and rationalize the seemingly irrational belief under examination. In other words, the historian must determine whether the beliefs under interrogation are ones that “should be suitable ... for them to hold true in the circumstances in which they find themselves” in order to then determine why they were held, and why they persisted (Skinner, 2002, 31). This methodology is similar to

Foucault's archeology of knowledge and his uncovering of *épistèmes*, or "general mode[s] of thinking" that lie behind, and constrain, a range of beliefs, practices and discourses (Gutting, 2005, 40). Nevertheless, Foucault's greater emphasis on relations of power and the productive capacity of power in *producing* discourse is an important complement to Skinner's approach.

I will take these insights from Skinner and Foucault;¹¹ however, my work will involve a very different type of intellectual history. Skinner carries out detailed analyses of particular texts in relation to the intellectual contexts of the periods in which they were written in order to shed greater light on their historical and philosophical significance. He opposes the idea of analyzing an idea as a historical unit of inquiry, deriding such historical accounts as narratives where "the ideas get up and do battle on their own behalf" (1969, 11) noting empirical and conceptual problems that can stem from this type of history. Among the empirical problems is the fact that an idea can carry an entirely different significance for different authors – even if the language employed to talk about it is the same - and that this can be the case even for those writing within the same context, let alone over a vast range of time. The great conceptual mistake in this type of history, for Skinner, is to hold that ideas have an "essential" meaning to which individual writers "contribute" (1969, 38). Therefore, "there is no history of the idea to be written, but only a history necessarily focused on the various agents who used the idea, and on their varying situations and intentions in using it" (1969, 38).

While Skinner's methodological constraints can facilitate an "empiricism of boundless erudition" (Labriola as cited in Femia, 1988, 175), they also place constraints on the critical examination of political thought over time. As Joseph Femia suggests, Skinner's methodology implies limiting historical inquiry to the precise intentional meanings of utterances issued within sets of unique contexts, while not endeavouring to "pursue analogies, make comparisons, identify regularities, and use general concepts" (1988, 168).¹² Following Gramsci, Femia finds valuable a brand of intellectual history

¹¹ Although by doing so, I am likely causing their thinking to "groan and protest", as Foucault did with that of Nietzsche (Foucault, 1977, 53).

¹² Skinner protests that Femia misunderstands his arguments (1988, 232). At the very least, though, Femia, identifies some of the limits of Skinner's methodological focus.

wherein the historian examines historical trends, makes transhistorical comparisons and thereby is able to critically interrogate his own “conception of the world” (Gramsci as cited in Femia, 1988, 174). Conscious of the limitations of what Femia polemically refers to as Skinner’s “austerities”, I will depart significantly from his methodological precepts, all the while incorporating some of his insights. In fact, I will not follow any of the specific methods applied by these thinkers with any great deal of fidelity. I have nevertheless drawn upon their thinking in constructing the methodology described below.

b) Methodology

My approach in this thesis is to situate various philosophical arguments that relate to work-based desert within their material and intellectual contexts, and in relation to the power relations that characterized these contexts. Key historical junctures will be 1) 17th-century England, which allows me to situate the Protestant work ethic within its historical context and better understand the ideas and contextual factors that influenced John Locke’s argument for private property, 2) late 18th century England and America, in which intellectual support for free markets – as seen in the writings of Adam Smith and Thomas Paine, both of whom I will discuss – was mounting, 3) the mid-19th century, in the midst of the industrial revolution, which we allow me to discuss how John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx proposed different solutions to the paradox of poverty in a rich industrious society, and 4) advanced post-industrial society, which will act as a backdrop to discuss various normative ideas related to work-based desert in relation to our contemporary context. I discuss these ideas and thinkers because have all contributed to – or at least upheld – normative principles that underpin contemporary work-based conceptions of desert, namely: the work ethic, the sanctity of private property, the justice of free markets, and workerist critiques of capitalism.

This approach allows me to situate relevant philosophical arguments within their historical and intellectual contexts, showing how they held a certain rationality and secured the power relations that formed the context of the time. While elements of this context have since evolved and changed, I will attempt to demonstrate that these changes have only reinforced the power relations that brought about the idea that the unemployed do not deserve a good life. Even Marxist theory is nested within these power relations, so

I will examine the extent to which this scholarship has adequately challenged notions of *undesert* with regards to the unemployed. This will shed light on why work ethic-based conceptions of desert have persisted despite the fact that the material context has changed such that their anachronism is more clearly revealed and they no longer help to maintain the stability of our political and economic systems.

Moreover, this approach sheds light on potential causes of the persistence of work-based *undesert* despite the fact that it is cognitively dissonant in relation to the contextual factors: In our contemporary context it might seem irrational to believe that people who aren't working are undeserving given the material reality that, under capitalism, there is consistently a portion of the population suffering from unemployment.¹³ This means that they want to work, but they cannot find work. Those who have stopped looking for work are referred to as “discouraged workers”, and common causes of this state of existence are, fittingly, discouragement, (the often well-founded) belief that there are no jobs for them, a loss of self-esteem, and depression (Amadeo, 2018). However, despite the irrationality and the anachronistic character of the belief that people who aren't working are wilfully idle and undeserving, it remains part of our common sense and persists in political theory. Following Skinner (2002, 33), this may be explained by the fact that there is a whole set of moral beliefs and judgements that we have inherited regarding idleness, and based within these beliefs, it might *appear* rational. An appeal to Gramsci's conceptualization of hegemony also helps explain this reality: the historically-inherited idea under scrutiny in my analysis that has immense cultural power and plays a role in upholding notions of meritocracy critical to justifying inequality and capitalist relations of production. Gramsci would perhaps say that it persists despite its incoherence because it legitimizes the institutional power of capitalists, and they intentionally propagate it. Foucault might add that it secures the claims of multiple loci of power throughout society.

My primary object of study is the work of a diverse set of thinkers from the 17th century to the present, including John Locke, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and Karl Marx as well as some of his interpreters. This selection is expansive in terms of the

¹³ For further discussion, see below (page 27).

timespan and the breadth of ideological differences between the thinkers. I do not pretend, however, to have exhaustively exposed the important perspectives on the question of study. Rather, I hope to demonstrate that conceptions of desert that attach desert to work are prominent across a wide ideological spectrum, to question their coherence, to discuss their contextual-specificity, and to ask why they have persisted over time. As well, I hope to explain how these perspectives reflect their contextual relations of power. While the main thrusts of their works are an element of context, I am primarily concerned with their theories as they related to the questions of desert, *undesert*, and work/employment.

To accomplish an effective analysis of this kind, it will be important to draw upon and engage with the rich debate in the secondary source literature regarding these theorists. For example, in the case of Locke, I will examine: 1. the rationality and coherence of Locke's arguments (e.g. Waldron 1988), 2. what he was *doing* (to use Skinner's phrase) by arguing in favour of private property (Dunn, 1969; Macpherson, 1964), and 3. how his claims secured and/or challenged contemporaneous – and subsequent – configurations of power relations.

c) Additional considerations regarding the framework

To further justify this methodological and theoretical framework, I also feel the need to anticipate the objection according to which my argument does not differ significantly from a simplistic (hypothetical) Marxist claim that capitalist ideas continue to enjoy hegemony because we live under capitalism and the dominant ideology is necessarily the ideology of the ruling class. Besides noting the somewhat deterministic character of this claim, a characteristic I hope to avoid in my own account, there are a number of important points to make in response:

An initial response relates to the fact that I have included, within my discussion of the contemporary context, an analysis of the changing nature of the political economies of advanced post-industrial countries such as the United States and Canada. This analysis will show that the hypothetical Marxist claim noted above fails to acknowledge the fundamental changes that IT, automation/robotization, and offshoring bring to the relations of production in advanced post-industrial society. As I will endeavour to

demonstrate more fully, these changes have the potential to increase profit margins in the short term by vastly decreasing labour costs and the need to hire labour in post-industrial economies. However, at the same time, they undercut consumer demand within a critical base of consumers, which can lead to economic stagnation, recession and even crisis.

This predicament demonstrates that, in addition to the antagonistic relationship between labour and capital that Marx identified, there is a concordance of interests between capital and workers in their role as *consumers*: both can be said to have an interest in a well-functioning economy in which people are able to buy things and keep the wheels of the economy moving. If we assume, firstly, that automation, robotization, labour-saving advancement in IT, and offshoring all continue to progress without measures to ensure a decent standard of living for the resulting unemployed and, secondly, that these developments will eventually lead to much higher levels of unemployment,¹⁴ then it follows that the results of technological advancement could be deleterious for both capital and employees, and potentially de-stabilizing for the overall system. As such, these economic changes reveal the increasing anachronism of work-based desert of both the hierarchical and levelling varieties. Ideas related to unconditional desert and inherent dignity, on the other hand, challenge the force of the work-based desert-claims that protrude from multiple loci of power in market society and seek to modify the *épistème* of power-knowledge within which they are nested.

Furthermore, as I have alluded, I will not hold that material forces and the ideology of the ruling class necessarily determine the dominant ideas of a given society, as traditional Marxian analyses might.¹⁵ Instead, I will employ the Foucauldian idea that knowledge is nested within relations of power. Relations of production and economic power play an important role in my analysis, but power can be expressed in numerous forms. Social movements, political parties, propaganda, media, culture, and persuasive philosophical argument are all forms of power. Moreover, following Gramsci, while the power relations that sustain the idea that the unemployed are undeserving still hold and are upheld through hegemony, they can be challenged, and their dominance displaced.

¹⁴ As is predicted below (see page 28-34)

¹⁵ Although some might object that it is a simplification to characterize the Marxian understanding of the relation between material realities and ideas as such.

However, (and this is perhaps where I depart from Gramsci), displacing the dominance of some ideas that secure particular interests in market society need not necessarily involve, or provoke, the criticism and overthrow of the entire structure and all of its ideological baggage. One can hold that, in an advanced society, everyone is inherently deserving of a good life, while still accepting, to a certain extent, a conception of desert that justifies differential levels of material wealth based on differing levels of achievement within what is seen as a capitalist meritocracy.

Overall, Marxism doesn't strike me as a particularly useful paradigm for challenging the attachment of positive work-based desert-claims to work-based *undesert* claims within capitalism. The complete rejection of desert-based distribution in favour of distribution according to needs implicit in Marx's famous statement in *Critique of the Gotha Program* isn't compatible with market society and discounts the idea that some people would rather work until sundown each day in order to earn more money and enjoy more material rewards, while others – to use Nozick's example (1974, p. 170) – might prefer spending time looking at sunsets, an activity which requires no money.

Therefore, in the absence of a major shift in power relations that would facilitate a vastly greater socialization of society's material benefits – or clear evidence that this would lead to a positive outcome – we can still attempt to modify the significance we attach to “deserving” in order to weaken 1) the idea that desert should be contingent on work, and 2) the attachment of “idle” to moral perversity, in order to construct to a more sophisticated *épistème* of discourses, conceptions and ideas relating to desert, work ethic, and income.

d) Practical relevance and limitations of this project

I believe the framework and the plan outlined above presents a logical path to address my research question. However, a major limitation of this approach is that my causal explanation cannot be proven using methods of “hard”, positivist political science. The strength of my conclusions will, therefore, depend upon the logical strength of my argument and the coherence of my analysis. Nevertheless, the question I have identified deserves to be addressed, and resides properly within the academic jurisdiction of

political science, somewhere in the nexus between political theory and intellectual history.

While the resulting analysis may be somewhat relevant to other societies, I believe it is particularly relevant to advanced, English-speaking, post-industrial societies wherein class coalitions (between the industrial working class, small-business owners, and rural inhabitants) did not emerge and lead to a high level of social solidarity between different social strata and consequential wider social safety nets.¹⁶ Conversely, its relevance may be more limited in societies with more generous welfare states and with higher levels of social solidarity. The reader will also notice that my choice of thinkers is decidedly Anglo-centric. Since I will discuss the influence of Puritanism and the propagation of the Protestant work ethic in England as an element of context, I feel it makes sense to limit the scope of analysis in this manner.

¹⁶ As demonstrated by Esping-Anderson in his discussion of the development of more expansive welfare states in Scandinavia versus the more limited welfare states of Anglo-Saxon nations (1990, 31-32).

4

Interrogating Work-Based Desert: Its Anachronism and Persistence

The ethic of rational labor, which is of bourgeois origin and which served historically to define the bourgeoisie as a class, is found renewed with fantastic amplitude at the level of the working class, also contributing to define it as a class.

Jean Baudrillard, cited in Weeks, 2011: 59

Automation threatens to render possible the reversal of the relation between free time and working time: the possibility of working time becoming marginal and free time becoming full time. The result would be a radical transvaluation of values and a mode of existence incompatible with the traditional culture. Advanced industrial society is in permanent mobilization against this possibility

Herbert Marcuse, 1974: vii

The next wave of economic dislocations won't come from overseas. It will come from the relentless pace of automation that makes a lot of good middle-class jobs obsolete.

President Barack Obama, cited in Rotman, 2017: para 4

In this chapter, I clarify various terms that are important to this essay and expound the substance of my argument. I demonstrate the link between changes in the political economy and changes in the normative power of work-based conceptions of desert and explain how work-based desert secures relations of power.

a) Concepts

Before diving into the substance of my argument, it is important that I elucidate some of the key concepts underpinning it. This will serve to clarify some concepts presented in the introduction that still may be unclear, and allow the argument to proceed without excessive qualifying interjections:

i. A good life

When I refer to “a good life”, my thinking is inspired by Amartya Sen’s “capability approach” to human development, although my interpretation of it could perhaps be criticized as overly means-focused or economic. Sen sees human life as a set of “doings” and “beings”, or what he calls “functionings”. In turn, the *capability* of a person is derived from the “various combinations of functionings he or she can achieve” (Sen, 2003, 4-5). Moreover, Sen’s claim is that “functionings are constitutive of a person’s being” and that an “evaluation of a person’s well-being has to take the form of an assessment of these constituent elements” (5). A person’s capability thus reflects a person’s positive freedom, that is, his or her ability to choose between a diversity of “ways of living” and to practice “valued activities” (4-5). Sen distinguishes his approach from approaches that focus on commodities, primary goods and, generally, *means* to achieve a good life, rather than *ends*, or the capability of a person to *experience* a good life. Thus, a good life encompasses, for example, the freedom to pursue higher education, personal and social dignity and respect, and physical nourishment, rather than merely a job with an adequate income. It is far more expansive than merely one’s basic needs and the material means to meet these basic needs, which was the focus of a lot of prior development and welfare literature.

Poverty, therefore, is not only a lack of means, but relates to social exclusion. While income can be seen merely as a means,¹⁷ I would argue that a guaranteed income in a wealthy, advanced, market society should be viewed as a key element of capability. More precisely, the ability to spend enough to live a dignified material existence, to enjoy life, to participate in commodified social activities, and to be able to determine independently how best to spend one’s guaranteed income, is a critical part of maintaining self-respect and participation within contemporary society, and key to a person’s freedom to choose different ways of living. This freedom can be contrasted against some more draconian means-tested programs, such as Kansas’s welfare system, which disallows participants from going to swimming pools, seeing movies in theatres, or

¹⁷ Certainly, Sen sees it this way, harkening to Marx’s contention that “rich human need[s]” are far more complex than the evaluative criteria of wealth and poverty employed by political economy (Marx as cited in Sen, 2003, 4).

“spending money in any business or retail establishment where minors under age 18 are not permitted” (Holley & Izadi, 2015). Moreover, it allows a person to refuse work - while still being able to have adequate income for participation and respect within society – for the various reasons one might choose to do so. For example, one might not wish to make more money, there may not be any available work, or one might determine the existing work options to be worse than not working.¹⁸

One might object that income without work would actually *secure* the social exclusion of those without work, rather than facilitating social inclusion. In this regard, there could be something inherently psychologically rewarding to being *needed*, or to producing or selling something socially valuable.

However, I would contend, in response, that the preference for social inclusion through work rather than *without* work reflects the continuing currency of the work ethic¹⁹ and the unquestioned place that work takes as a pillar of social value. As such, this judgement is not grounded in a clear assessment of what it means to feel needed or valued, whether this feeling is *necessarily* achieved through work, and indeed whether all – or even most – workers achieve this feeling through employment. While tenured academics are perhaps more likely experience this feeling through their work, an easily dispensable, desperate, low-income worker does not necessarily enjoy the experience of feeling valued by her employer, customers, or even her co-workers. Rather, this person might feel undervalued, unappreciated, and disempowered, given that she likely has little control over her working conditions and conscious productive activity while at work. She could find that their workplace reinforces feelings of inferiority and social exclusion, but return to work nonetheless, due to the fact that she is structurally *coerced* to work in order to avoid material deprivation and social exclusion outside of work. Indeed, this is one of the central insights that can be derived from Marx’s earlier work on alienated labour (Marx, 1991/1844).²⁰ While Marx’s discussion of alienated labour is attached to the idea that social labour is fundamental to self-actualisation and human flourishing, one

¹⁸ For a more in-depth discussion of the normative implications of refusal to work, see below (pages 95-98).

¹⁹ See below (page 29).

²⁰ For further discussion, see below (page 83-85).

can very easily apply his insights regarding the removal of personal autonomy in the production process to an argument for the right to refuse disempowering work and to seek social inclusion through other means.

Moreover, the idea that someone can *only* be social valuable and achieve social inclusion through productive activity that is remunerated by the market or the public sector is a spurious claim that overlooks the fact that there are plenty of socially valued activities that involve no remuneration, but which people autonomously choose to partake in. Examples of these would be: care for one's family, leadership roles in an online gaming community, or participation in a sports team. Relatedly, the idea that the possibility of material deprivation is a necessary motivating factor to compel humans to create social value, and feel needed and valued by others, ignores the wide array of non-remunerated activities, some of which are commodified, that many humans voluntarily engage in every day. While guaranteed income by no means guarantees that beneficiaries will exercise their expanded autonomy in a manner that increases their social inclusion,²¹ it ensures that everyone has the autonomy to choose different ways of living and of seeking social inclusion, thereby making a good life more accessible.

ii. Scarcity of employment

Despite the fact that, at the time of this essay's completion, the unemployment rate was relatively low in the United States, it is analytically sound to hold that employment in market society is always more or less scarce. This is because the mere fact of the existence of an unemployment rate indicates that there are people who are seeking employment but are unable to access it. Hence, scarcity of employment exists, although the extent of this scarcity varies. This holds without even factoring in the following additional arguments: Firstly, there is a distinction between the official unemployment rate and the U-6 'real' measure of unemployment, which includes underemployed and discouraged workers and is consistently much higher than the official rate. Secondly, unemployment can concentrate in areas where particular industries grew and expanded over time, rendering populations dependent on them before collapsing, withdrawing, or downscaling, and leaving economic devastation in their wake. So, while

²¹ For more on this, see below (page 100-102)

the overall rate of unemployment of a country might be low, scarcity of employment might nevertheless be particularly pronounced in certain regions. Thirdly, employment in many industries is precarious and becomes scarcer during recessions, which tend to recur at least once every decade (Pollock, 2015). Finally, there are relatively able-bodied people who, due to a lack of employment opportunities and economic desperation, claim disability transfers for somewhat painful, but relatively minor and treatable injuries (McCoy, 2017b).

iii. On desert

Therefore, I am interested in addressing the moral objections to the idea that everyone is deserving of a basic level of income regardless of their employment status or lack thereof. Desert, as a philosophical term, can signify claims that someone deserves some benefit on the basis of some action or “performance” - to use Miller’s term (1999, 103). But one could also take the view that desert simply involves claims that someone deserves a benefit simply *on some basis* (i.e. not necessarily on the basis of a “performance”). In a social context in which goods and wealth are abundant (although the distribution of the latter is sharply unequal), but employment is scarce, one could hold – albeit at the risk of sounding tautological – that *everyone* is deserving of an adequate share of the social/material benefits necessary to live a good life, regardless of anyone’s evaluation of their “performance”. The basis for this desert-claim is simply that everyone has fundamental needs that can be sustainably met, and everyone is inherently worthy of having the means to do so. *Insofar as people’s needs can sustainably be met within today’s social context without causing harm to the overall society, they are inherently deserving of having them met.*

Furthermore, if we accept the utilitarian arguments for guaranteed income, then it becomes evident that *more than merely basic needs* can be unconditionally and sustainably assured through direct state transfers. To the extent that it is possible without causing social harm, one could make the argument (as Phillippe van Parijs (1997) has) that everyone is inherently deserving of as much freedom and autonomy in how they participate in society through consumption as is sustainable, with practical fiscal and economic (and one might add – environmental) considerations accounted for. Moreover,

as I will examine in greater detail below, as productivity continues to increase, not everyone must work in order for this to happen sustainably. Indeed, it is a persistent policy challenge to increase employment in some areas and doing so is not necessarily useful or beneficial to the society overall.²² Of course, there are many useful or interesting things to be done, but not all of these are valued by the market, or socially necessary enough to justify State funding. In such a context, it doesn't make sense to say that everyone is inherently deserving of a job that provides them with the means to enjoy a good life. Rather, one could hold that everyone deserves (to be able to enjoy) a good life, regardless of their work. This view provides at once a criticism of existing conceptions of desert, and a new way of thinking about the concept. The work-based conceptions of desert that furnish objections to this particular normative view are what I am interrogating in this essay. Moreover, given that these conceptions of desert conceive desert in a strong moralistic sense, I am using it in this same sense, from which it takes on implications about an individual's worthiness, which I take to be inherent, rather than earned.

iv. The work ethic

The work ethic, on the other hand, is an ethical discourse that holds work to have an inherent moral value and idleness to be a sign of moral perversity. As famously discussed by Max Weber, it is based in ideas that developed during the Reformation, ideas which led to the "ethical sanction for and the psychological impetus to work" (Weeks, 2011, 39). This "ascetic Protestantism" taught that one ought to set oneself to a lifetime of "organized worldly labour" as if God himself had commanded it (Weber, as cited in Weeks, 2011, 39). Weber sets this in opposition to "traditionalism", which he characterizes as a conception of work that treated it as merely and means to concrete finite ends (i.e. meeting one's material needs) (Weber as cited in Weeks, 43). The Protestant ethic, on the other hand, instructed followers to dedicate themselves to worldly labour "*as if* it were an absolute end in itself, a calling" (Weber as cited in Weeks, 44). As Weeks outlines, this ethos became secularized and served as an ideological

²² Not to mention the environmental damage caused by the need to constantly find more things for people to produce.

justification for capitalism, although it evolved to allow for consumerism, rather than merely austerity and very limited consumption.²³ A work-based conception of desert, then, is any conception of desert that is based in the work ethic and holds that people are deserving only because they work hard or produce substantial value. However, this way of thinking has a dialectical quality; it can take on different, opposing, variants and act both as a justification for inequality and as a levelling force.

b) On Post-Industrial Political Economies and the Anachronism of Work-Based Desert

Some might hold that philosophy is timeless, given that it deals with universal, perennial questions that transcend particular contexts. While this may be the case with regards to certain philosophical questions, I take seriously Skinner's (1969) contention that ideas have a particular significance that must be understood in relation to their intellectual context, and I think this concern is particularly relevant when it comes to questions of desert and distribution. I should note, however, that I do not always employ the term "anachronism" in the same manner as Skinner.²⁴ He used the term to refer to the mistake, in intellectual history, of superimposing contemporary debates and concepts onto the meaning of utterances made by thinkers from an earlier time, who either would have held a completely different understanding of the significance of these concepts and debates, or would have not even been aware of them (Skinner, 1969, 8).²⁵ In a slightly different approach, I hold that certain philosophical ideas were rational to hold within a particular historical context; however, as this context changes, they become less persuasive because they are increasingly inapplicable to the changing material and intellectual context.

To illustrate this point in relation to my argument, it is one thing to say that 'he who does not work does not deserve to eat' in the context of a pre-industrial farming

²³ Although Weeks (2017, 39-41) disputes Weber's argument that it played a causal role, referring to Marx's criticism of the primitive accumulation parable in *Capital*.

²⁴ Although, I do use it in similar claim with regards to representations of Adam Smith that support particular policies in contemporary market society.

²⁵ For example, Skinner criticizes attempts to discern whether Marsilius of Padua "had a 'doctrine' of the separation of powers, and if so whether he should be 'acclaimed the founder of the doctrine'" for "the impropriety of supposing that he could have meant to contribute to a debate whose terms were unavailable to him, and whose point would have been lost on him (1969, 8).

community wherein food is scarce, and the survival and well-being of the community depends on everybody working. It is entirely another to say “someone who does not work does not deserve to go out for a nice dinner or to the movies once in a while – he should be grateful he gets to eat at all” in the context of a rich, post-industrial economy in which necessary goods and many non-necessities are abundant, everyone’s needs can be sustainably met, and there are limited employment opportunities available due to structural economic factors. While first statement might seem rational to a member of that community and may indeed have been a socially useful idea for that community to hold, the second statement ought to appear irrational in the contemporary context.

However, one might object that unemployment has always been an unavoidable feature of market society; therefore, the idea that the able-bodied unemployed were undeserving because of their apparent willful idleness became anachronistic as feudal tenure and access to land were progressively eliminated. While scarcity-induced constraints could limit the extent to which the unemployed were provided for, the idea of *undesert* due to unwillingness to work is thus anachronistic within all forms of market society. I accept this contention – the idea that willful idleness is a major cause of unemployment and poverty has always been an anachronistic and normatively weak idea in market society. However, what, this objector might ask, what makes post-industrial market society distinctive?

There are several points to make in this regard. Firstly, many argue that scarcity of goods – particularly necessities - is becoming less and less of an issue (e.g. Sadler, 2016, 51-67; Skidelsky & Skidelsky, 2012, para.31-32; Kaminska, 2012; Chernomas, 1984, 1007).²⁶ Moreover, inadequate consumption – while goods remain abundantly available for consumption – is seen, in the Post-Keynesian paradigm, as the cause of economic stagnation (e.g. Krugman, 2014). More to the point, as far as this essay is concerned, abundant yet unequally distributed wealth is a clear feature of countries such

²⁶ So the argument goes: as industrialisation progressed, abundance of goods increased, albeit unequally, to the point where we are close to achieving, as Keynes predicted, a “post-scarcity society” (Chernomas, 1984, 1007). In this regard, groceries stores throw out food that is still fresh and edible each day rather than sell it below market price (Mancini & Vellani, 2016). And, in the U.S empty homes vastly outnumber Americans experiencing homelessness (Hartman, 2015).

as Canada and the United States;²⁷ taxes could be increased on the top percentile of their income earners, and this group of people would still be very wealthy and keep most of their income (Cohen, 2015). Furthermore, the IMF finds that sharper progressive tax rates can be instituted, within reasonable bounds, without leading to capital flight, reduced investment, or other adverse economic consequences (Elliot & Stewart, 2017). If we assume a post-industrial context in which all of this holds true, then the contention that it is *socially harmful* (and thus immoral) to not work while receiving income becomes cognitively dissonant in relation to contextual realities. The remaining barriers to adequate redistribution for everyone to live a good life, then, are not practical, but rather ideological, weak, and anachronistic.

Secondly, technological unemployment and offshoring may in fact *force* us to rethink the desert-work connection. In this regard, many labour market economists argue that due to these irreversible processes, maintaining high levels of employment – particularly in certain areas – is likely to become an increasingly intractable problem that governments and policy-makers must confront. These processes are argued to have had the effect of stagnating wages, causing high levels of unemployment in some areas and generally leading to more precarious forms of employment. As opposed to such concerns as inadequate demand, they are argued to be material developments over which governments have limited control, and which could drastically reduce the demand for labour in post-industrial economies. Furthermore, it is argued that that post-industrial economies are developing the capacity to maintain high levels of commodity production with a decreasing amount of human labour; in short, human labour is becoming less *necessary*. This contention presents opportunities along with immense challenges looking to the future.

Offshoring involves the movement of investment in goods production from high-wage, industrialized countries in western Europe and North America towards low-wage

²⁷ This contention, of course, assumes the possibility of greater inter-regional redistribution within these national polities, if political, ideological, and normative objections to such redistribution were overcome.

developing countries. Because the cost of production is lower in these countries, profit margins increase (Wolff, 2013, pp. xv-xvi). Wolff states in this regard:

“Many Americans know quite well how cities like Detroit, Cleveland, Camden (New Jersey), and countless others were plunged into decades of economic decline and social collapse in the wake of capital outflows to areas of greater profit. To how many other regions of the United States might similar long-term deterioration be coming? Rising profits for those who benefit from capital mobility versus falling incomes for those hurt by it are basic contributors to the ever-widening inequalities of wealth and income in the United States and western Europe”. (Wolff, 2013, p. xvi)

In Wolff’s view, this is an unrepresented shift in global capitalism; capital is leaving the places that used to benefit from capitalism and taking these benefits with it. The conventional view in the economics profession was that the increased trade that is the somewhat inevitable result of economic globalization would generally bring positive effects; however, while employment levels were high in the 90s, they sagged in the early 2000s, years before the 2008 recession, and import growth from China between 1999 and 2011 led to an estimated employment reduction of 2.4 million jobs (Acemoglu, Autor, Dorn, Hanson, & Price, 2013, p. 4).²⁸

Technological advancements have also caused unemployment and threaten unprecedented disruptions in the future.²⁹ In this regard, there is a growing body of evidence, mostly coming from MIT and Oxford labour market economists, to suggest that the combined effects of offshoring and technological unemployment will render a large portion of human labour in post-industrial societies obsolete, increasing unemployment and inequality³⁰ (e.g. Autor, Dorn, & Hanson, 2013; Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2017;

²⁸ These estimates accounted for confounding variables such technological advancements and the 2008 recession.

²⁹ While the technological unemployment thesis is easy to dismiss through reference to its Luddite roots, it was endorsed by Keynes because he anticipated that machines (instead of humans) would eventually be able to build the machines that produce goods. More recently, it was supported by Nobel Prize-winning economist Wassily Leontief, who in 1983 stated that “the role of humans as the most important factor of production is bound to diminish in the same way that the role of horses in agricultural production was first diminished and then eliminated by the introduction of tractors” (as cited in Byrnjolfsson & McAfee, 2011, p. 6). Following this, there was a wave of scholarship in the 1990s predicting the eventual “end of work”, due to the beginnings of the IT revolution (e.g. Aronowitz & DiFazio, 1994; Aronowitz & Cutler, 1998; Rifkin, 1995).

³⁰ In this regard, the Obama administration’s Council of Economic Advisors (CEA) calculated that 83 percent of jobs that provide remuneration of less than 20 dollars per hour will face a high probability of automation, whereas 31 percent of jobs that provide 20 to 40 dollars per hours in remuneration will face a

Acemoglu, Autor, Dorn, Hanson, & Price, 2014; Autor, Dorn, & Hanson, 2016; Autor & Dorn, 2013; Frey & Osborne, 2013).³¹ Economic historian James Livingston states with regard to these projections that “the measurable trends of the past half century, and the plausible projections for the next half century, are just too empirically grounded to dismiss as dismal science or ideological hokum. They look like the data on climate change – you can deny them if you like, but you’ll sound like a moron when you do” (2016, 3).

Therefore, the relationship between capital and labour, between employers and employees of all industries may be fundamentally changing. “The elasticity of substitution... between capital and labor – between machines and real, live human beings – approaches equivalence” states Livingston with regards to this change. This means that capital doesn’t *need* human labour to fill many different productive roles anymore, it can direct funds towards substituting in machines and robots and save money in the long term. Indeed, this is already occurring in Little Rock, Arkansas, where robots are producing t-shirts that humans formerly produced, drastically reducing labour costs. The Chairman of Tianuyan Garments, the company doing the producing, states in this regard that “around the world, even the cheapest labour market can’t compete with us” (2017, para. 3).

But despite these projected upheavals to traditional labour markets, some suggest that human desires can proliferate in unpredictable ways, lead to new industries, and, along with a state that is highly active in advanced education and workforce retraining, the maintenance of decent levels of employment (e.g. Byrnjolfsson and McAfee). On the

risk of automation, and only 4 percent of jobs that provide above 40 dollars per hour in remuneration are at risk (Executive Office of the President, 2016, 14).

³¹ These economists contend that, as computer science improves the ability of machines to think, significant technological employment is likely to result. Frey & Osborne (2013) argue that two-thirds of existing jobs, including jobs that require “non-routine cognitive tasks, (i.e. thinking) risk being lost to computers and robots within 20 years. Even jobs such as legal research may eventually be threatened as computers become more advanced and can accomplish such tasks better than humans (Byrnjolfsson & McAfee, 2011, 23-24). Other estimates also anticipate the use of robots to proliferate rapidly, leading to a decrease of 0.94-1.76 percent in the employment to population ratio in the U.S between 2015-2025 (Acemoglu & Restrepo, 2017, 37),³¹ which would correspond with 3,061,580 to 5,732,320 more people out of work (based on today’s population ratio).

other hand, a growing body of social scientists and economists (e.g. Straubhaar, 2017; Livingston, 2016; Weeks, 2011; Aronowitz & DiFazio, 1994; Aronowitz & Cutler, 1998; Rifkin, 1995), contend that we need to start the difficult process of thinking about a future with less work and figuring out how to organize our society so that it remains prosperous in the process.³² The latter perspective elicits some provocative questions: what if the technological unemployment thesis is correct? What if human labour is indeed, as Wassily Leontif predicted, becoming a less important factor in production? What if most traditional forms of human labour will become obsolete, rendering large swathes of the population unemployed? What if, as Livingston (2016, xiv) asserts, growth no longer requires net additions to the labour force, and so the value and importance of human labour is decreasing?³³ Would we, then, be *forced* to imagine a society in which a certain level of desert is seen as inherent, rather than contingent on work or value-creation?

If we assume the technological unemployment and post-scarcity hypotheses to be correct, then another *layer of anachronism* is added in advanced post-industrial society: not only does the idea that unemployment and poverty are caused by willful idleness not reflect the structural realities of *any* labour market, in post-industrial economies, human labour may be required for *fewer* and *fewer* forms of production. Therefore, even if people *were* wilfully idle, the idea that this would be socially-harmful – a contention which, I think, accounts for a least some of the moralistic objections to guaranteed income – becomes less convincing.

Of course, the transition to a society with more leisure and less work would not be simple, for, as Keynes states “we have been trained too long to strive and not to enjoy” (1963/1930, 367). Relatedly, as I contend, a major philosophical and political obstacle would be conceptions of desert that attach a person’s deservingness of a good life to whether or not this person works, given how their persistence can be explained by their

³² This idea goes back to Keynes who predicted – almost 100 years ago – that in about 100 years we would be on the precipice of “age of leisure and of abundance” (1963/1930, 367).

³³ This is not an unfounded argument, given that, in the U.S., per capita GDP (World Bank, 2018) has decoupled from labour force participation and prime age labour force participation rates (Krause & Sawhill, 2017, 7).

efficacy in legitimizing and securing power relations. Therefore, *I do not hold that technology will save us*. Rather, considering the sharply unequal power relations within which current technological advancements are embedded, technology poses very real and serious threats, particularly to the powerless people who will likely be most severely impacted by any technological unemployment that occurs. At the same time, however, if the effects of work-based conceptions of desert can be limited, in spite of the power relations that sustain them, then labour-saving technological advancements present opportunities for a world with less onerous work and more leisure, art, music, education, sport, gaming, and hobbies generally.

c) The argument

Conceptions of desert based in the work ethic suffer from incoherencies and have limited normative power. They are also anachronistic in the context of industrialized and post-industrial commercial society. However, they are remarkably prominent across the spectrum of western political thought.³⁴ Indeed, work as the moral basis for desert is upheld– or at the very least inadequately challenged – in some of Marx’s work and in dominant streams of Marxist thought. It can even be observed amongst contemporary progressive liberal economists such as Dean Baker and Jared Bernstein (e.g. Baker & Bernstein, 2013, 94).³⁵

I contend that the prominence and persistence of such ideas within political thought can be explained by investigating the contexts in which they came about and the shifting power relations within these contexts. Their continued persistence can be explained by the fact that they reflect, and secure, contemporary power relations. Of course, a variety of philosophical ideas exist regarding the significance of desert and its relation to work. However, conceptions of desert that hold desert to be contingent on work – and thus hold the unemployed to be undeserving – are predominant. They constitute a form of hegemony (in the Gramscian sense), in that they correspond with and

³⁴Although there are obvious counterpoints, such as John Rawls (1999/1971).

³⁵ Baker and Bernstein state, for example, that “when we have a willing and able worker who cannot find a job because of weakness of the economy, we are denying that person’s desire to realize his or her potential and losing a contribution to the economy and society,” as if maximizing growth and production is of the utmost importance, and as if a person’s potential and value are determined by their contribution to a profit-seeking enterprise!

secure the unequal power relations that characterize preindustrial, industrial, and post-industrial commercial society. However, whereas Gramsci conceived hegemony as ideological leadership by the ruling class, I contend that work-based desert also sustains the power of workers and subordinate classes generally. In this regard, it has been fundamental to socialist claims about the desert of workers and the necessity of communism. Before this, in early modern England, it was indispensable to levelling critiques of the aristocratic exemption from work.

Thus, my argument goes as follows: work-based conceptions of desert maintain their prominence due to the power of the very wealthy (employers, shareholders, business owners, landowners), *and* due to the power of workers, particularly unionized workers and professionals.³⁶ The persistence of work-based conceptions of desert not only reflects these loci of power, but also has the effect of securing power by providing normative justifications for desert-claims. While these various economic classes have distinct, often opposing class interests, they are united in their adherence to conceptions of desert that find their basis in the work ethic, rather than inherent human worth and dignity. This is because both employers and workers derive normative power from the work ethic and work-based conceptions of desert, although they deploy different versions of these. As such, these conceptions sustain and legitimate their structural power.

Employers draw upon the idea of capitalist meritocracy to claim they – or their parents/ancestors – achieved their wealth and power through hard work, so they deserve wealth and power. This provides a desert-claim for what their structural power (as owners of the economy) grants them, namely, far more wealth and privilege than most people, and more private property. This desert-claim is crucial to providing the normative power to justify resistance against redistributive taxation and welfare policy.

Likewise, workers, who draw their structural power from unionization and/or from competition between enterprises for workers, use the work ethic as a normative

³⁶ Professionals constitute a privileged class of workers who are able to level desert-claims on the basis that their work is particularly socially valuable. While their work may be less physically demanding and may not even be considered ‘hard work’, it required discipline and dedication to achieve the requisite educational credentials, is held in high social esteem (in the case, for example, of doctors) and is highly valued in the market.

justification for the pursuit of their material interests, and continue to do so. If hard work and productivity – rather than the inherent dignity and deservedness of all people – is the normative basis for establishing desert, then workers whose work is in short supply and high demand can lay claim to wage increases, improved benefits, and limited taxes on their income. They can improve their socioeconomic standing without supporting those who do not work or who work in occupations that are not highly valued in the labour market.³⁷ At the same time, the use of work-based desert by employees holds levelling potential, as it can provide a normative basis for critiquing the privilege of capitalists who do not have to work at all, but can instead hire people to invest their money and/or manage their businesses, accruing wealth without ever actually working.³⁸ This dialectical quality of work-based desert persists across its multiple historical and contemporary incarnations and is an underlying theme of my argument: if one employs *only* work-based desert in a critique of undeserved hierarchies privilege, they leave unchallenged certain assumptions about the moral value of productive activity that is valued by the market or the state, and these assumptions, when levelled against the vulnerable, can also provide a work-based *justification* for the deprivation of some and the opulence of others.

Moreover, while the nature of unemployment and poverty in post-industrial societies has changed substantially since the Puritans preached the work ethic in early modern England (Hill, 1964), the basic power structure that grants power to employers and skilled workers (albeit far more to the former than to the latter), very little power to the working poor, and almost no power to the unemployed, remains. Therefore, a range of work-based conceptions of desert exist within what we might describe, drawing on Foucault, as an *épistème* that constrains how we think about desert. All of these conceptions, to varying degrees and in various ways, construct some people as deserving (due to their work) and others as undeserving (due to their lack of work). Given the nature of this argument, the focus of my essay is both broad and specific in scope. It is broad because the philosophical conception under interrogation spans a fairly massive

³⁷ Of course, this power is more concentrated in unionized workers and professionals, and more useful for those with secure employment, as they do not need to fear becoming unemployed.

³⁸ For a more complete discussion of this levelling critique, see pages 88-89.

period of history.³⁹ (To be precise, from the 17th century to the present). At the same time, it is specific, because rather than addressing discussions and arguments concerning merit, property rights, desert, and need in their entirety, it focuses on ideas that hold desert of a good life to be contingent on work.

To recap the argument: a range of conceptions of desert persists that are stuck within a work ethic-dominated *épistème*. Within this *épistème*, poverty and unemployment are often individualized rather than understood structurally. “Able-bodied” unemployed people are characterized as “willfully idle” and seen as morally perverse. “Hard working” is seen as a positive trait; leisure must therefore be enjoyed only in moderation. Employment is always good and gainful employment is better, while not working is always bad. It really doesn’t matter *what you’re working for*, whether you’re producing cigarettes or food, so long as you’re working. Although unemployment and poverty are understood structurally within Marxist thought, the work ethic still underpins Marxist conceptions of desert, thereby upholding some of the same assumptions which lead people to see the unemployed and poor as undeserving. The persistence of the work ethic within western political thought can be explained not by its philosophical coherence, but rather by the power relations it stems from and upholds.

I will now discuss the ideas of various thinkers who have normatively upheld, contributed to, and adapted work-based conceptions of desert, and how these ideas reflect the power relations that characterise their distinct historical contexts. Before examining the ideas of Locke, Smith, Mill and Marx, however, I must discuss the moral and religious ideas that gave rise to work-based conceptions of desert, which are rooted in the Protestant work ethic and the ideas of John Calvin and Martin Luther.

In the following chapter, therefore, I will demonstrate the dialectical nature of the work-based conceptions of desert that grew out of the work ethic: they provided a levelling critique of traditional hierarchies, while also providing a novel normative justification for economic inequality. The dialectic I set forth here sets the stage for a theme that underpins this essay, in that it holds true for all work-based conceptions of

³⁹ This is not to say that it did not exist before in a different form, given that the Christian sin of sloth obviously pre-dates the reformation.

desert that I examine: they can provide a levelling argument against undeserved privilege, but they can also serve as a basis for distributive inequality in market society between those who work (and are seen to be more moral and valuable to society), and those deviants who do not.

5

The Protestant Work Ethic

There was 'nothing more disgraceful than a lazy good-for-nothing who is of no use either to himself or to others but seems to have been born only to eat and drink'.

John Calvin, as cited in Beder, 2000: 17

In this chapter I attempt to map out the Protestant work ethic and its iterative relationship with the shifting power relations that characterized early modern England. I demonstrate the dialectical nature of the work ethic that was preached by the Puritans and radical separatist Protestant sects, demonstrating that it had levelling potential, but also provided a normative basis for new forms of inequality. It reflected shifting power relations, challenging the decaying feudal power structure, while at the same time helping to secure the forms of power characteristic of the emerging market society. This analysis will serve as a basis for understanding the work ethic's normative power, and for situating Locke's arguments, which I will discuss in the following chapter. I begin here in order to discuss the moral foundations that gave rise to philosophical ideas related to work-based desert. As well, doing so allows me to historicize and expose the peculiarity of the work ethic by contrasting it with earlier ways of thinking about work. This is important for my argument as a fundamental goal of this essay is to problematize, and provoke a critical interrogation of, ideas that are rooted in the work ethic.

Max Weber is an important thinker in this regard as he draws attention to historical specificity and strangeness of the Protestant work ethic. To this point, Weber argues that there is something rather irrational in the "peculiar idea" of treating work – which could be seen as merely a means to particular material ends (i.e. survival, comfort, or enjoyment) – as a religious calling, and as something that makes one a moral and dutiful religious person. Weeks notes in this regard that, by Weber's account, the Protestant ethic "bestowed on work a new and powerful endorsement" that was very useful in the reformation of attitudes to suit the capitalist mode of production (Weeks, 2011, 39). While Weeks is skeptical of Weber's claim that Protestantism played a causal

role in the development of capitalism, she holds his analysis to be useful in explaining and “defamiliarizing” the modern attitude towards work (2011, 42).

Crucially, Calvinist and Lutheran attitudes towards work stood in stark contrast to earlier ideas regarding work, or what Weber referred to as traditionalism. Traditionalism was characterized by an orientation to work that treated it as merely a means to “concrete and finite ends” (Weeks, 2011, 43). This orientation was held by those who preferred working less and by Weber’s account, stubbornly resisted the new Protestant work ethic. Such resistance was, for Weber, “the most important opponent with which the spirit of capitalism, in the sense of a definite standard of life claiming ethical sanction, has had to struggle” (Weber as cited in Weeks, 43). Indeed, from a traditionalist perspective, willingly living for work rather than working merely for enjoyment and leisure *outside* of work, seems rather irrational; it involves a “confounding of means and ends, ‘where a man exists for the sake of his business, instead of the reverse’” (Weeks, 44; Weber as cited in Weeks, 44).

Of course, “sloth” as a deadly sin was always a part of Christian doctrine; however, Protestant thinkers brought a new weight to this idea by emphasizing the moral and religious duty to labour. The idea of a “calling” is unique in this respect as it imposes a positive worldly duty from God to fulfill a task he has set out. This idea can be seen in thinking of both Martin Luther and John Calvin, and it led to a particularly disdainful attitude towards those who didn’t work. In this regard, Luther attacked what he considered to be the parasitic nature of monks, friars, and beggars, given that they lived off the work of others, and argued that the religious work of the monks and priests deserved no special status or influence. Calvin, likewise, condemned laziness, and argued that worldly work had an inherent moral value (Beder, 2000, 14). As a result, he saw unemployment as a vice, as evidenced by the epigraph of this chapter (Beder, 17). As Weber contends, Calvin’s view of predestination had an “extraordinarily powerful” psychological effect in supporting these claims: since the individual’s fate in the afterlife was predetermined but unknown to him, commitment to work was emphasized in order to “assuage the anxiety produced by such uncertainty and to strengthen one’s confidence in being among the worthy elect” (Weber as cited in Weeks, 2011, 45). The flip side of this

emphasis on the moral value of work was that idleness came to be seen as stemming from some moral flaw that existed in individuals who were not among the ‘chosen’.

Relatedly, whereas Catholics believed that all humans were imperfect and preached the value of charity, many Protestants, following Calvin, believed that sinners could not be saved and deserved no charity. Rather than taking into account the structural factors causing their idleness, Luther and Calvin viewed their state as a sign of individual moral perversity, and “mercilessly criticized” them. Thus, their followers viewed the swathes of poor people who, displaced by changes in feudal land tenure systems, flooded cities and towns but could not find work, as sinners (Beder, 2000, 17). Relatedly, as Christopher Hill highlights, while literature ‘exposing’ deceitful beggars appeared in the 17th century in both Catholic and Protestant countries in order to “soothe the consciences of the wealthy” (268), the idea that idleness was voluntary wickedness was mostly held by wealthy Protestants. Of course, the extent of Protestant suspicion of the poor and aversion to charity was likely exaggerated by Catholic propagandists (Hill, 1964, 265-268)); however, there is clear evidence that in England, after the reformation, “thought about charity was changing rapidly... to the detriment of the poor” (Hill, 1964, 268).

Indeed, Hill demonstrates that the work ethic was adopted in England by religious followers of Calvin and Luther who came to be labelled ‘Puritans’. He highlights the fact that the term ‘Puritan’ was originally a pejorative political nickname, used to malign one’s political and religious opponents and to criticize everyone from advocates of anti-Spanish foreign policy, to Church reformists, to Church separatists, to someone who was “naturally covetous of his purse” (Hill, 1964, 23). At a certain point, “Puritan came to be used to describe almost any opponent of the Court” (Hill, 1964, 27). However, the term was subsequently reclaimed and used to designate men of principle (Hill, 1964, 21, 27-28). Social attitudes associated with Puritan religious leaders and their followers were a belief in the moral value of work (124-144), an emphasis on personal and religious discipline (219-258), suspicion of beggars and vagabonds as well as reticence towards charity and aid to the poor (259-297).

As Hill (1964, 124-144) demonstrates, their views and propaganda played an important role in changing social attitudes towards work, which then facilitated the development of new forms of disciplined labour under capitalism. Indeed, where

economic conditions permitted, there were many examples of voluntary underemployment in the 17th century. In fact, English society was apparently known for an indifferent attitude towards work and a proclivity for “piping, potting, feasting, factions and mis-spending [of] time in idleness and pleasure”, a tendency that was said to place the country at an economic disadvantage vis-à-vis its neighbours (125). In this context, the Puritans were indispensable in hegemonic attempts to “adapt Christian morality to the needs of a population which was being steadily driven from its old feudal status into the untried conditions of competition between man and man in an increasingly commercial and industrial society under a money economy” (Haller as cited in Hill, 1964, 127). Whereas, in agricultural society, labour was intense but only for short periods, organized in “seasonal fits and starts [and] dominated by natural forces”, labour in market society required “prolonged and consistent effort”. So, the ideological system promoted by the Puritans, which constructed it as a “social duty” served to legitimize and secure labour relations in this context (Hill, 1964, 128-129).

Not only did Puritanism help transform attitudes towards work, but it was also “deeply rooted in the English society of its day”, reflecting the “the needs, hopes, fears and aspirations of the godly artisans, merchants, yeoman... who gave their support to its doctrines” (510-511). Indeed, Hill demonstrates in this regard that Puritanism was particularly appealing to small employers and self-employed men, because, for these people, hard work could potentially “make all the difference between prosperity and failure to survive in the world of growing competition” (1964, 134). Although Puritans were commonly men of (at least some) property and distinguished themselves from Levellers, who some regarded as “lovers of anarchy” (Hill, 1964, 28), both groups subscribed to work-based conceptions of desert. Moreover, as Anderson (2017, 12) demonstrates, they reflected similar shifts in power relations.

In this regard, the Protestant work ethic was not only a force that trampled the destitute. Indeed, Livingston contends that it “was a leveling, democratizing attitude and social force. It served as a critique of aristocratic exemption from necessary labor because it stated that everybody had to justify their consumption of goods by their prior production of value – everybody” (2016, xi).

Anderson concurs, although she holds that Puritans were more conservative than the “radically democratic” (2017, 12) religious sects associated with the Levellers, a contention with which Hill seems to agree (1964, 28). Contextualizing egalitarianism before the industrial revolution, Anderson reminds us of the social order of early modern England against which Levellers, religious dissidents, and other egalitarians were rebelling. Hierarchies pervaded social life, nearly all people had superiors, and these superiors held “nearly unaccountable discretionary authority to rule their lives” (2017, 9). In this regard, the Church and the Guilds both held immense authority over their members lives, censoring them, controlling their conduct, and even operating their own court systems and jails. And the ideologies that rationalized these hierarchies – the great chain of being, patriarchalism, and original sin – prevented their critical examination. In this context, the Levellers’ support for property rights and free trade was just one part of a larger program of liberating individuals from these “interlocking hierarchies of domination and subordination” (2017, 8).

In this same vein, Anderson contends, drawing on the historical work of Christopher Hill in *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972), that the rise of “masterless men”⁴⁰ brought about by economic changes – such as enclosures – undermined arguments that legitimized authority by appealing to the great chain of being, as these explained why subordinates should obey their masters, but couldn’t account for people “unlinked from the chain of authority” or prescribe how they ought to lead their lives (2017, 11). Moreover, changes brought about by the Reformation had undermined traditional religious authorities by establishing a direct link between the believer and God. This led to the proliferation of lay preachers and “radically democratic” – and even somewhat feminist – sects, such as the Baptists, Quakers, Ranters, and Fifth Monarchists (2017, 12).⁴¹ Thus, in the era of the Levellers, support for private property and free trade was directed at monopolies enforced by the state and often attached to challenges to the Anglican Church’s religious control and the King’s patriarchal claims to authority (13).

⁴⁰ The fact that these men were masterless, however, in no way indicates that their material conditions had improved, as both Anderson and her critics highlight (e.g. Hughes, 2017, 82). In fact, in terms of economic security, there were more winners than losers, and many entered into a condition of outright destitution.

⁴¹ In addition to the more moderate Presbyterian groups, who wanted to reform the Church of England by instituting “governance by elders” and ousting the Anglican bishops.

The principal advantage of property rights and free trade, from this perspective, was that it facilitated opportunities for personal economic independence – for men and women to exist without masters – by attacking the power of monopolies and guilds. The Levellers contended that these institutions exercised power in a way that placed people “in a condition of vassalage” and reduced them to “servility” (Johnson as cited in Anderson, 2017, 15). Anderson summarizes her argument as follows:

In the seventeenth century, egalitarians supported private property and free trade because they anticipated that the growth of market society would help dismantle social hierarchies of domination and subordination. State-licensed monopolies were instruments by which the higher ranks oppressively governed the middling and lower ranks. Opposition to economic monopolies was part of a broader agenda of dismantling monopolies across all domains of social life: not just the guilds, but monopolies of church and press, monopolization of the vote by the rich, and monopolization of family power by men. Eliminate monopoly, and far more people would be able to attain personal independence and become masterless men and women. Even those who remained servants would gain esteem and standing through enhanced income and bargaining power with respect to their masters. (2017, 17)

Thus, we can see that, although the Protestant work ethic did lead to a suspicious, uncharitable attitude towards the those who didn't work, it reflected the shifting power relations in early modern England by critiquing traditional hierarchies and the aristocratic exemption from work, and by legitimizing the increasing power of merchants and masterless men against the decaying feudal order. In the Protestant ethic and the class of masterless men, we can see the birth of modern work-based conceptions of desert, which clearly attach the idea that work – rather than assigned place within a hierarchy – creates a desert-claim for a good life⁴² to the idea of *undesert* for those viewed to be wilfully idle.

Thus, in the process of attacking existing hierarchies, seventeenth-century egalitarians established a new basis for inequality: namely, the work ethic. While this conception of work has become secularized, it has lost none of its force. Weeks states in this regard that “the value of work, along with its centrality to our lives, is one of the most stubbornly naturalized and apparently self-evident elements of modern and late, or postmodern, capitalist societies” (Weeks, 2011, 43). The effect of the work ethic on how

⁴² Although this was associated with personal dignity and wasn't necessarily attached to material abundance.

we think about desert is a fundamental theme of this essay, and this effect can be seen in each of the authors I review below.

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the religious foundations of the work ethic, its peculiar attribution of inherent moral value to labour, its designation of work as an end in and of itself, and its dialectical character, making it both a levelling force and a basis for inequality. In the following chapter, I demonstrate that Locke's philosophy, and particularly his arguments justifying private property and explaining poverty, were heavily influenced by these ideas. Similarly, to the Puritans and radical Protestants, his ideas held egalitarian potential, while at the same time providing a novel normative basis for inequality. They also reflect the shifting power relations of the emerging market society of his time and served to level to secure the desert-claims of emerging bourgeoisie, protect their wealth against redistribution in favour of the poor, and secure the property and labour relations of market society generally.

6

The Right to Private Property and Poverty as Moral Perversity

The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, bethought himself of saying, this is mine, and found people simple enough to believe him, was the real founder of civil society.

Rousseau, 1973/1754: 76

The growth of the poor must therefore have some other cause, and it can be nothing else but the relaxation of discipline and corruption of manners.

Locke, 1697: 1

a) Introduction

In this chapter, I examine Locke's arguments regarding the legitimate origin private property through labour, as well as his understanding of poverty, because these are fundamental aspects of contemporary work-based conceptions of desert. Indeed, the strategy of appealing to work-based desert as a means to uphold the inviolability of private property persists (e.g. Henderson, 2015; Whaples, 2015), along with the idea of the undeserving poor (Wise, 2018). Relatedly, I will demonstrate that while Locke's political thought held egalitarian potential, it offers a theoretical basis for a work-based conceptions of desert and *undesert*, and thus a normative justification for inequality and poverty. Moreover, Locke's ideas reflect the growing power of merchants, the continuing power of landowners, and the continued lack of influence by paupers. I suggest in this regard that, while Locke's theory suffers from incoherencies, it gained prominence because it secured (and continues to secure) these power relations.

This analysis allows me to demonstrate that the idea that work creates both a desert-claim and an inviolable rights-claim to private property is an integral part of a work-based conception of desert. It also allows me to demonstrate how the idea that the supposedly perverse and undeserving moral character of the poor justifies their deprivation and forms the basis for *undesert*-claims against redistribution.

While it was not Locke's intention to condone capital accumulation (Dunn, 1969) and his arguments present a challenge to the absolutism and traditional justifications

aristocratic privilege (Anderson, 2017), he also justifies the appropriation of private property and historical entitlement to property (Waldron, 1988) and frames the poor as undeserving due to their supposed moral perversity (Vaughan, 2009). Moreover, through Locke's argument, his intended audience (Whig merchants and the rural squirearchy), could justify their material wealth and secure their right to private property – inherited or personally earned – while still endorsing a theory of politics that allowed for revolution and challenged royal authority (Waldron, 1998, p. 148).

b) Locke the Leveller?

However, Locke's ideas, as John Dunn (1969) decisively demonstrates, were deeply influenced by Calvinism which, as we've seen, was a dominant thread of Protestant thought. Dunn demonstrates that Locke's political theory was derived from a clear set of theological commitments, and ought to be viewed as "the elaboration of Calvinist social values, in the absence of terrestrial focus of theological authority and in response to a series of particular challenges" (259). These challenges were presented by Filmer's argument for absolutism and the unlimited royal prerogative and the "Popish" threat presented by the prospect of James, Duke of York's accession to the throne, which led to the exclusion crisis (45-47), to which Locke responded with an argument for private property and a "theoretical proclamation of the ultimate right of revolution" (48). There is thus a clear connection between the Calvinist notion of work being a "calling" (by steadfastly pursuing one's calling, one is accomplishing God's will) and Locke's ideas on labour and property. Relatedly, Anderson (2017, 16) argues that there are some "profound affinities" between Locke and the Levellers, noting that his constitutional principles – popular sovereignty, a nearly universal male franchise, equality under the law, equal representation of districts, and supremacy of the House of Commons – are all Leveller principles.⁴³

From this perspective, then, Locke should not be viewed as an apologist for capital accumulation, as Macpherson holds. In this regard, Dunn critiques Macpherson's

⁴³ It should be noted that there is actually significant debate over the extent to which Locke supported some of these principles, particularly his views on the franchise. While Jacqueline Stevens (1996) - the source Anderson cites in support of her claim - interprets Locke's support for expanded suffrage generously, Waldron asserts that "Locke was by no means committed to political democracy as a matter of principle" (2006, 197).

view that Locke intended to endorse the unequal distribution of property of his time, taking Macpherson's inferences to task by noting other places in Locke's writing where he explicitly refutes the views that Macpherson attributes to him. For example, for Locke, the rich are usually morally corrupt while the virtuous are likely to stay poor, whereas Macpherson would assert that Locke held the opposite view (1969, 217). However, Dunn's critique of Macpherson only modifies Macpherson's account, rather than disproving it; he is only able to demonstrate that it wasn't Locke's *intention* to condone emerging property relations or class structures, not that this wasn't the result or impact of his work (Moore, 1970). Indeed, as I attempt to demonstrate below, Locke's argument for private property can usefully be thought of as a work-based theory of desert, and the dialectical quality of work-based desert provides a normative basis for both the levelling argument (i.e. removing the political privilege of the aristocrat elite) and the inequities of nascent capitalism (by legitimizing the unequal distribution of wealth).

So Macpherson's contention that Locke's ideas correspond with, and legitimize the features of, the emerging market society of his time still stands, although his ideas about Locke's intentions are not credible.⁴⁴ Although one might agree with the goal of limiting royal prerogative, it is important to distinguish between the intention of an argument, the content of the argument itself, and the power relations it might secure. Certainly, as we shall see, his argument for private property and his views on the causes of poverty have the effect of providing an intellectual justification for the unequal distribution of wealth and for limitations of the poor's claims to the wealth of the rich.

Moreover, the idea that Locke's Calvinist beliefs protect him from the charge of endorsing individualistic property relations is not clearly substantiated by the Calvinist doctrine itself. In this regard, as we've seen, Puritan thought (which was influenced by Calvinism), modified attitudes towards labour to encourage disciplined labour and meet the needs of the emerging market society (Hill, 1964, 124-144). Moreover, Hill contends that Puritanism (and the social changes that accompanied it) had indirect effects on the

⁴⁴ James Tully (1980) also attacks Macpherson's view, providing a far more radical re-interpretation of Locke, painting him as something similar to a contemporary progressive liberal. He asserts that private property, for Locke, did not exist in the state of nature, and being a creation of civil society, could be redistributed for the public good. However, his interpretation has, I think, been decisively refuted by Waldron (1988: 156-158, 198-200, 220-222, 225-241).

attitudes of aristocrats towards labour. This caused increased industriousness (of a sort) in even the highest circles, to the effect that “by 1690 Locke could assert the origins of property in labour with no more danger than when he asserted the origins of government in the people: it was as though such things as Levellers and Diggers had never existed” (1964, 144). Therefore, while finding the normative basis for property in labour was potentially threatening to aristocratic interests, on Hill’s account, it was less subversive than one might assume, given the shift of power from the aristocracy to the bourgeoisie, and the increased industriousness of the upper classes. Moreover, the argument itself has the potential to legitimize new forms of inequality, as we shall explore in greater detail below.

c) Locke’s argument for private property

As discussed earlier, work-based desert, as understood in the worldview stemming from Puritanism, can usefully be thought of as one conception having two faces, like a coin. On one side, there is desert, which stems from hard work. On the other, of wealth and its resulting enjoyment as a reward for result of hard work, then someone who is idle, lacking the basis for this hard work, is seen as undeserving of this same reward. If it is further asserted that I deserve *all* of the benefits that I earned as a result of my work, and that I cannot be made to part with any of them, and we exist in a system where benefits can only be appropriated as a result of the work of individuals, then the resulting implication is that the idle person deserves nothing. If he gets anything to survive on, it would be due to my pity and charitable nature, but he cannot be said to *deserve* it, as he did nothing to earn it.

This is why discussions surrounding private property are an important part of any critical examination of desert: the idea that one deserves *all* of the fruits of one’s labour and, as such, can lawfully exclude others from these benefits, is a critical aspect of work ethic-based conceptions of desert. It provides what we might call the *positive* side of the conception, whereas criticizing laziness provides its negative side (what I call *undesert*). In order to problematize this claim, private property must be denaturalized and its basis interrogated. Therefore, we must, following Jeremy Waldron, recognize the “*strangeness* of the idea that private property – this regime dependent as it is, in the real world, on the arbitrary contingencies of fortune and endowment – could somehow be regarded by

theorists in the Enlightenment tradition as one of the fundamental and imprescriptible rights of man” (1988, 133). Furthermore, we must examine the extent to which the argument for private property is actually philosophically coherent and persuasive. If we can establish that it is not, in fact, overly persuasive, then we can dispense with the idea that it has persisted because it is simply the most philosophically sound distributive principle that humanity could come up with, and move forward in the argument.

Following Waldron, I have chosen to focus on Locke’s argument for private property because “no modern philosopher of rights” has discussed private property as a special right on the same level of depth as him (1988, 14).⁴⁵ One might hold the view that Locke produced a strong, timeless, argument for private property as a special right that can only be infringed to provide for the survival of those in need. However, Waldron⁴⁶ decisively demonstrates that this argument, even when put forth in its most complete form in the *Second Treatise*, is actually rather incoherent. I do not have space to go over the minutiae of his argument here, but I will attempt to provide its main points. He briefly outlines Locke’s conception of private property, which consists in an exclusive right to the use and control of something, provided it is not food being allowed to spoil. He also outlines Locke’s conception of original communism, in which everyone has a claim-right to the resources of the earth but is also able to “exclude the common right of other men’ in relation to particular resources, provided that she does not infringe on another’s right to the means for basic subsistence (Locke as cited in Waldron, 1988, 155). Waldron then examines the various reasons that Locke provides for why and in what circumstances an individual ought to obtain a special right to private property.

The first reason Locke provides is that no needs could be satisfied by natural resources without their appropriation by individuals. This argument is very weak because, although food must inevitably nourish individuals and be digested exclusively by individual bodies, the individual property that this argument attempts to establish

⁴⁵ A “special right” rises out of an event, relationship, or transaction and it is limited to the parties involved, whereas a “general right” is one that any human “capable of choice” has, regardless of any particular transactions, relationship, or contingent events (Waldron, 1988, 106-107). Waldron also examines Hegel’s arguments for private property, which amount to general rights-based arguments, but this line of thinking is not as closely related to the concerns of this research.

⁴⁶ It should be noted that Waldron is concerned with normative, rights-based arguments rather than utilitarian arguments that attempt to provide an economic/efficiency basis for supporting private property.

“does not involve any right to choose which of a number of possible uses shall be made of a food object” (Waldron, 1988, 168). Everyone could be fed without any individuals having this discretion. Moreover, this argument only applies to food, and perhaps clothing; everything else could be shared with people’s basic needs being adequately met. While Locke makes some utilitarian, efficiency-based arguments relating to human needs, these don’t take into account the fact that land could be cultivated while held in common. Rather, Locke seems to hold that land must be privately held in order to be cultivated, without even considering that it could be held in common and cultivated (Waldron, 1988, 170). Moreover, even if this was true, it wouldn’t rescue the overall argument from its flaws.

Another argument advanced by Locke, known as the “labour theory of appropriation” is that by labouring on a section of land previously held in common, the individual gains the right to appropriate it (Waldron, 1988, 176). This theory presents the immense challenge of explaining how a mere action of the body over an object is able to limit the rights of others without their consent. Furthermore, it implies that all subsequent labour applied to objects already appropriated can be carried out only under “terms imposed by the owner and usually for his benefit” more than that of the subsequent labourer. Locke attempts to justify this theory through the concept of self-ownership, which states that a person is the owner of his person (which, for Locke, is a technical term meaning a human’s free and conscious “actions and their merit and thus their labour” (Locke as cited in Waldron, 1988, 179). But the sense in which someone owns one’s labour (i.e. by having control over his or her conscious activity), is very different to the sense in which one owns an object that one labours on, depriving others from the enjoyment of it. Locke thus deforms the concept of ownership used in the first step of his argument in order to establish it as the basis for justifying a different type of ownership (Waldron, 1988, 182-183).⁴⁷ Since his “mixing” labour argument relies on the crucial first step of establishing self-ownership as somehow linked to legitimate appropriation of an external object, the entire theory becomes suspect.

⁴⁷ Although it should be noted that this deformation is not necessarily intentional, as Locke uses an incoherent and fairly plastic definition of property throughout his work, using it to mean both “that property which Men have in their Persons as well as Goods”. At other times, he uses it in a more conventional sense, to mean land and goods (Locke as cited in Macpherson, 1964, 198).

However, Waldron charitably proceeds to examine the “mixing one’s labour” argument, setting aside these difficulties. The argument goes as follows: the individual owns his labour and he mixes it with the object; the object, therefore, contains something the individual owns; the object, therefore, cannot be taken from the individual without his consent; the object, therefore is the individual’s property (1988, 196). After identifying the obvious category mistake in this argument (only objects can mix with objects), Waldron goes on to demonstrate that the phrase “mixing one’s labour” has the logical form of “mixing one’s mixing” which “just seems defective” (1988, 186).

He goes on to counter potential objections to this debunking of Locke’s argument which, lacking space, I will not treat here. This exhaustive treatment of objections to the “mixing labour” theory leaves just the labour theory of value to discuss. Waldron distinguishes Locke’s theory, which is about use-value, from Smith/Marx labour theory of value, which is mostly about exchange-value. He then points out that Locke cannot demonstrate that most of the utility of objects comes from the labour applied to them, which would be the necessary condition for claiming they belong to whoever first labours on them. If Locke could demonstrate this, “then anyone complaining about exclusion by an appropriator can be accused of desiring almost nothing but ‘the benefit of another’s Pains’” (Locke as cited in Waldron, 1988) (Waldron, 1988, 192). However, as his argument stands, Locke cannot justify why “the minimal expenditure of energy by an opportunist” should be a good reason to exclude everyone else from the enjoyment of what would otherwise be natural benefits held in common (1988, 192).

Waldron also considers alternative interpretations of Locke’s arguments. The most plausible and relevant for the present work is how the right to appropriate property can be interpreted as a theory of desert. Waldron contends that this doesn’t accurately reflect Locke’s thought process but notes that this is a common interpretation of Locke’s thought (1988, 201). According to this argument, Locke sees labouring on a common resource as morally meritorious because it demonstrates a direct obedience to God’s command, and therefore is pious (Waldron, 1988, 202). It is also morally good as it contributes to mankind’s wealth and prosperity (II. 36-37). As Locke expresses throughout his writing, productive labouring is the proper course of action for man and is always good, whereas idleness is unnatural and disobedient (Waldron, 1988, 203).

However, if one is to assert that people deserve property on the basis of *all work* this raises a contradiction with Locke's labour theory of appropriation, as the work of a tenant farmer, for example, would not result in him gaining the same property as someone who initially cultivated that farmland in order to acquire it. Waldron notes in this regard that "a plausible theory of desert will not discriminate between the first labour and the second labour expended on a resource in the hard-and-fast way that a theory of appropriation requires" given that both labourers are obeying God's command. Therefore, it is easy to see how Locke's theory "could be mistaken for a socialist theory of property" if interpreted as a theory of desert (1988, 203). However, this interpretation of the labour theory of acquisition is self-contradictory and it also contradicts Locke's thoughts regarding inheritance and bequest.⁴⁸ Therefore, Waldron contends that Locke's theory ought not be interpreted as such.

At the same time, by the very fact that his philosophy is steeped in a religious flavour, one associated with the Protestant work ethic,⁴⁹ I would argue that there is good reason to believe that Locke thought that those who worked hard deserved property. Indeed, the extent to which Locke's theories are tied to Puritan attitudes towards work is made clear by Waldron's analysis: Locke contends that "God sets [man] to work for his living" and that God gave the world to men in order to cultivate and to extract "the greatest Conveniences of Life they were able to draw from it" (Locke as cited in Waldron, 1988, 147). Waldron concludes from this that, for Locke, productive labour is part of one's religious virtue whereas idleness is sinful and antisocial. Although it is an onerous curse that provides no fulfillment, one must exercise discipline and work in order to survive, flourish, and live a moral, religious, life. (Waldron, 1988, 147). As well as having a right, someone can be seen to have a moral desert-claim to ownership of the object modified by their labour, as a reward for the virtuous conduct of following God's command. It is also evident that, by virtue of the fact that this object ought to become their private property, that others have no claim to it, whether we call this a desert-claim,

⁴⁸ For Locke, the right of bequest stems naturally from man's right to control his property, and the right of inheritance stems naturally from parents' duty to provide for their children. Although Waldron raises questions about their relative importance for Locke – and about their contradictions with the labour theory of appropriation – this isn't the main target of his criticism of Locke.

⁴⁹ Whether or not his rights-based argument can be separated and stand apart from its religious foundation, as Waldron holds, is a different question.

or a rights-claim is of little import in this regard. Therefore, it is not a leap, or even a stretch, to contend that Locke thought labour creates a desert-claim for property in addition to a rights-claim. Some desert-claims unfortunately could never be fulfilled for those labouring on the property of others, however, from this perspective, they would be morally – but not practically or legally – justifiable.

d) The relation of private property to the deservingness of the poor, contextual power relations and debates surrounding who deserves a good life

It might still seem slightly unclear, from the above discussion, how Locke's theory of private property relates to my problematic about deservingness of a good life, particularly in light of Waldron's contention that Locke's theory ought not be read as a theory of desert. Nevertheless, Waldron presents an excellent summary of the political implications of Locke's theory of private property rights, and how it bars people from the enjoyment of the what might otherwise be social benefits. Lacking the same writing ability, I feel the need to cite the passage:

Locke's theory purports to give a certain moral priority over the rest of mankind to those who appropriate resources. Everyone, of course, remains entitled to the means of survival – appropriation does not affect that – but an appropriator is alone entitled to derive *comfort* and *enjoyment* from the resources he has taken. He has the liberty to use and enjoy those resources, and this is now a liberty which, by virtue of his appropriation, others lack. Their situation has been changed by his action to one of duty: they are now morally required individually and collectively to refrain from taking or using the resources without his consent. Much as they would like to eat his apples, and even if they could derive greater pleasure from them than he could, they are obliged to leave them alone. They cannot even call on his resources for urgent common or public purposes without his consent; if he or his representatives refuse to contribute anything, for example, to the cost of supporting a government (once governments are instituted) there is nothing anyone can do. Appropriation, therefore, wreaks a drastic change in the position of non-appropriators. From being tenants-in-common to God's largesse, they are now placed in the position of moral dependence, for everything but bare survival, on the say-so of individual property-owners. (1988, 175-176, emphasis added)

Here, Waldron makes clear the immense constraints that the duty to respect private property places on those who have not appropriated private property. Crucially, it is not necessarily one's means of subsistence that is threatened, but rather *one's ability enjoy oneself and make choices that would contribute to one's comfort and enjoyment of*

life. To put this in terms relevant to the contemporary debate on basic income, if people weren't raised with the appropriate work ethic, or merely don't have the luck, skills, intelligence, or adequate employment opportunities, they are barred from the enjoyment of resources that others have appropriated (i.e. access to a small proportion of their money), which would allow them more choices as to how to increase their comfort and their enjoyment of life. In fact, as some more draconian welfare programs would have it, they are barred from anything more than what they absolutely require to meet their basic needs.

When the idea of property rights is popularized in political consciousness and discourse, rights are easily conflated with desert, (and a theory of rights can be easily conflated with a theory of desert). While, for the philosopher or theorist, there is an important distinction between the two, it is entirely plausible that even educated social/political actors might not see a noteworthy difference between, for example, the statements "people ought to have a right to own the property they work for and the government shouldn't unreasonably tax it" and "people deserve the property they work for and the government shouldn't unreasonably tax it". The same contention might also apply to the statements: "he has no right to my property besides what he needs to barely survive" and "he doesn't deserve any of my property besides what he needs to barely survive". Furthermore, the idea that secures the wealth and power of the rich is that they – or at the very least their ancestors – worked very hard for their wealth, and therefore, it is morally deserved. The distinction between this idea and the philosophical definition of a right is of little import to this idea and the power that it secures. As Skinner points out, for the political actor "the need to attain an appropriate self-image by legitimating his behaviour to himself and his sympathizers may often be of paramount importance" (1988, 111). The rich thus have a psychological incentive to legitimate their actions (for example, opposing high taxes on their private property), as well as a material incentive to propagate these ideas in order to secure their power and place within an unequal society. They feel no great need to interrogate their philosophical coherence. Rather, the

pleasurable cognitive consonance they induce is enough for them to be unquestioningly believed and propagated in order to secure the existing power relation in question.⁵⁰

However, does not the general right to subsistence, as theorized by Locke, provide an adequate theoretical basis for social assistance programs such as guaranteed income? Does Locke's theory *necessarily* call for *undesert* and suffering for the poor? Put differently, can these ideas about private property accommodate a conception of desert that grants everyone a good life? Waldron demonstrates that this reading would create severe tensions and internal contradictions within Locke's argument, severely limiting the rights-claims to private property that are explicitly argued for. He contends that if a generous reading of their full implications is applied, provisos such as the 'enough and as good left in common for others' proviso would create insurmountable inconsistencies. Therefore, they ought to be read as upholding only the general right to the *minimum* subsistence required for survival (Waldron, 1988, 209-218). Macpherson provides more clarification here by pointing to Locke's revision of the argument in a third edition of the *Treatises*, wherein he asserts, rather baselessly, that since "he who appropriates land to himself by his labour, does not lessen but increase the common stock of mankind," given that he makes it more productive and decreases demand on the commonly held land. Locke assumes here that the increase in the common stock will be distributed in such a way that – at least very least – does not harm, those with less. In this way, he is able to provide an ideological justification, however flawed, for the accumulation of private property beyond what one can use for herself, even if it means limiting the property that is accessible to others and thus their potential wealth and enjoyment (Macpherson, 1964, 212).

e) Locke's understanding of the causes of poverty and solutions to poverty

These views on private property are attached to *undesert* claims according to which those who do not work are undeserving of the goods or wealth that other people have legitimately made their private property. Poor people who do not labour are thus seen as undeserving of anything more than what can barely assure their survival. Thus, as I shall now demonstrate, Locke's views are connected with the idea that poverty is

⁵⁰ Following Foucault, power/knowledge can "induce pleasure".

caused by moral perversity and willful idleness and, consequently, that the poor are undeserving of a good life.

Contextualizing the time in which Locke wrote, Vaughan states that the demise of medieval society during this time brought with it social upheaval, massive unemployment and destitution. Economic downturns, bad harvests resulting in food shortages, and wars also contributed to the rise of poverty. She mentions how this poverty posed a challenge for Locke and other liberal thinkers (and how, generally, poverty poses a challenge for classical liberals). This is because, while most classical liberals held humans to have inherent moral equality and dignity, poverty compromises the experience of this equality, and makes it appear illusory. Moreover, mitigating poverty often requires infringing on “freedom” (by which I take her to mean private property rights, given the context) (Vaughan, 2009, 47). Therefore, it is easy to see why explanations relating to some sort of corruption of the morality of the individual – who is inherently morally equal and equal before the law but who is also free to exercise either virtuous or immoral behaviour – are prevalent in market society. Indeed, in the proceeding discussion, we will see how the flip side of Locke’s views on private property can only be described as a draconian attitude towards the poor.

Locke addressed the problem of poverty directly as Commissioner on the Board of Trade in 1697 with a report that is sometimes called *An Essay on the Poor Law* (hereafter *Report*). Consequently, “his views about the causes, effects, and solutions to poverty are not a matter of speculation, but clearly stated in an official document he authored” (Vaughan, 2009, 46). As this document makes clear, contrary to Tully’s characterization of Locke (1980) and in affirmation of Macpherson’s perspective, Locke’s intention in the act of writing this report was to affirm the Puritan idea that moral perversity is the cause of poverty and idleness, interpret the current poverty problem through this lens, and propose solutions based on this paradigm. Indeed, the *Report* makes it clear that he viewed poverty as a sign of individual moral corruption that drains the collective wealth of society. It would thus be necessary to change the character of the poor to resolve poverty.

Before directly examining the report, Vaughan points to signs of Locke’s disdain for the moral character of the poor that are evident in parts of Locke’s *Essay Concerning*

Human Understanding (hereafter *Essay*). Here, Locke contends that pleasure and pain are the result of choices, and determinants of happiness. This provides a theoretical justification for the idea that sanctions against the poor must be harsh and involve pain in order to be effective (49). In fact, one of the specific reasons Locke gives in his *Essay* for the occurrence of poverty is that poor people, motivated by short-term pleasure, make poor judgements about what is in their best interests, deciding, for example, to not work and enjoy leisure even though doing so will cause them pain in the long term. He repeatedly uses poverty as an example to demonstrate that individuals misjudge what is pleasurable/good and what is painful/evil. He argues that, since this way of being becomes habit, an individual must feel the discomforts associated with poverty before he will make the ethically correct choice to work to improve his material conditions. Therefore, only punitive measures – that induce some sort of pain – can be effective in changing the behaviour of the poor (Vaughan, 2009, 49). Locke states in this regard:

I am forced to conclude, that good, the greater good, though apprehended and acknowledged to be so, does not determine the will, until our desire, raised proportionately to it, makes us uneasy in the want of it. Convince a Man never so much, that plenty has it [sic] advantages over poverty; make him see and own, that the handsome conveniencies of life are better than nasty penury: yet as long as he is content with the latter, and finds no uneasiness in it, he moves not; his will never is determin'd to any action, that shall bring him out of it. (Locke as cited in Vaughan, 2009, 50)

This helps to explain the severity of Locke's proposed punishments for the poor in his report. They need some sort of pain to provide an impetus to become industrious. As we shall see, he proposes several measures with the hope that they will correct the moral perversities apparently exhibited by the poor, thereby addressing what he sees as the root cause of poverty. At the outset of the report, Locke asserts that the growth of the poor population must be caused by "nothing else but the relaxation of discipline and corruption of manners; virtue and industry being as constant companions on the one side as vice and idleness are on the other" (Locke as cited in Macpherson, 1965, 223). The basic argument is as follows: the poor are willfully unemployed, they stupidly and immorally choose to be idle and to live off of the work of others. Therefore, if they are forced to work and they suffer if they do not, poverty levels will drop. No structural causes are admitted. Rather, the issue is entirely individualized (Vaughan, 2009, 57).

A major area of concern of Locke's, therefore, is the punishment of beggars and vagabonds, some of whom he claims *pretend* to be unable to work or that they cannot find work, so they can instead be "begging drones" (Locke as cited in Vaughan, 2009, 53). It does not seem to cross his mind that these beggars are unable to find work. Nor does it occur to him that, if people would rather live a miserable existence begging for food than work, then there must be something deeply wrong with the nature of the work available to them. Instead, these people must be punished and forced to work, particularly if they are caught begging outside their parish (presumably to get more than they would be allowed within their parish). As Vaughan details "these men should then be sent to the next seaport town and kept at hard labour until a government ship comes close enough to pick them up. They should serve three years under strict discipline at soldiers' pay and be punished as deserters if they go ashore without leave" (53). Even men who are maimed or who are older than 30 caught begging in an inland country should be sent to a correction for 3 years of hard labour. If the sentence of a correction house prisoner has expired but he is not judged to be "reformed," then he should not be released until there is "proof" that he has changed for the better. While Locke acknowledges in the report that some people do legitimately have trouble finding work, he is confident that the poor guardian (a public official elected by each parish), will be able to set these people up with work for parish members at reduced rates, unless the person seeking work has "some defect in ability or honesty", in which case it makes sense that the person should suffer the consequences (Locke as cited in Vaughan, 2009, 54). At one point, Locke even advocates cutting off the ears of those who forge passes to beg outside their parish. Still, those who actually could not work due to disability needed to be provided for, although as minimally as possible, with four or more people to one bedroom (55). Furthermore, to ensure the utter desperation of the poor is adequately maintained, local people should be prohibited from providing relief to individuals not registered in the parish book (52).

Locke is softer on poor children though: if they are caught begging outside their parish, they should only be soundly whipped, sent to a working school and kept there (working hard) until the late evening, before being sent home (53). He also holds that special working schools should be established for children between the ages of 3 and 14 so that their mothers "who live like drones upon the labour of others" can join the labour

force and their children can be taught a good work ethic. Expanding the labour force, however, seems utterly senseless if Locke had any grasp of the fact that, at the very least, *part* of the increasing poverty problem was caused by the fact that there were more unemployed people than gainful employment opportunities.⁵¹ Locke, though, consistently ignores these obvious structural factors contributing to poverty, factors that, as Christopher Hill points out, were recognized by others before Locke (1964, 262). Due to their moral corruption, then, the poor are morally *undeserving* of anything more than the bare means of existence, and only if they are forced to work for it under extremely harsh conditions.

Commenting on the absurdity of this punitive attitude towards the poor in the 17th and 18th centuries in light of the *historical* and *structural* causes for their situation, Marx states: “thus were the agricultural folk first forcibly expropriated from the soil, driven from their homes, turned into vagabonds, and then whipped, branded and tortured by grotesquely terroristic laws into accepting the discipline necessary for the system of wage-labour” (1976/1865, 899).

f) The anachronism of Locke arguments regarding private property and poverty

It is important to understand that, from a certain perspective, these views served a useful purpose: namely, behaviour modification to adapt the population to the social organization of market society. As we have seen, Puritan attitudes towards the poor – which are nearly identical to those exhibited by Locke (Hill, 1964, 259-297) – were inexorably connected to the Puritan work ethic, which was indispensable at adapting people to the emerging market society. Moreover, as I alluded to in the introduction, the context in which Locke wrote – and the context in which the Puritan leaders preached before him – was one of scarcity, in which increased production was necessary in order to prevent poverty and hunger. However, those driven to the towns due to ongoing changes to feudal tenurial arrangements often couldn’t find work due to a massive imbalance between labour supply and capital investment, as highlighted by Marx in his historicist

⁵¹ Marx demonstrates this point in his historicist critique of “primitive accumulation”, or the idea, prevalent in political economy, that the wealth inequality and accumulation necessary for capitalism arose a result of the frugality and industriousness of some, and the lazy “riotous living” of others (1976/1865, 873-940).

critique of the classical economists' idea of primitive accumulation (Marx, 1867/1990, 873-940). Yet, the wide-scale unemployment and idleness observed by Locke and others must have been a bewildering phenomenon to thinkers who had directly inherited a worldview that had developed in relation to the material realities of an almost entirely agriculturally-based society. Put simply, when most people have access to land to farm, then idleness is more easily and rationally seen as willful.⁵² Elizabeth Breunig (2017, para. 7-8) neatly summarizes it thus:

Willful idleness had a different social resonance in the middle ages, when even small numbers of townsfolk neglecting their work could mean disaster for everyone else. Unemployment as we know it—the phenomenon of people who want to work being unable to find it—was virtually unknown to them; labor shortages were a more pressing problem. Thus, as Peter Speed points out in his anthology of medieval primary sources *Those Who Worked*, “there was no question of medieval people trying to eradicate poverty. In the first place, it would have been an impossible task, for there were not nearly enough resources to accomplish it.” *There simply wasn't enough production to go around* [emphasis added], a fact that was complicated by several bouts of famine and plague. So, the medievals had their own reasons for holding idleness in particularly low esteem...but there were very careful distinctions made between those unfortunately out of work (as those struck by famine) and those neglecting their opportunities.

Hence, that the idea of willful idleness could be said to have been *inherited* by Locke because it appears to have been derived from a worldview according to which almost everyone had access to land. This contention can be substantiated by the fact that, in his argument for private property, Locke consistently refers to feudal/agricultural forms of production to justify the normative basis for private property. The idea that the changing structure of the economy may affect whether people are able to access opportunities to work, and thus the legitimacy *undesert*-claims, does not seem to concern him, the voluntary nature of idleness being so deeply entrenched in his worldview. Moreover, in a context wherein scarcity was still a major concern, willful idleness was quite rationally viewed in a pejorative light. It is interesting to note, however, that Robert Nozick (1974), who applies Locke's ideas in support of a minimalist state in the contemporary society, doesn't discuss work-based desert in the negative sense (according

⁵² Whether or not this was actually the case in feudal society is another question entirely.

to which the poor who do not work are undeserving, as does Locke. Rather, he tends to focus mostly on work-based desert in the positive sense, claiming that taxation and redistribution constitute illegitimate appropriation of what people have rightfully earned; *undesert* only arises as a consequence of the exclusive right of the individual to the fruit of his labour, and the resulting illegitimacy of taxation. The idea that someone is morally undeserving of a good life if they do not work is side-stepped through the idea that “a good life” is subjective (for example, one might prefer watching sunsets to material wealth). This idea, while appealing on the surface, neglects the devastating impacts that living in poverty have on one’s physical and mental health.

g) Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to establish that Locke’s argument for private property and his views on the causes and solutions to poverty reflect a work-based conception of desert. Parts of this conception had levelling potential; however, his ideas could also serve as a justification for the property relations of the emerging market society. This malleability of work-based desert is further explored in the following chapter, in which I discuss Adam Smith’s arguments for free markets. While Smith advocated free markets as a means of creating a more egalitarian society, his arguments have been anachronistically superimposed onto contemporary market society in order to justify its disparities in wealth and income. This distortion of Smith’s original intent is possible due to the dialectical character of work-based desert: while it provided a means for Smith to criticize the unjustified privileges that resulted from arbitrary hierarchies and the power of merchants to maintain protectionist economic policies, but it also established a justification for sharply unequal distribution due to the idea that markets allow everyone to earn their work-based desert. While Smith thought market meritocracy and the natural dynamics of free markets would lead to more egalitarian outcomes, the configuration of contemporary market society differs significantly from what he expected. I establish this difference in the following chapter in order to demonstrate that it is not only certain arguments and claims that rise to prominence due to their iterative relationship with power, but also particular de-contextualized representations of ideas that rise to prominence as they are sustained by, and sustain in return, the diffuse power structure of market society.

7

Adam Smith and Free Market Egalitarianism

a) Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss, firstly, how the free market ideas of Adam Smith were, at a fundamental level, broadly egalitarian, notwithstanding his acceptance of the inequalities that could result from the division of labour. While Smith did not object to inequality on principle, he likely did not anticipate the extent of the concentration of economic power that the industrial revolution would bring about. At the same time, when anachronistically interpreted as arguments in favour of industrial and post-industrial market society, his arguments take on a different political significance. In this way, such representations of Smith can provide a powerful justification for the wealth and political interests of employers. I argue this point in order to suggest that certain *representations* of thinkers' ideas can get plucked from their historical context and anachronistically applied to a different context wherein they take on a new significance, gaining prominence as ideas that secure the power relations of this new context. While one could take Smith's endorsement of free markets as an endorsement of the contemporary distribution of wealth due to the idea that this wealth has been earned and is thus deserved, this claim is weakened if Smith is read within his historical context.

b) Egalitarian Adam Smith

As discussed above, although free market ideas can be seen as upholding economic inequality and individualizing unemployment, they once provided a levelling critique of unjust privilege. In this vein, Elizabeth Anderson provides an insightful analysis of the context in which Adam Smith's ideas were developed, arguing that free market society began as an egalitarian and progressive project that has very little in common with the so-called "libertarianism" of the contemporary the American right wing. To introduce her problematic, Anderson contends that both Smith and Marx were egalitarians, defining "egalitarian" as someone who commends and promotes a "society in which its members interact as equals" (2017, 3).⁵³ However, the socioeconomic

⁵³ This definition does not preclude wealth inequality

context in which they wrote – Smith at the threshold of the industrial revolution and Marx in its midst – caused them to produce profoundly different assessments of free market society.

While Smith is often seen as advocating market society because it leads to increased national wealth, he actually states that security and liberty of individuals who previously faced war and “servile dependency upon their superiors” were “*by far* the most important” benefits of market society (Smith as cited in Anderson, 2017, 18, emphasis added). Smith observed that, in contrast to his view of a completely free market, the hospitality system prevalent in feudal society created a situation where landlords had overwhelming unaccountable power over their retainers and dependents, whose tenure depended on the “good pleasure” of the landlord (Smith, as cited in Anderson, 2017, 18). He also contended that the rise of commerce and manufacturing was in part brought about by the “gratification of the most childish, the meanest, and the most sordid of all vanities” by “the masters of mankind” whose “vile maxim” was “all for ourselves, and nothing for other people” (Smith as cited in Anderson, 2017, 19). These wealthy landowners “gradually bartered” away their control of land in exchange for frivolous commodities, which paradoxically had the positive effects of increasing demand for the products produced by artisans and giving way for other people to own land. Smith predicted that this development would eventually have positive, levelling effects; he expected that the emerging market society would bring about a situation wherein the great estates would be divided, and most people would have access either to land as yeomen farmers or to a livelihood as independent artisans or merchants operating small businesses with very few employees (Anderson, 2017, 21).⁵⁴

Relatedly, Sen & Rothschilds (2006) note Smith’s disparaging characterization of great proprietors and landlords who he describes as a “somewhat foolish” class of “proud and unfeeling” people. In contrast, Smith finds small proprietors to be agreeable, given that they improve their land (2006, 327-328). Moreover, Smith associates merchants and manufacturers with “the wretched spirit of monopoly” and asserts that their “[self-

⁵⁴ It is interesting to note, in this regard, that Smith’s famous “pin factory” which he used to demonstrate that efficiencies of the division of labour, employed only 10 workers (Anderson, 2017, 22), see note 44.

]interested sophistry” confounds common sense in favour of their “mean rapacity and “impertinent jealousy” (Smith as cited in Sen & Rothschild, 2006, 340-341). Therefore, they exert influence in parliament and members who oppose their interests are “subjected to the “most famous abuse and detraction” arising from the “insolent outrage of furious and disappointed monopolists”” (Smith as cited in Sen & Rothschild, 2006, 341).

To lessen poverty, Smith argued for progressive taxation, lower taxes on necessities, public education, and most importantly, higher wages for the working classes⁵⁵ (Vaughan, 2009, 84). He criticized in this regard English merchants who complained of high wages in England, pointing to the high profits of British stockholders and their extravagant consumption and implying that it was unfair of them to resent workers for earning a decent living (Vaughan, 2009, 90). At the same time, however, Smith’s negative assessment of the rich and his positive characterization of the poor as virtuous and industrious did not lead him to the conclusion that the poor deserved social assistance, even if they were in desperate need. This is because, as Vaughan highlights, Smith saw justice as “a negative virtue, [one that] only hinders us from hurting our neighbour” (Vaughan, 2009, 84). As well, Hont & Ignatieff (as cited in Long, 2006, 313) highlight that Smith excluded “distributive justice from the appropriate functions of government in a market society” given that he held claims regarding need or desert to be in the realm of morality, but not that of law (1983, 24-25). For Smith, then, although it was virtuous to help the poor, it was not the proper function of government to provide them with social assistance payments.

Moreover, he had similar views to Locke regarding individual responsibility and the necessity that the state protects private property. Vaughan notes in this regard that, for Smith, “infringements upon private property are punishable, including crimes committed because of extreme poverty... [because] justice demands that individuals have enough self-control to endure personal suffering from hunger instead of harming the innocent property owner by stealing” (2009, 85). Moreover, Smith also held that, although people look down upon the poor and that this is unfair, there are positive consequences to this

⁵⁵ Although he believed these would arise naturally in a fully free market and should only be regulated in certain circumstances (Sen & Rothschild, 2006, 326-327)

stigmatization: namely, that it spurs their ambition, leading to greater industriousness (Vaughan, 2009, 86). So, while, for Smith, kindness, humanitarianism, and philanthropy were all virtuous and essential to an individual's morality, they did not fall under the purview of justice. Therefore, we cannot say that he viewed the poor as morally undeserving; however, he only saw them as deserving of voluntary aid from private individuals.

In the case of Smith, (as opposed to Locke, and even Mill) the idea that some people deserve private property due to their performance is not connected to the idea that the poor are undeserving due to moral perversity. Rather, the poor do not deserve assistance merely by virtue of the fact that justice does not demand that they are provided for, and private property is not problematized. As Marx puts it "political economy proceeds from the fact of private property. It does not explain private property" (1991, p. 58).

At the same time, as we have seen, Smith believed that a well-structured, successful, market society that employed specialization of labour would eliminate, or at least drastically reduce, *the need for aid* to the disadvantaged and consequential infringements on the right to private property (Long, 2006, 314). The poor would only be relatively poor, would have access to necessities, and any remaining destitution could be adequately addressed by private charity. In this way, Smith is somewhat similar to Marx in that he wasn't looking for solutions that mitigated the negative effects of mercantilism and monopoly by providing social assistance to the unemployed; rather, he envisaged an economic system where there would be no need for social assistance because everyone would have access to employment or self-employment. Deborah Boucoyannis (2013) also affirms this interpretation of Smith. She argues that, although Smith, in a similar manner to John Rawls, held the view (attributed to him by Samuel Fleischacker and others) that if the worst-off people were better off than they would have been under a more egalitarian distribution of goods, then inequality was justified, this point was made with regards to his analysis of the existing mercantilist system that was the object of his criticism (1052). Moreover, Boucoyannis makes an important distinction between Smith's descriptive theory and his prescriptive theory. She contends, in this regard, that if

Smith's *prescriptive* theory was actually implemented, it would have, in theory, resulted in an egalitarian society with high wages and low rates of profit. This explains the so-called "Adam Smith problem" brought about by the apparent disconnect between his moral philosophy and his economic theory (2013, 1052).

Relatedly, Anderson highlights that Smith looked to North America – where even people who had very little means could buy their own farms, and yeomen farmers were predominant in the agricultural sector – as a model of what would happen in England if a fully free market, with barriers to entry eliminated, were established. In the commercial and manufacturing sectors, small-scale enterprises run by independent artisans and merchants would predominate (Anderson, 2017, 21). In this regard, "Smith's greatest hope – the hope shared by labor radicals from the Levellers to the Chartists, from Paine to Lincoln – was that freeing up markets would dramatically expand the ranks of the self-employed" (35).

Similarly, America's staunchly egalitarian 18th century political thinker, Thomas Paine, was also once a strong advocate of free markets and a minimalist state. In fact, if Paine's earlier writings⁵⁶ are read in terms of the contemporary social and political context, his views seem strikingly similar to the talking points of today's libertarian movement. He held, for example, that most problems were the result of government, that taxation is theft, that people depending on the government were "social parasites, oppressing the industrious", and that the need to provide social assistance to the poor by taxing those better off could be eliminated by cutting taxes drastically, particularly on the poor (Anderson, 25, 2017).⁵⁷ Nevertheless, he constantly criticized the various ways in which the state favoured the rich, and he hoped for a society with very little poverty, and in which most people would be self-employed. Describing the context in which Paine espoused his libertarian agenda, Anderson states:

⁵⁶ In later writings, notably *Agrarian Justice*, Paine, troubled by the persistence of poverty, endorses far more redistributive positions. These include a citizen's dividend (a one-time grant to everyone at age 21) and a system of old-age pensions.

⁵⁷ It merits being noted, however, that later in life Paine grew troubled by the persistence of widespread poverty, and proposed programs such as universal social security and disability insurance, though he managed to justify these on Lockean principles (Anderson, 2017, 28).

“[Paine’s agenda] made considerable sense for an export-led agricultural economy facing high grain prices, as was true for late eighteenth-century America... Free market wages were high in a country suffering from chronic labor shortages, and in which self-employment was a ready option for nearly all. When the bulk of the population is self-employed, pleading for relief from state meddling is quite a different proposition than it would be today. There is not much call for employment regulation as there are few employees, and virtually all have a ready exit into self-employment. When no enterprises are large enough to have market power, there is no need for anti-trust regulation. When land is abundant and practically free, land use and pollution regulations are hardly needed because people are spread out and environmental effects (as far as people understood at the time) minimal. When people can appraise the quality of virtually all good for sale on inspection, and nearly everyone grows what they eat, there is little need for laws regulating the safety of consumer goods... Paine’s America probably came as close as anywhere in the world to avoiding market failures, as contemporary economists define them.” (2017, 27)

Therefore, crucial aspects of the market society for which both Smith and Paine advocated were easy access to self-employment or employment in a small enterprise,⁵⁸ and a liberal reward for labour. Both thinkers advocated a society where everyone would have the chance to earn their work-based desert. Conversely, in industrial capitalism the means of production fell under the ownership of a small minority of the population and opportunities of economic independence were drastically reduced. Anderson asserts in this regard: “the industrial revolution shattered the egalitarian ideal of universal self-government in the realm of production. Economies of scale overwhelmed the economy of small proprietors, replacing them with large enterprises that employed many workers” (2017, 33). Moreover, there was an increasing gulf between owners and workers; most owners no longer worked alongside their employees and were, therefore, able to subject them to conditions that they would never tolerate for themselves (34).

⁵⁸ While Smith might be seen as arguing that the wealth production resulted from economies of scale, it is important to note that his example of the pin-factory model, which served as his model of an efficient enterprise, employed only 10 workers (Anderson, 2017, 22). Rather than an argument for economies of scale, then, his pin-factory is more an example of the benefits of an efficient division of labour. These two ideas – economies of scale and division of labour - while often associated, are not necessarily tied together. In this regard, at a certain point, efficiency gains due to the ceaseless division of tasks amongst a growing number of employees could start to become less efficient; in turn, a large workforce is not necessary for an efficient division of labour. Moreover, Smith held that, in a completely free market, small firms managed by their owners would out-compete large joint-stock corporations, which Smith finds to be comparatively inefficient due to the fact that their directors lack “expertise, initiative, and energy” because they are “risking other people’s money” (21, 152).

Nevertheless, contemporary advocates of laissez-faire anachronistically apply arguments “to a social context that brought about the very opposite of the effects that were predicted and celebrated by their predecessors” (36). However, it is evident that his arguments have been used, in a rather one-sided manner, in order to legitimize actually existing market society, secure its power relations, and to support regressive economic policies such as Reaganite supply-side economics (Pack, 1991; Werhane, 1991). The prominence of anachronistic applications of Smith, used to legitimize contemporary market relations, demonstrates that it is not merely certain writers and their ideas that maintain prominence due to how they secure power relations, but rather certain *representations* of their ideas gain prominence, serving to secure power relations. The same might be said for Nozick’s use of Locke, although Locke’s egalitarian credentials are less clear.

c) The anachronism of Smith’s free market

Indeed, it is clearly anachronistic to take the theory of Smith or Paine as somehow supporting the social organization of industrial and post-industrial market societies, wherein most people exist in a condition of servitude to employers while they are at work (Anderson, 2017, 37-71). Moreover, it is possible to derive from Anderson’s analysis another, more useful insight for my purposes: namely, that it is also anachronistic to apply classical liberal conceptions of desert to post-industrial political economies wherein employment is scarce and precarious and not everyone has a chance to earn their work-based desert.

There are several types of anachronism at play that factor into my argument in this essay. On the one hand, the idea that those who do not work are undeserving due to the fact that they are choosing not to work became anachronistic as the process of enclosures began to transition English society⁵⁹ away from the feudal and ecclesiastical obligations that were supposed to grant the peasantry access to employment in farmland. Pre-industrial English society had been characterized by rapid urbanization due to the expropriation of the agricultural population from rural land and the enclosure of common

⁵⁹ As seen above, the same could not be said with regards to the North American colonies that became the U.S.

lands. As Marx demonstrates, these freshly-created proletarians, in losing their access to land, had lost their means of production and subsistence, and in many places, there were far more of them than available employment opportunities (1976/1865, 877-940). Thus, Locke's England was beginning to move away from being a predominantly agricultural society, wherein it was more rational to see people who didn't work as choosing to not work, towards a society in which opportunities to work were limited and varied depending on economic conditions. However, as seen above, Locke's discussion of property was caught in an anachronistic paradigm in which everyone had access to land and the industrious had the right to claim that which they laboured on.

Smith, on the other hand, had developed a theory according to which unemployment and the worst types of inequality were *caused* by the feudal and mercantilist policies that market society was attacking, whereas a fully free market would remedy these (if it ever were to come about). While this economic theory may have been flawed, it was conceivable in a context in which protectionist policies that favoured monopolies still dominated while some remnants of feudalism – such as the great landed estates – were still decaying and the return of yeoman farming was conceivable. Relatedly, in Paine's America, the abundance of land made it such that anyone who wanted to work could, in fact, do so. However, industrialisation placed Americans in a position of dependence on capital for employment, thereby creating a situation in which economic fluctuation could lead to factory closures, and people lacked control over whether or not they would have access to work. Therefore, the anachronism related to Smith has to do with a decontextualized, and thus flawed, reading and representation of his ideas. As Pack (1991) demonstrates, certain (often incorrect or decontextualized) representations of Smith's ideas about the benefits of free markets are superimposed onto the contemporary context in order to secure power relations and further the economic interests of employers. Indeed, ideas and policies about the need to eliminate regulations and capital controls have an entirely different social and economic resonance in the contemporary context.⁶⁰ Furthermore, while Smith saw himself as challenging the

⁶⁰ Contemporary regulation of financial markets - or safety regulations in workplaces – have an entirely different significance to the regulation of prices, high tariffs, and the other protectionist barriers to trade that Smith criticized.

entrenched power of merchants ('the masters of mankind'), these representations of Smith serve to secure the power of today's powerful 'merchants'. Moreover, the insight that Smith's egalitarianism is anachronistic and no longer serves an egalitarian purpose begs the question as to whether Marx's work-based egalitarianism is not also dated, a question that arises in the chapter below.

d) Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how Smith's prescriptive ideas regarding free markets were broadly egalitarian and were grounded in work-based desert. The fact that they have been anachronistically applied as a justification for the inequality produced by laissez-faire economic policy in post-industrial market society demonstrates, once again, the dialectical character of work-based desert. While he saw his prescriptive free market theory as threatening to the "masters of mankind" – who favoured protectionist, mercantilist policies – and as favouring hardworking labourers, other parts of his theory can be stripped from their original context and deployed as an ideological device to secure particular powerful interests within contemporary society.

In the following chapter, I will discuss and contrast the ideas of John Stuart Mill and Karl Marx relating to work and desert. This analysis will demonstrate the extent to which, even as market society industrialised, and contextual realities changed, dominant conceptions of desert remained firmly nested within a work ethic-dominated épistème. Even perspectives that were critical of capitalism drew upon work-based desert in their levelling critiques of market society. In this regard, while Mill encompasses both tendencies in the dialectic of work-based desert, Marx presents the full potential of its levelling tendency, supporting the power and the desert-claims of the industrial working class. The work-based aspect of the Marxian paradigm, however, may be rendered anachronistic by changes in the political economy of post-industrial societies, just as the egalitarian goals of Smith's prescriptive free market theory were shattered by the advent of the industrial revolution.

8

Mill, Marx, and Marxism in the Shadow of the 21st Centurya) Introduction

In the penultimate chapter of this thesis, I discuss arguments relating to desert and *undesert* for the poor and unemployed that were developed during industrial and post-industrial capitalism, examining the thinking of John Stuart Mill, and Karl Marx, as well as some prominent 20th and 21st century Marxists. In particular, I discuss the responses of both Mill and Marx to the persistence of poverty in an increasingly prosperous economy. While their responses differ substantially from one another, both are firmly stuck within a work ethic-dominated *épistème*. Mill defends differential distribution according a market meritocracy, while at the same showing an interest in socialism. He thus epitomizes the dialectical nature of work-based desert, demonstrating both its levelling and hierarchical tendencies. Marx, on the other hand, presents the logical end-point of the levelling potential of work-based desert by advocating for a society in which everyone works equally; and, since all work would be important and socially-valuable, distribution would be determined according to needs.

Crucially, neither seems interested in a society in which some people work very little or not at all (but are nevertheless are seen to be inherently deserving of a secure and modestly comfortable life), while others could choose to work more and enjoy more material wealth. This tendency persists amongst 20th century Marxists and even amongst contemporary Marxist theorists even as they confront the possibility of automation and offshoring reducing the need for labour in post-industrial societies. This discussion, therefore, allows me to demonstrate the theoretical limits of an *épistème* dominated by work-based desert, and how these limits reflect the power relations endemic to market society. It also sets the stage for my subsequent argument – carried out in Chapter 9 - regarding the normative power of work-based conceptions of desert in advanced post-industrial political economies, wherein I demonstrate that work-based *undesert* – in its various forms - loses its contextual rationality in contemporary society, while the force of

work-based desert is significantly reduced. Presently, however, I discuss the ideas of Mill and Marx with regards to work and desert.

b) Mill's commitment to work-based desert and *undesert*

By the mid-19th century, scarcity was growing to be somewhat less of a problem, so Mill had to tackle the “paradox of poverty in a rich and industrious community” (Vaughan, 2009, 123). Indeed, he was aware of the injustices and abuses inherent in a system of private property, criticizing the greed of the rich and supporting sumptuary taxes (127). In this regard, he was particularly critical of wealthy landlords who, as he put it, “grow richer... in their sleep, without working, risking, or economizing”, and asking “what claim have they, on the general principle of social justice, to this accession of riches?” (Mill, 2004/1848, 220).

However, despite Mill's criticisms of the rich and his contention in his autobiography that he and his wife could be considered socialists (Vaughan, 2009, 131), he espouses moralizing ideas relating to the undeserving character of the poor that are reminiscent of Locke's *Report*. However, given the fact that he was writing in the context of industrial capitalism, in which markets had been institutionalized for quite some time, the reality that the unemployed were people who sought work, but were unable to find it, would have been clearer for Mill than it was for Locke. Thus, the idea of willful idleness likely seemed less convincing. Nevertheless, Mill tends to individualize poverty, blaming the poor for their lot. In this regard, according to Daniel Rauhut:

Mill pointed at four causes of poverty; (1) the primitive instincts to reproduce in large numbers; (2) the inability of the poor to understand, due to lacking intelligence and a low moral cultivation, what is good for them at an aggregate level; (3) a too numerous labour force creates a hard competition for each vacancy, which, in turn, press down the wages; and (4) the poor relief system in itself contained mechanisms for keeping the poor in poverty. (as cited in Vaughan, 2009, 123)

From Rauhut's account, according to Mill, it is the poor's lack of self-control and excessive population growth, rather than, for example, an economic system that over-works some workers while keeping others unemployed, that is the cause of poverty. Thus, Mill continued the tradition of blaming poor people for their situation. Although he

placed less emphasis than Locke on the idea of willful idleness, he also worried that social assistance would cause a loss of motivation to work and lead to dependency. Mill, therefore, held that the poor must remain uncomfortable in order to be motivated to work hard and practice self-restraint (Vaughan, 2009, 128). His main focus, though, was on population growth resulting from poor people having too many children. In fact, Vaughan argues, drawing on several of Mill's discussions of poverty throughout his work, that Mill believed *the principal cause* of poverty to be the lack of self-control in society.⁶¹ If more government aid was given than the bare minimum required for survival, poor people would not worry about the consequences of having sex and having too many unaffordable children. This, in turn, would grow the labour force and depress wages (Vaughan, 2009, 124). Thus, for Mill, population control through birth control and abstinence – even in marriage – rather than adequate public aid was fundamental to addressing poverty (Vaughan, 2009, 125). One must remember, in this regard, that Mill was writing when Malthusianism was very prominent, and unlike Marx, he was influenced by these ideas (124).

Thus, while Mill recognized some structural causes to poverty, and even endorsed the idea that some poverty resulted from the greed of the wealthy (he is particularly adamant about this point with regards to the contemporaneous destitution in Ireland), he continued to attribute its main causes to a lack of education and self-control on the part of the poor, thereby upholding a discourse that individualizes poverty. For Mill, there was no question of tolerating unemployment (of varying levels depending on economic conditions and the demand for labour) and providing the unemployed poor more social assistance than absolutely necessary for survival. Instead, the unemployed and poor must be uncomfortable, only receive enough to barely meet their basic needs, and exercise self-control in order to only have the children they can afford. In this regard, one of the main benefits of public education, for Mill, was that it would create more enlightened poor and working classes, members of which would then exercise greater self-control

⁶¹ It should be noted that Mill also takes issue with the greediness and lack of self-control exhibited by the rich, as exemplified by their vain consumption of luxuries, holding that an ideal society would have very little inequality. In this regard, he is particularly critical of the English landlords, who had impoverished the Irish peasants of his time, leading to their widespread destitution (Vaughan, 2009, 126).

over unhealthy urges, such as the urge to procreate (Vaughan, 2009, 129). Despite the entrenchment of industrial capitalism, then, Mill doesn't seem to clearly recognize – as Marx does – that a varying level of unemployment is structurally built into the capitalist system, and stems from the private ownership of the means of production, and the consequential dependency of people on capital investment for employment. Rather, he believes it could be eliminated through population control and a less populous working class. Of course, we now know that a smaller working class – as Mill advocates for – could have had unintended economic consequences by decreasing consumption. This, in turn, would potentially decrease the capital stock, production, and employment opportunities.

Moreover, despite his distaste for inequality and his sympathy with socialist experiments,⁶² Mill's theory upholds key tenets of work-based conceptions of desert that justify wealth inequality within market society. In this regard, although he was critical of some consequences of 'really existing' private property systems, he stipulated that not enough could be known about the potential consequences of socialism, and that the "evils which now bear down humanity" could be avoided with population control and universal education, and the need to "flee" to socialism could be avoided (Mill, 2004/1848, 92).

Notably, Mill also upheld the idea of capitalist meritocracy, according to which higher income was often the result of greater effort. For this reason, he opposed progressive taxation, considering that it punished hard work (Vaughan, 2009, 126).⁶³ This is one of the ideas that are fundamental to justifying the inordinate wealth of the few even while poverty exists, and it is still employed today (e.g. Hagopian, 2011). This is because the idea that meritocracy determines the distribution of wealth in market society (and therefore it is illegitimate to disproportionately tax high incomes) is tantamount to a justification for inequality. In this same vein, within a work ethic-based conception of

⁶² Mill was particularly taken by Fourierism, even speaking highly of the idea of providing every member of the community a guaranteed income. However, one of the benefits of all forms of socialism for Mill, as we shall see, was that everyone who was capable would have to work, so no one could be idle and rely on the work of others.

⁶³ Unlike some contemporary economists (e.g. Baker as cited in Livingston, 2016, 6), his opposition to progressive taxation was not merely for utilitarian reasons pertaining to, for example, reduced investment or prevention of capital flight. Rather, Mill asserted that progressive taxation was unjust, as it punished hard work (Vaughan, 2009, 126)

desert, the idea that higher incomes correlate with increased effort, rather than luck and circumstances, provides the rich with a desert-claim to their wealth. Indeed, one can observe a somewhat analogous logic between this idea and Locke's argument for the right to private property. Moreover, the idea that poor people shouldn't have children that they 'cannot afford' without social assistance remains quite pervasive in contemporary society and is used to argue for restrictions on social assistance programs (e.g. Martin, 2010; Hartley-Brewer, 2015).⁶⁴ Rather than examining the structural economic factors that keep people in poverty, these narratives attribute poverty to individual failings, thus preserving the idea of a capitalist meritocracy and dismissing normative claims to redistributive taxation and social assistance programs.

At the same time, Mill advocated for egalitarian poverty-reduction proposals, such as universal education and land redistribution. The benefit of land redistribution for Mill, was that it would allow for self-reliance, helping the poor, without creating dependency. His proposal – which he hoped might actually permanently eliminate poverty – would be to use English common land to establish small 5-acre proprietorships. They would be provided with tools, manure, and enough subsistence to survive on until they could grow their own food (Vaughan, 130). Thus, his egalitarianism was also based in an attempt to increase self-reliance and decrease social assistance. Moreover, it involved encouraging a return to work that was characteristic of earlier modes of production, and required ready access to agricultural land for small, individual proprietors.

Overall, Mill is an interesting figure given that his work straddles the line between securing/legitimizing inequality while at the same time critiquing it. Indeed, the tension in his ideas demonstrates the dialectical character of work-based conceptions of desert. Similarly to Locke, his ideas that uphold inequality are based in the work ethic (recall his opposition to progressive taxation). At the same time, his socialist sympathies are also

⁶⁴ It has, however, been detached from the discredited Malthusian economics that influenced Mill, reflecting mostly moral concerns, which were also evident in Mill's references to self-control.

rooted in a work ethic-based conception of desert, as is made clear by his statement regarding his and Harriet Taylor's socialist ideals:

We yet look forward to a time when society will no longer be divided into the idle and the industrious; when the rule that they who do not work shall not eat, will be applied not to paupers only, but impartially to all; when the division of the produce of labour, instead of depending, as in so great a degree it now does, on the accident of birth, will be made by concert on an acknowledged principle of justice; and when it will no longer either be, or be thought to be, impossible for human beings to exert themselves strenuously in procuring benefits which are not to be exclusively their own, but to be shared with the society they belong to. (Mill as cited in Vaughan, 2009, 131)

Socialism, then, is desirable for Mill because it makes everyone earn their income and their food, not just the working class. While the reduction of poverty, the elimination of forced unemployment, a more egalitarian distribution of wealth, human flourishing, and the development of fellow-feeling also play into his approval of socialism, a clear focus is placed on the desirability of eliminating income without work, as it is unearned and thus undeserved. As with earlier forms of egalitarian critique that employ work-based desert, such arguments uphold ideas that, when applied in market society, can lead to work-based objections to welfare and work-based justifications for inequality. As we shall see in the following section, although Marx arguably avoids this problem through his uncompromising indictment of the capitalism, work is nevertheless his fundamental starting point and he reinforces work-based conceptions of desert by deploying the work ethic as a tool to critique capitalism.

c) Marx and Marxism

Dominant themes in Marx's work – and in ensuing Marxist literature – also uphold the work ethic, thus upholding the idea that social assistance under capitalism is an undesirable solution to social ills, and desert must always be contingent on work (unless someone is physically unable to work). In this regard, Kathi Weeks cites Baudrillard's critique of socialist productivism where, riffing off of Marx, he states “a specter haunts the revolutionary imagination: the phantom of production. Everywhere it sustains an unbridled romanticism of productivity” (Baudrillard as cited in Weeks, 2011).

For Baudrillard, historical materialism “reproduces political economy’s fetishism of labor; the evidence of Marxism’s complicity can be found in a naturalized ontology of labor and a utopian vision of a future in which this essence is fully realized in the form of an unhindered productivity” (2011, 81). Therefore, Baudrillard holds that “Marxism assists the ruse of capital. It convinces men that they are alienated by the sale of their labour power; hence it censors the much more radical hypothesis that they do not have be the labor power, the ‘unalienable’ power of creating value by their labor” (1975, 3). While Weeks isn’t convinced by Baudrillard’s “totalizing indictment” (2011, 81) of Marxism, she acknowledges his critique to provide a starting point into criticizing certain Marxist paradigms that rely heavily on the work ethic.⁶⁵ As a more general point, Weeks contends that imaginations of potential post capitalist societies seem to remain within a productivist paradigm, wherein the liberation of creative activity is seen as something necessarily socially useful or productive. Relatedly, even free ‘nonwork’ activity in a communist society is liable to be conceived of as a “disciplined practice”, rather than carefree leisure, the latter risking association with the deadly sin of sloth (2011, 82).

Moreover, perhaps due to Marx’s prolificacy as a writer and his changes in focus and methodology, groups of scholars interpreting Marx have constructed particular Marxist paradigms, privileging different texts, and holding fairly different ideas, frameworks and political agendas. What Weeks calls the “socialist modernization” paradigm is more orthodox, traditional, and teleological in its orientation and privileges the *Communist Manifesto* and *Capital*. This strand of thought focuses on the idea that capitalist relations of production are not only exploitative but also prevent the “full development of modern productive forces” (2011, 83). While Communism would democratize the ownership and control of the means the production, production itself would become unfettered, a word which implies *increased* production. By this account, there would presumably be no unemployment, and potentially, more socially useful work accomplished. This current of Marxism is associated with Leninism and State socialism,

⁶⁵ Weeks, herself a Marxist, advocates for “autonomist Marxism”, a paradigm shared by thinkers such as Michael Hardt, Antonio Negri, and Silvia Federici. This line of thinking dispenses with Marx’s teleology and focuses on the subjective agency of a loosely-defined working class, viewing class struggle as the “primary agent of change” (2011, 94).

which emphasize the importance of factory discipline and productivity in a socialist transition to communist society. Exploitation is overcome through the abolition of private ownership of the means of production (workers, in theory, receive the social value they produce through things provided the State), but communism must be earned and eventually achieved through initial hard work, discipline, sacrifice, and industrialization.

Ideas that explicitly appeal to the judgement that some people are undeserving appear in this strand of Marxism in the Soviet parable of Stakhanov and Oblomov. This is a creative version of the political economists' parable about how the industrious and frugal man became rich as a result of his hard work, while the frivolous, lazy man remained poor. However, they reverse the class roles: and the poor but industrious workers are worthy and ethically deserving, while the nobleman is seen as useless, lazy, and undeserving (Weeks, 2011, 84). In this regard, it is interesting to note that Christopher Hill explicitly compares the goals of the Soviet government in establishing labour discipline and reforming the "passive fatalistic attitude of the pre-revolutionary Russian peasant" in order to ensure the "*continuity* of labour", through educating them with a body of ideas that, "like Puritanism, stresses the dignity and social value of labour" (1964, 129).

This account of desert implies that those who work hard are deserving of communism, and it rests on the moral judgement that everyone ought to work and to contribute to society. While the myth that the rich owe their success to particular ingenuity, hard work, and frugality is dispensed with, hard work is nevertheless seen as necessary for a moral life and as part of a comrade's social responsibility and contribution to the communist project. Just as radical protestant and classical liberal thought once functioned as a levelling force by drawing on the work ethic, so too does Marxist thought.

Even Marx's account of exploitation considered in abstraction from any historical materialist ideas about fetters and productive forces relies somewhat on a moralizing critique of those who don't work hard, although the critique is directed at capitalists rather than the unemployed and poor. It is also based on positive desert-claims related to

the idea that the capitalist employment contract is unfair because the worker's labour-power is not completely remunerated. As Marx explains in *Capital Vol. 1*, the payment the worker receives for his work is determined, in large part, by the cost of his means of subsistence, that of his children, and whatever other things he is *able* to expect to buy (Marx, 1867/1990, 275).⁶⁶ Crucially though, the amount someone is paid for her work is not determined by the value she adds to the raw materials of the business-owner. In the example used by Marx, in transforming cotton into yarn, the worker might add 6 shillings to the market value of the capitalists' raw materials in one day; however, the price of her labour – what she receives in return for the 6 shillings of value she adds to the capitalist's cotton – might only amount to 3 shillings. In fact, if the capitalist is to turn a profit, he *must* pay the worker less than he adds to the market value of his raw materials, and he is constantly seeking to increase the gap between the worker's pay and the value she produces, what Marx calls "surplus-value".

In the Marxian account, then, a worker is exploited not because she lives in poverty and is not paid enough to live well, nor is she exploited because she has to work long hours. Rather, although these facts might result from exploitation, the worker is exploited because she is paid an amount that is less than the value she produces. In terms of the economic aspects of the wage-relation, this is what Marx exposes as an inherently exploitative and unfair. After all, a worker in a capitalist enterprise could be paid enough for a materially comfortable life, yet she would still necessarily be exploited, as she produces more value than she is paid by the capitalist, who doesn't necessarily need to actually work (Marx, 1998/1857, 300-301). In the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx is more polemical in his moralizing attacks against the unlaborious bourgeoisie, stating that, in bourgeois society, those "who work, acquire nothing, and those who acquire anything, do not work" (1994/1848, 172).

⁶⁶ This depends on the conditions in which the 'free' working class in his country was formed and is characterized as a "historical and moral element" (that contributes to determining his wage). The number of other labourers and the demand for their labour, their desperation for work, the standards of consumption to which they are accustomed, their ability to unionize, etc. could all be said to play into these historical and moral factors.

We can see from this that while Leninist Marxism – as well as some basic elements of Marxism - offer a levelling critique of capitalism, it is a critique that is based in the ideas that those who do not work are undeserving and that everyone ought to work. “Socialist humanism,” on the other hand, developed out of a critique of socialist modernization, and focuses on Marx’s earlier work such as the *German Ideology* and his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*. Proponents of this paradigm, such as Erich Fromm, attempt to place Marx back within the humanist tradition noting that in his earlier works he demonstrated a clear concern for individual freedom. Moreover, his criticism of capitalism – as found in his earlier works – was grounded in the fact that labour under capitalism prevented the actualization of peoples’ creativity, individuality, and human essence, which can only be expressed through social labour carried out by in free association. While this account of Marx is less obviously associated with the work ethic, it still takes work as fundamental to the human experience and as necessary for a true expression of human freedom and a proper life. As such, it actually upholds the same assumptions upon which the dominant work ethic-based conception of desert is based.

Thinkers associated with socialist humanism emphasize Marx’s critique of alienated labour, as found in his *Manuscripts*. According to this critique, the object and product of the worker’s labour, as well as her conscious labouring activity, are fundamental aspects of her essence as a human. In Hegelian philosophy, *alienation* means the separation or externalization of a part of a whole, a part that properly belongs *with* the whole and without which the whole is incomplete. In this case, the human being’s labour is separated from her; she loses ownership of it and control over it. Put simply, this means that the worker ought to have control over her own activity while she is working and of the things she produces through her work. However, instead, under capitalism, her work belongs to – and is controlled by - the capitalist, to whom she has sold her activity for a certain period of time. He owns and controls her activity and whatever she produces. For Marx, the act of labouring is thus alienated from the person who labours, as “the activity of the worker is not his own spontaneous activity”. Therefore, the worker, “feels miserable and unhappy, develops no free physical and mental energy but mortifies his flesh and ruins his mind” while his “spiritual and personal energy, his personal life ...[become] an activity turned against him, independent of him,

and not belonging to him” (1994/1844, 62). Furthermore, labour, carried out socially and cooperatively with others, is the essential and unique part of human existence. It is, for Marx, our *species-life* – what separates us from other animals and makes us human. However, “alienated labour reverses the relationship in that man... makes his life activity [his work] nothing more than a means for existence” outside of work (1994/1844, 63). Further, labour under capitalism separates the worker from his essence and from his cooperative relationships with other people. Instead of being viewed as fellow humans to work *with*, they are competing alienated labourers, working *for* whomever they have sold their labour to (1994/1844, 64-65).

Fromm - a psychologist as well as well as a philosopher - contends that alienated labour, as identified by Marx, is a cause of mental illness and that capitalist work is not well-adjusted to human psychological needs (Fromm, 1955). The solution advocated within this paradigm, however, assumes (due to fidelity to Marx’s framework in his *Manuscripts*) that work is necessarily an essential part of human existence without which we would be incomplete. Fromm, therefore, isn’t concerned with justifying the morality of life with less (let alone *without*) work, but rather, with a mode of production comprised of unalienated, social labour that allows for the individual to express her individuality and collaborate cooperatively with others in the process of production.

He cites at length Marx’s description of the key elements of communism in volume three of *Capital*, noting that, according to Marx, the realm of freedom can flourish only with the realm of necessity (i.e. necessary labour) as its basis. However, Fromm fails to note Marx’s concluding sentence which states that the reduction of working hours is the basic prerequisite for freedom and he doesn’t ever comment on this aspect of Marx’s thought. Rather, for Fromm, “the goal is to restore work’s dignity and worth, not to contest its status as the pillar of social value” (Weeks, 2016, 87). This lack of interest in less work is evident in his focus on unalienated, socialized production and provides no basis for challenging the contingency of desert on work.

Livingston seems to agree with Fromm’s interpretation of Marx; however, he is sharply critical of this aspect of Marx’s thought. He points out that Hegel was heavily

influenced by Luther, and that he therefore “grasps labour as the essence of Man”, as the young Marx (cited in Livingston, 2016, 37) puts it, (although Marx was, of course, endorsing Hegel’s view). Marx adopted Hegel’s view, basing his critique of alienated labour on it. This “faith” in the inherent value of human labour and the fact that it is *the* activity that makes us human is, for Livingston, a fundamentally religious principle, and one that lacks secular justification. Indeed, while labour was once required for social reproduction, the idea that it is the essence of human life and essential to self-actualization is thrown into question by a context in which it is no longer required of everyone in order for society to be materially prosperous. More than this, from an environmentalist perspective, one could argue that *too much* production is occurring.

In sum, Weeks’ critique of socialist humanism and socialist modernization goes as follows: these “two visions of the future – socialist modernization and socialist humanism – are in some ways opposed to one another, but they are based on a similar commitment to labor as a fundamental human value” (86). Indeed, they don’t provide a theoretical framework for a politics that advocates for less work or for the decoupling of work from income, and they tacitly uphold the same assumptions that underpin work-based conceptions of desert, which, in turn, can lead to the judgement that the unemployed and poor are undeserving.

Yet, the fetishism of labour and production as identified in Baudrillard is not limited to these paradigms. It is also noticeable within overdeterminist Marxism, which is a growing current of thought promoted by Richard Wolff, who is said to be “America’s most prominent Marxian economist” (Davidson, 2012). Overdeterminist Marxism attempts to dispense with “traditional Marxism’s economic determinism and all its baggage: e.g., reductionism, inner laws of capitalism, and teleology” (Wolff & Resnick, 2013, 156), while still employing economics in a Marxian analysis of capitalism. Overdetermination, a concept theorized by Louis Althusser, holds that every cause is also an effect. This insight allows for the demotion of economics from its causal role in Marxist theory, to merely an important “entry point” for class analysis (Wolff & Resnick, 2013, 157). This rescues what Wolff and Resnick see as the useful elements of Marxian thought from some of its less convincing determinist aspects. When class exploitation is

conceived of in economic terms of people appropriating and controlling a surplus created by a group of producers (rather than in political terms of a right to ownership of means of production), it becomes clear that exploitation was never abolished under Soviet communism, that it can potentially be overcome in a market system (through state policy that encourages the formation of worker cooperatives). Indeed, Wolff and Resnick's logic suggests that exploitation can only be overcome *without* state ownership of the economy.

Following this logic, in an innovative approach, Wolff posits worker cooperatives as the most promising solution to what he sees as a deepening crisis that faces rich industrialised capitalist economies wherein rapid industrialisation in other parts of the world is causing real wage stagnation, heightened levels of household debt, decreased buying power for most people, increased inequality, and precarious employment (Wolff, 2012). While his work is favourably reviewed and is gaining prominence, it is telling that this attempt to rethink Marxism – in response to distinctly contemporary problems resulting from changes in the international political economy – is still focused on getting more people working and maintaining high levels of gainful employment, (albeit it in non-exploitative structures). Wolff places primacy on overcoming exploitation – that is, having workers gain control over what they produce, how they produce, for whom they produce, how they distribute their commodities, and what they do with any surplus that arises from its sale – rather than on recognizing, *pace* James Livingston (2016, xiv) that technological advancement has made it such that increased productivity no longer requires net additions to the labour stock, so the possibility of liberation *from* work – rather than *through* work – is now attainable.

Wolff thus appears caught in a paradigm, which he shares with the socialist humanists, in which a good life can only be achieved through unalienated, non-exploitative labour, and a good society can only exist with no one living off of the work of others (unless, of course, they are physically or mentally unable to work). While he insists that increasing human welfare within the existing capitalist system is a laudable goal, his framework – like the other two threads of Marxism we've seen – does not provide backing to the normative claim that everyone is deserving of a good life, whether or not they work. In fact, it actually upholds some of the ideas used to object to

redistributive justice. Wolff's critique of social assistance and guaranteed income is revealing in this regard. He sees social assistance as a technique used by capital to try to mitigate the contradictions inherent in capitalism. Moreover, he claims that a major problem with redistribution is that the rich are exempted from paying their fair share because of their political power, and that it engenders resentment – which is fostered and encouraged by conservatives – between those who work for their money and those who are on welfare. Welfare is thus an ever-precarious, band-aid solution. The better solution, then, is that everyone ought to work (in worker-owned cooperatives) and receive reasonable pay, which would eliminate the need for welfare (Wolff, 2017).⁶⁷

While these Marxian paradigms provide a framework for understanding that unemployment and poverty, under capitalism, are not the individual's fault, their normative frameworks still reinforce the idea that people ought to – and even must – work in order to enjoy a good life. Marxist perspectives have a complicated relationship with social welfare and programs like guaranteed income. These programs can strengthen the position of the working class by decreasing the level of desperation workers face when laid off, thereby strengthening their bargaining power vis-à-vis capital, and acting as an initial step in a gradualist route towards socialism (Esping-Andersen, 1999, 44-45); they recognize the injustice faced by those at the bottom end of the wealth distribution spectrum under capitalism, and they distribute material benefits according to needs. However, they can also be seen as inadequate in that they try to make an exploitative system livable by giving those left out enough to live on and thus mitigating social unrest, rather than harnessing social unrest with the goal of overcoming capitalism and creating a better system.

Moreover, the labour-centric quality that is prominent in levelling political critiques reflects shifts in power relations over the recent centuries. As discussed above, as feudalism was breaking down, the propagation of the Protestant work ethic served the structural power both of the better-off “masterless men” (the artisans, small merchants, and yeomen farmers whose labour was in demand) as well as the power of the nascent

⁶⁷ Cooperatives tend to distribute income far more equally than the capitalist enterprises.

bourgeoisie, who were able to claim that, unlike like the feudal lords, their wealth resulted from hard work and personal initiative. As Anderson demonstrates, the industrial revolution removed the potential for classical liberal iterations of work ethic-based desert to lead to an equitable society, given that it concentrated power in a new class (the capitalist employers) rather than increasing self-employment and small enterprise production in which the owner was also a labourer (Anderson, 2017, pp. 33-36).

Thus, Marxism rose to prominence, reflecting the structural power of the labour movement, the goal of which was to counter (and hopefully overthrow) the power of capitalist employers. If we look to Marx specifically, we can see that his work both legitimized the desert-claims of – and rose to prominence on the back of – the industrial working class and their claims against the bourgeoisie. His prominence thus reflects their growing power throughout the 19th century. Baudrillard states in this regard that “the ethic of rational labor, which is of bourgeois origin and which served historically to define the bourgeoisie as a class, is found renewed with fantastic amplitude at the level of the working class, also contributing to define it as a class” (as cited in Weeks, 2011, 59). In the case of Marxism-Leninism, the levelling critique included the class-based desert-claims of the peasantry, as exemplified by the parable of Stakhanov and Oblomov (Weeks, 2011, 84), who by their sheer mass and the fact that they were facing an antiquated mode of social organization, held some power that had to be seduced and accommodated by the Soviet ideology.

Groups that are left out by these workerist desert-claims, however, are those who remain the most disadvantaged within existing market economies, namely, the unemployed, people experiencing homelessness, and people experiencing disabilities that are not socially recognized as valid reasons to not work. These groups cannot make work-based desert-claims. While in a socialist state everyone would be cared for, an important goal would be to get everyone healthy and working in some manner; this implies that there is something wrong when people do not work. That ‘something’ is the mode of production in the Marxist account, rather than a lack of personal discipline or some sort of moral perversity (as seen in Locke’s and Mill’s account). Regardless, what is valued is getting people to earn their desert through productive labour, due to its

inherent value. Overall, the Marxist frameworks that are attached to work-based conceptions of desert do not challenge the idea that desert is contingent on work or the idea that work is a fundamental aspect of a moral life.

On the surface, then, Marx and his interpreters – or at least the ideas and interpretations discussed above – do not provide a useful framework for advocating for greater social assistance and the decoupling of desert from work within market society. Furthermore, if we accept the projections of the labour market economists discussed in Chapter 4, significant amounts of labour may be rendered obsolete in the not-too-distant future, leading to increased unemployment and decreased working-class power vis-à-vis capital. Insofar as the dominant Marxist paradigms discussed above are limited by their focus on the desert-claims stemming from the work of employees, (more specifically, on the ‘theft’ of surplus-value from employees and the alienation of labour that results from private control of worker’s activity and production by her employer), they become ill-equipped to make distributive desert-claims for those who unable to earn their desert through work due to entrenched technological unemployment. Of course, this was never Marx’s goal, and he did envisage a reduction of the work day as industry progressed in communist society. But what I have attempted to demonstrate in this section is the fact that work-based desert is pervasive and dominant even within perspectives that are critical of market society, and this *épistème* limits the scope and diversity of their argument.⁶⁸ At the same time, however, particular Marxian insights can be usefully applied in an argument against *undesert* in contemporary post-industrial societies, as I discuss below.

⁶⁸ Of course, there are important exceptions, such as Baudrillard (1975) (as mentioned), Marx’s son-in-law, Paul Lafargue, who wrote on the “Right to be Lazy” (2000/1883), as well as Kathi Weeks, and other autonomist Marxists (2016).

10

Conclusion: An Argument Against Undesert in Contemporary Post-Industrial Societies

Given that the utility of guaranteed income proposals is beginning to gain increasing recognition,⁶⁹ my initial motivation for challenging the idea that “certain people are undeserving of a good life because they do not work” was because this normative idea seemed to me to be a substantial barrier to the implementation of such a policy. In order to challenge this idea, I attempt in this chapter to demonstrate that 1) the distribution of wealth and income is not sacrosanct or primarily attributable to meritocratic processes, and 2) we already accept clear violations of the norm of work-based *undesert* based on countervailing normative principles and, in particular, based on the principle of utility. It follows, then, that *if* the utility of guaranteed income can be demonstrated, not only for its direct beneficiaries but also for the overall society, then we ought to discount moral norms pertaining to the *undesert* of the ‘unproductive’ – weak as they are in philosophical force – in favour of a policy that will minimize societal pain.

As described in Chapter 4, Waldron has shown the weaknesses of Locke’s claim that an individual who spends minimal energy improving an object with his labour gains an exclusive right to the object that he has improved. While his critique can extend beyond these things, it is most pertinent when applied to private ownership of land or other finite resources (water, oil, etc.) that others are clearly being excluded from using to improve their lives. For other commodities, and wealth and income generally, certain Marxian insights are useful in responding to ideas that emanate from the work-based conceptions of desert that are hegemonic within market society.

⁶⁹ Recent Nobel Prize in Economics Laureates such as Sir Chris Pissarides, Peter Diamond, James Heckman, and Daniel McFadden have come out in favour of it. Pissarides supports it as a way of increasing leisure time and counteracting the inequality and technological unemployment that will, he thinks, inevitably result from both globalisation and technological advancements; McFadden supports it as a particularly effective way of reducing poverty.

For my purposes, the most important contribution of the Marxist paradigm is that it highlights questionable assumptions – in both Locke and Mill,⁷⁰ and prevalent in contemporary discourse – according to which the distribution of wealth in market society corresponds with work-based desert, either in terms of how hard one works or the social value one’s work produces. Therefore, in this chapter, I will employ certain Marxian insights as a starting point to a larger argument that justifies, on normative grounds, greater social distribution with *no reference to work*, despite the fact that this would require transgressing norms relating to the inviolability of private property and work-based *undesert* in market society. This manner of proceeding will serve to address the moral objections to guaranteed income that motivated this thesis.

An initial point to make is an insight also shared by Hume, and can be derived from Marx’s critique of the idea of primitive accumulation referenced above, wherein he demonstrates that the conversion of feudal title into private property – which eliminated obligations on the proprietor to provide tenure to peasants, allowing for their violent, forced expropriation – and the transfer of common and ecclesiastical property to individuals as private property, brought about the initial distribution of property in English market society (1766/1865, 873-940). Any inherited property or subsequent money resulting from this process cannot be said to have been earned through labour. Also, the distribution of income, wealth, property, and unemployment within market society is not only, nor even primarily, the result of individual hard work, personal initiative, or the fact that certain individuals’ labour produces more social value.⁷¹ Of course, these factors have some impact, and it is not at all my goal to argue that they ought not to do so. But, regardless of agency, the structure of market society requires unequal distribution of these things, and morally arbitrary chance circumstances strongly

⁷⁰ As demonstrated above, Smith, for the most part, didn’t share these assumptions. However, I reviewed his work in order to demonstrate that anachronistically and selectively applying his ideas serves particular interests.

⁷¹ It should be noted, however, that this perspective is not exclusive to Marxists. For example, George Monbiot (who is a critic of Marx) neatly summarized some of these same arguments in an article on the what he calls the “self-attribution fallacy” (Monbiot, 2011).

influence where one falls within this structure.⁷² This insight weakens work-based desert-claims according to which progressive redistributive taxation and spending is unfair.

Moreover, capital accumulates, by and large, through the use of other peoples' labour, not that of the proprietor of capital.⁷³ People born into wealth can stay extremely wealthy without ever having to work. People born with the appropriate combination of natural endowments and circumstances to become very wealthy can put in substantial initial effort to gain wealth and then remain wealthy with minimal effort. Even in the case of socially-valuable and highly-remunerated intellectual labour, the producer of social value is often not the primary beneficiary in terms of the distribution of the wealth earned by the value produced.⁷⁴ While one might object that deciding where to invest one's money is a form of intellectual labour, one can even hire other people to do that for them.

One might object that investors' money results from their labour, but often only a very small part – if any – results from their *own* labour (as much of it could be surplus-value from past investments). The bulk of their money could even be inherited. In the case of entrepreneurs, after the initial creation of value through the invention, development, and marketing of a product and the hiring of managers and workers, the entrepreneur is able to use the labour of others to profit without working. That is, after his initial appropriation of property through creation, he no longer needs to work in order to continue enriching himself. This is not to say that the entrepreneur should be blamed or maligned for this fact. Indeed, most people wouldn't be willing to risk their money and time on an innovation whose market prospects were uncertain. Rather, what this demonstrates is that his claim to perpetual profit must rest on some other basis than work-

⁷² If everyone worked equally hard, some would still end up poor and unemployed because the market requires certain people to work in poorly remunerated and precarious jobs, and unemploys people as it fluctuates from periods of prosperity to recession. People ending up at 'the bottom' are those disadvantaged by limited natural endowments, inherited poverty, less access to enriching educational experiences, less personal connections to high-income earners, and/or greater racial and gender-based discrimination, all "contingencies that are arbitrary from a moral point of view" (Rawls, 1999/1971, p. 447).

⁷³ Of course, labour is not the only required ingredient. Investors and entrepreneurs risk their money. And there is surely some normative force to the idea that risking one's money to fund something productive should merit rewards. The point is that we accept obvious violations of work-based undesert on the basis of *other normative principles* (i.e. risk-reward, the utility of risk-reward).

⁷⁴ For example, pharmaceutical research: the investors of pharmaceutical companies use the researcher's labour to grow richer, and they gain far more the value produced by research than the researchers themselves, let alone the workers tasked with manufacturing these drugs for distribution and sale.

based desert, and that his claims against progressive taxation perhaps hold less force than we might assume.

Finally, nothing is created from nothing. Even Locke's industrious farmer required socially-inherited knowledge on how to farm. And contemporary individual 'creations' depend on a whole history of inherited knowledge and material conditions for which scientists, philosophers, and the people who grew their food were all necessary contributors.⁷⁵

Nevertheless, those of us who support liberal democracy accept these violations of work-based *undesert* (according to which those who don't work are undeserving), and we probably ought to because they are, indeed, necessary for capitalism. Here, Mill's contention that not enough can be known about the potential consequences of socialism (2004/1848, 92) comes into play. Whether or not we accept the USSR as "true" socialism, we know that divergences from liberal democracy are potentially dangerous. We know, conversely, that capitalism has led to prosperity, even though this prosperity is not shared by everyone and even though the power relations that characterize market society make it difficult for the redistribution of benefits. We might even hold that a radically egalitarian redistribution of wealth – through which a large part of the wealth of the top 0.01 percent of income earners was appropriated and used for the public good – would be more normatively coherent and allow for a more efficient, well-functioning market. However, we accept that the power relations characteristic of market society prevent such a drastic redistribution from occurring. Therefore, we accept and protect the institution of property rights within market society based on the *utilitarian judgement* that the society overall benefits from the prosperity produced by a system that 1) grants ongoing rewards for past labour, including historically-inherited value produced by past labour – and even inherited wealth that didn't result from labour – and 2) protects these

⁷⁵ To illustrate this concretely, we need only to look to the example of the internet. As Chomsky (2000, 31) points out, the internet took 30 years of state research to develop, and then its benefits were privatized. Subsequently, an entire range of possibilities for private innovation and profit opened up. So, the richest man in modern history, Jeff Bezos, was only able to attain his wealth because of investment from the State and labour from its researchers created the medium his company uses. The internet, which fundamentally enhanced communication and information-sharing across the world, is clearly more socially-valuable than an online commodity-distribution system (Amazon), however, far more remuneration has gone to Bezos than the State or the researchers who developed the internet.

rewards.⁷⁶ It benefits society in material terms and it benefits individual freedom insofar as the ability to accrue wealth and property in a market economy and enjoy control over these can be seen as an important aspect of freedom. In other words, the prosperity of society, and the inherent deservingness of people to live in a free and prosperous society, have far more normative power as a guide to state action than the strictly adhering to work-based desert.

By the same token, then, were it demonstrated that a guaranteed income would foster – rather than jeopardize – economic prosperity, and that without a guaranteed income, the “relentless pace of automation” (Obama as cited in Rotman, 2014, para. 4) leading to technological unemployment would harm the overall prosperity of the society, it would follow that substantial limitations on work-based *undesert* (in the provision of a guaranteed income) and on work-based desert⁷⁷ (through the necessary taxation measures to pay for it) ought to be accepted as ethically legitimate. Given that the moral objections supporting *undesert* for those who do not work are increasingly inapplicable to contextual realities, and no longer hold much utility, their normative force is significantly weakened. At the individual level, this means that someone who was not working, but nevertheless receiving sufficient income to enjoy a good life, is not harming the rest of society, and contributes to economic prosperity through his or her consumption.⁷⁸ To reiterate an earlier point, this does not mean that work-based desert ought to cease to be a principle that determines differential remuneration; it should simply be counterbalanced by other considerations relating to context, utility, and human dignity.

However, the relevance of my argument here doesn't entirely hinge on the inevitability of technological unemployment. What I have also tried to do in this essay is

⁷⁶ At play here is also a normative, work-based desert claim according to which people deserve continuing rewards for the past creation of socially-valuable things that continue to be used (as determined by the market). However, this contention does not normatively justify returns on *new* investments made with this normatively justified money, nor does it justify returns on investments made with inherited money, for which there is no justification in terms of work-based desert, the only justification being utility.

⁷⁷ Work-based desert is violated by progressive taxation because, as discussed above, some amount of differential remuneration results from the fact that some people work harder than others and/or produce greater social value per time worked than others.

⁷⁸ Insofar as the longevity of an economic recession can be linked to the persistence of inadequate demand (Krugman, 2014), guaranteed income can be seen as a means of stabilizing demand in the midst of economic turmoil (Levin-Waldman, 2018, 148).

to problematize the Lockean judgements that 1) private property is deserved and inviolable because it has its origin in labour, and 2) unemployment in market society is caused by laziness or moral perversity. I attempted to demonstrate that these ideas are considerably anachronistic given that they function according to a conception of the world in which everyone has access to land (or some material and means of production) and is, therefore, able to ‘create’ property if they are willing to work for it. In a context wherein whether someone seeking work is *able* to work depends *not on this person’s own will*, but rather upon whether a job is available to this person, it is a normative error to judge this person to be undeserving of a good life if he or she remains unemployed.

This, however, begs the question, what if a job *is* available to someone, but he or she nevertheless chooses not to work? Is this a sufficient basis for an *undesert* claim to be levelled against this person? In other words, does willful idleness, in today’s context, make someone immoral and undeserving? If Dale McGlothlin’s disability is really only a slightly painful injury and he could work through the pain, is he immoral for refusing work? It has not been my objective in this essay to make positive arguments, as Karl Widerquist (2013) has, in favour of the right to refuse work and still be guaranteed a minimum level of income. Rather, I have sought to interrogate the coherence of work-based conceptions of desert that give rise to the normative objections levelled *against* guaranteed income. However, addressing these conceptions has lead me, somewhat inevitably, towards a discussion of some of the positive arguments.

Therefore, I would contend, in line with my framework, that the answer to this question can only be determined in relation to context. A key contextual factor to consider in this regard is whether such a refusal to work would be socially-harmful. While one might intuitively assume that wilfully refusing an offer to contribute labour to society while receiving a portion of the fruit of other peoples’ labour is obviously socially-harmful, this conclusion is not inevitable. As an initial point, we have already established that the fruit of one’s labour is not entirely, and often not even mostly, the result of only their own labour. Yet if technological advancements do not meet the labour-saving potential that is expected, then the answer to this question is still not clear. If we assume that, in advanced post-industrial societies such as Canada and the U.S,

almost all essential goods that fulfill people's basic needs, as well as many non-necessities, are already abundant, this means that there is not an immediate social need for increased production. If, however, in a context wherein there *was* a clear social need for labour, someone was to refuse to work, the normative grounds for levelling an *undesert*-claim against this person would admittedly be stronger. In short, whether the refusal to work is grounds for levelling an *undesert*-claim depends on whether this refusal is socially-harmful, not on anything inherently immoral with regards to refusing work while receiving income from the state.

If, on the other hand, technological unemployment progresses at the rate of the predictions discussed in Chapter 4 (and given the preponderance of the evidence, I think this scenario is perhaps more likely), then a refusal to work would result in remunerative work being available to someone else who would want it more. It would mean being content with merely a *basic* income – enough to enjoy a moderately secure life and a measure of autonomy in one's consumption and one's enjoyment of life, but not an amount that would be fiscally unmanageable for the state or would require such a high progressive taxes rate as to disincentivize earning a higher income (a determination that policy-makers would have to make). It would also mean that an opportunity for work would be left open for someone else who was more motivated by material rewards or even by the social aspect of work.

One might object, however, that, to the extent that disempowering, undesirable, and poorly-remunerated yet socially-necessary (or socially-useful) work would still exist (say, for example, hospital-cleaners) no one who was already receiving a guaranteed income would want to do this work. This concern is getting into the practical concerns to be addressed by policy analysts, which, for the purposes of this essay, I have assumed to be resolvable. However it has normative implications and thus merits a discussion: In such as case, according to this objection, refusing to work when there was work available that needed to be accomplished would become, once again, socially-harmful and thus immoral, and those refusing work would be subject to *undesert* claims.

There are two responses that could be brought forth to such a concern. Firstly, I find myself returning once again to Robert Nozick's sunset. What this simple yet brilliant example illustrates is that there is a wide diversity of human desires: some people prefer to work for more material wealth, whereas others would prefer to leisurely watch the sunset each night. In this regard, whatever guaranteed income the policy-makers come up with would assuredly not be enough to satisfy the plethora of desires for the numerous commodities that humans have dreamt up. Some people would, of course, forego the additional income and live a leisurely good life, albeit one that was relatively simple in material terms.⁷⁹ Others would strive to find whatever work was available in order to be able to, for example, travel across Europe for a year with plenty of money to spend. Still others, with a stroke of chance and ingenuity, would develop a new socially-valuable software and create tech start-ups to sell this product. They would have the incentive to do so in order to be able to afford, for example, the cabin by the lake and a yearly trip to Hawaii, or even merely for the joy of creating something that brings pleasure to others. Work-based desert still operates, but it is infringed upon in the public interest. Work-based *undesert*, on the other hand, would hold a lot less power. To tie this back to Sen's capability approach, a guaranteed income permits this freedom to choose different ways of living, and the autonomy to still make choices that would contribute to one's enjoyment of life, even if one is not employed on the labour market.

The second response relates to Erik Olin Wright's idea of basic income as an inexhaustible, unconditional strike-fund (Wright, 2005, 4). This idea reveals that it might become necessary to increase remuneration for onerous, distasteful work, given that the position of desperation that coerces poor people into accepting such work for low pay would be removed. Employers, therefore, might have to start to compensate people that clean our buildings and washrooms more fairly, as opposed to maintaining abusive employment practices (e.g. CBC News, 2010). Or, in cases where higher remuneration

⁷⁹I still maintain, however, that a good life would require enough income to put one clearly above the poverty line so that one would have a measure of autonomy in participating different activities and purchasing different commodities that would allow for one's enjoyment and fulfillment (i.e. going out to dinner, the movies, etc.). The determination of a sustainable amount of guaranteed income – that would allow for a good life, but not raise taxes to harmful or unfair levels, would be a considerable policy challenge.

was impossible, the more onerous and disempowering tasks might have to be divided up, creating better jobs through what Michael Albert calls “balanced job complexes” (2003, 110).⁸⁰ From this perspective, the refusal to work such jobs if the working conditions are overly abysmal – even in the midst of a clear need for work – can be seen as an ethical political praxis, in that, if carried out in coordination with others and in pursuit of concrete demands, it would lead to more equally shared prosperity. A work-based *undesert* claim holds substantially less normative force when levelled against people refusing to engage in necessary work not merely due to an affinity for leisure, but rather on explicit grounds relating to higher remuneration and better working conditions, demands which are partially grounded in work-based desert (albeit differently conceived).

However, it doesn’t follow from this argument that minimum wages would need to be increased in order to incentivize people to not rely on their guaranteed income, thereby making the program infeasible in areas that rely on a lot of small business that have low returns on investment. Indeed, a benefit of the universal basic income – and even negative of income tax schemes with low clawback rates – is that their designs can actually incentivize people to take low-paying, low productivity jobs,⁸¹ because there are little to no claw-backs based on additional income earned. Therefore, added income supplements, rather than replaces, the guaranteed minimum. While low-paying jobs would bring only minimal supplementation, many peoples’ material desires would likely supersede the limits of whatever guaranteed income was instituted, so they would appreciate additional supplementation. I know that I was still willing to work as a dishwasher as a teenager even though my needs and some of my wants were paid for by my parents. The refusal to work, therefore, would likely transpire more with regards to particularly onerous work that was inadequately remunerated, such as the cleaning of public washrooms. In the private sector, as a result of the viability of the refusal to work,

⁸⁰ Albert argues that balanced job complexes improve the psychological and social experience of work and create more just workplaces. However, he advocates for balanced job complexes as part of a larger proposal for a more egalitarian, post-capitalist economy that would be structured around cooperatively owned and managed enterprises that determine distribution in accordance with producer and consumer councils (2003).

⁸¹ In fact, this was one of the stated goals in the Finnish basic income proposal (Zamora, 2010).

owners of ‘mom and pop’ operations such as small restaurants, who couldn’t afford to substantially increase remuneration, would perhaps have to share in more of the disempowering, onerous tasks of their operations, such as dishwashing and cleaning, thereby creating more attractive, balanced job complexes rather than hiring people specifically for those purposes. In any case, here I am really starting to get into the practical concerns pertaining to guaranteed income, which are properly in the domain of the policy analysts.

My goal, on the other hand, has been to attack the normative objections to guaranteed income that have their roots in work-based conceptions of desert, an objective which stemmed from the observation of an increasing number of persuasive utilitarian arguments in favour of this policy. With regard to the latter though, it is worth briefly noting a particularly persuasive perspective: namely, that of Nobel Prize in Economics laureate Daniel McFadden, who supports guaranteed income primarily for its efficacy at reducing poverty. Explaining the effects that guaranteed income provided to indigenous communities in America through casino revenue, he states that:

A lot of economists would think that was not a good thing to do. But what happened was that child abuse dropped drastically, spousal abuse dropped drastically, crime dropped. Simply handing money to poor people was salutary. It really helped them. Being trapped in poverty, with the stress and insecurities associated with that, is progressively debilitating. Sometimes even the simplest kind of transfers can break the cycle. (Cited in Coppola, 2017, para. 10)

Relatedly, work by Forget (2011) has even suggested that the state could actually *save* money in the long-term through programs like universal basic income. This is due to the positive mental and physical health effects associated, among other things, with the reductions in stress that result from unconditional transfers of money to the poor.

However, while I have assumed the overall utilitarian benefits of guaranteed income, one might nevertheless object that, in some cases, the receipt of guaranteed income *beyond* what was necessary to meet basic needs (as my interpretation of Sen’s capability approach would call for) could facilitate anti-social, socially harmful, or immoral consumption/leisure amongst particular recipients. Examples of this harmful consumption or leisure activity might include excessive video gaming and alcohol abuse.

According to this objection, even if the overall effect of the policy would be positive in utilitarian terms, it would be morally problematic for the state to continuously and unconditionally transfer money to individuals, beyond what was necessary to meet their basic needs, because some recipients would inevitably use this money for distasteful goods and activities. In these cases, rather than facilitating meaningful social inclusion, the state would actually be *enabling* socially-harmful vices. However, a central tenant of Sen's capability approach, and of liberal doctrine generally, is the autonomy of the individual to choose different ways of living. The fact that one might exercise their autonomy in a manner that might be seen as distasteful to others has no bearing on whether this person deserves the autonomy to dispose of a share of the social benefits of industrialisation in an advanced post-industrial society. Income opens up the *possibility* for social inclusion by ensuring, on the one hand, the means to meet one's basic needs and, on the other hand, the means to autonomously engage in the consumption of goods and various commodified forms of leisure and socialization (such as playing online video games, or shopping, or swimming in public pools). If, however, someone chooses to dispose of their income in what is seen as an anti-social manner, this is nonetheless still an exercise of their autonomy. Undermining this autonomy would be both patronizing and (as Mill held) ultimately destructive of what is most important to us as human beings: our free agency.

I would also question what is – and isn't – considered social inclusion, 'antisocial,' and socially harmful by some. For example, while someone might see online video gaming as antisocial, it actually involves a wide breadth of social interaction, communication, camaraderie, teamwork, and skills development.⁸² Moreover, dominant norms might situate someone who chooses to rely on a guaranteed income and spends a lot of time playing video games to be immoral, as opposed to the socially-sanctioned behaviour of those buying large amounts of luxury good that create a substantially higher carbon footprint. Therefore, dominant norms are not actually an accurate barometer for what is social inclusion and what is antisocial or socially-harmful.

⁸² For research on this, see, Martin and Steinkuehler (2010), Steinkuehler and Duncan (2009), Steinkuehler (2007), and Steinkuehler and Williams (2006).

Finally (harkening to Mill's harm principle), to the extent that certain behaviours can be objectively determined to be harmful for personal health, well-being, and social inclusion, if no harm is inflicted upon *others*, it is not the role of the state to limit individual autonomy. Rather, it is the work of parents, educators, counsellors, and public health officials to discourage these behaviours and promote alternatives that are conducive to mental and physical well-being and social inclusion. Therefore, the fact that guaranteed income *could* enable antisocial or socially harmful behaviours in particular cases does not discount the overall utilitarian benefits of this policy,⁸³ nor does it provide a strong normative argument for opposing the policy. Finally, research on the interplay between welfare programs, public health, drugs, and crime demonstrates that, while illegal drug use exists in all social classes, the more harmful patterns of drug use are associated with poverty and deprivation. Furthermore, societies with less socio-economic inequality and more generous welfare are associated with less drug-related harm (e.g. Stevens, 2011). Sociologist and social policy researcher Alex Stevens asserts in this regard that (material, means-focused) social inclusion *reduces* drug use because, put simply, "making sure users have a roof over their heads means they can be enrolled in programmes to get them off drugs" (2010). Therefore, guaranteed income ought to be seen as a means to help *minimize* the social exclusion that results from addictions and unhealthy behaviours, rather than means of facilitating these. While particular cases of poor choices will inevitably still occur (as with any social assistance), a policy must be judged on its overall merits, not on particular cases.

What the utilitarian arguments in favour of basic income seem to overlook, however, are the substantial *political* barriers to redistributive taxation and spending. In this regard, the power relations that characterise post-industrial societies, particularly those that Esping-Anderson labels as "liberal" welfare states (United States, the U.K., Canada, and Australia), are characterized by a concentration of power amongst rich employers and higher income earners (at the expense of working and unemployed poor people), and a comparative lack of countervailing social solidarity amongst various

⁸³ Which, admittedly, I have assumed in this essay; the reader can judge the existing policy evidence for his or herself).

classes of working people. The recent GOP tax bill, which “hurts the poor and helps the rich” (Mathews, 2018) is a poignant example of this concentration and convergence of political power and economic power amongst economic elites. The decline of the labour movement - which was necessary in establishing what John Gerald Ruggie (1994) called the “compromise of embedded liberalism,”⁸⁴ had led to a lack of a strong locus of political and economic power to countervail the power of employers and capital. Moreover, if technological unemployment matches the projections referenced above (in Chapter 4), this power imbalance between capital and labour will only increase.

The various proposals of the Nobel laureate economists referenced above – who all advocate relatively sharp progressive tax measures such as wealth taxes and capital gains taxes⁸⁵ – seem to rely on the assumption that the correct, socially-beneficial ideas are the ones that eventually win out. However, part of what I have tried to do in this essay is demonstrate – through examining the persistence in western political thought of the idea that desert of a good life is contingent on work– that the predominance of particular ideas has less to do with their coherence and normative power, and more to do with the extent to which they reflect and secure power relations. The concentration of power amongst employers and capital secured itself as market society developed and reflected ideas relating to work-based desert. It was countervailed for a time by the labour movement and socialist movements, which legitimized the desert-claims of the working class through a reconceptualization of work-based desert based on workerist/socialist insights and a rejection of the idea of market-based meritocracy. However, this power has declined substantially.

⁸⁴ According to which economic dislocations due to trade and technological advancements were accepted as long as those negatively impacted were taken care of.

⁸⁵ While the conventional wisdom with regards to measures that increase taxes on the rich (such as those proposed above) is that they will lead to capital flight and thus stymie economic growth, this idea has come under criticism of late. Notably, the International Monetary Fund recently published a report that “demolish[ed] the argument that economic growth would suffer if governments in advanced Western countries forced the top 1% of earners to pay more tax” and stated that there should be “significantly higher” tax rates on the rich than those currently in place in many countries (Elliot & Stewart, 2017, para. 2-3). With regards to the idea that this would stymie investment and economic growth, the report stated, “empirical results do not support this argument, at least for levels of progressivity that are not excessive” (para. 4). The study also notes that the decreasing progressivity of taxes since the post-war era holds substantial responsibility in increasing inequality.

As a result, even if a guaranteed income proposal could gain popular support amongst groups historically attached to work-based desert, the power relations of market society would likely prevent the final proposal from being strongly redistributive. In this regard, left-wing critics of the idea of guaranteed income tend to hold that, given political resistance to redistributive taxation, an affordable guaranteed income is inadequate while an adequate guaranteed income is unaffordable (Zamora, 2017).

Moreover, the predominance of work-based desert in western political thought reflects the relative power of employers and workers (ranging from professionals to so-called ‘unskilled workers’) vis-à-vis the homeless, the unemployed, discouraged workers, disability claimants, and welfare recipients, who cannot work. It does not provide strong normative grounds for advocating for unconditional income transfers, or for countering the predominance of the idea that desert is contingent on work, regardless of economic conditions. In fact, it subtly reinforces the idea that these people are undeserving. This does nothing to challenge, but rather reinforces, the stigmatization and suspicion of discouraged workers and disability claimants such as Tyler and Dale McGlothlin, as demonstrated by David Hess’s attitude towards them. The need to interrogate the normative basis for these *undesert* claims, based in a belief in the inherent dignity of those they stigmatize, has been the driving force of this thesis. Moreover, as the threat and opportunity of technological unemployment looms large and may deprive an increasing number of people from work-based desert-claims, the need to question the normative basis of these conceptions of desert is all the more pressing.

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