

Global contributive justice: An exploration on how to defend a wider provision of meaningful work

Cristian Timmermann
Instituto de Investigaciones Filosóficas, UNAM

(cristian.timmermann@gmail.com)

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Abstract: Extreme inequality of opportunity leads to a number of social tensions, inefficiencies and injustices. A raising issue of concern is the effect inequality is having on people’s fair chances in attaining meaningful work, thus limiting opportunities to make a distinguishable positive contribution to society and reducing the chances to live a flourishing life and develop capabilities. Globalization has led to an increasingly uneven distribution of meaningful work in a globalized knowledge economy, the aspects thereof seldom theorized. Aim of the paper is to explore a normative framework to justify a fairer distribution and provision of meaningful work across national boundaries.

Keywords: labour conditions; capabilities; de-skilling; human flourishing; global justice; knowledge economy; poverty.

Introduction

Everyday human well-being can be considerably improved by distributing meaningful work more evenly and by offering additional opportunities to contribute positively to society. The relative recently introduced concept “contributive justice” is a valuable tool to argue for a fairer distribution of meaningful and tedious tasks and to advocate capacity-building. Aim of this paper is to examine what contributive justice demands and how this request can be justified.

We will pursue this goal by first, discussing why securing quality of work is important, second, examining what contributive justice is and what it requires, third, attempting to justify the demands set out by contributive justice, fourth, enlisting some of the negative implications, and finally, drawing some conclusions on the potentials and disadvantages of a wider use of the concept.

45 **Why should we worry about work quality?**

46

47 Work is the conscious activities adults spend most of their time at, especially when
48 taking into account work preparation and reparation as well as transportation.
49 Policy changes affecting work quality will thus have an enormous effect on human
50 welfare, as meaningful work allows people to develop skills, receive recognition and
51 often empowers them to be the critical citizens democracies need. Studies have
52 shown that people engaged in dull work will most likely also pursue idle activities
53 during their leisure time (cf. Murphy 1993), reducing their chances to positively
54 contribute to the wider social and political well-being, limiting individual
55 flourishing, making them much more vulnerable to political propaganda and free-
56 riders of civil action defending democratic rights.

57 As is widely acknowledged, globalization has massively changed the work
58 environment around the world. Highly relevant for our examination are two trends
59 within this wider transformation in the labour landscape: (1) the worldwide
60 interconnectedness of intellectual and creative work, increasing competition and
61 opportunities, and (2) the outsourcing of labour to cheaper production sites. As
62 often work requiring fewer skills has been relocated to the Global South, we are
63 starting to see an even deeper global division of meaningful and tedious work
64 [reference].

65 This transformation brings about a number of negative consequences,
66 especially when taking into consideration the institutional order in which these
67 changes have taken place. First, we live in a world of extreme inequality of income
68 and opportunities, this not only between nations but also increasing within states
69 (cf. Milanovic 2011). Second, our currently globally recognized intellectual property
70 regimes allow multinational corporations and research institutes to demand much
71 more money for every creative and/or intellectual work-hour, than work-hours in
72 manufacturing industries through temporary monopolies (cf. Drahos and
73 Braithwaite 2003). Third, the Global South has become highly dependent on medical
74 and agricultural innovation developed in the Global North (Timmermann and van
75 den Belt 2013). This not only creates an environment where richer countries
76 continuously are “rescuing” the poor – creating a false imagery of the “saviour” and
77 the “dependent” – it also raises the necessity to sell a vast number of natural
78 resources as export commodities to be able to import the needed objects of
79 innovation, which are often subject to exclusive rights and sold well above
80 production costs (Timmermann 2014). These outcomes create an environment of
81 actual and perceived dependency. The training of local experts and building
82 scientific infrastructure is in many countries who became used to import
83 technologies neglected, as many critics of current and past international
84 development programmes note [reference].

85 These changes have led to a situation where people from different parts of
86 the world have difficulty perceiving each other as peers of equal standing, reducing
87 global solidarity (Caparrós 2014). In addition, we have a massive wastage of human
88 capital – something we should primarily condemn for the suffering and lack of
89 flourishing it brings about (Pogge 2008; Sen 2009), and also, to an increasing rate,

90 for the public health threats extreme poverty and ignorance create for the rest of the
91 world [reference].

92 As far as people's individual well-being goes, any defence to distribute and
93 provide meaningful work is incomplete without a conceptual clarification of what
94 makes work meaningful. So what exactly makes work meaningful? Fortunately, this
95 question has been satisfactorily answered by Adina Schwartz (1982) and Richard
96 Arneson (1987), among many others. Work is considered meaningful when a
97 sufficient number of these elements are present over a minimum threshold:

98

99 (1) fair wages

100 (2) opportunities to develop capabilities

101 (3) interesting

102 (4) contribute positively to society

103 (5) social recognition (especially that work be recognized as such)

104 (6) meaningful social interaction

105 (7) certain thrills (non-monotony)

106 (8) balance between work and leisure

107 (9) having a say on how the work is to be done

108 (10) having a democratic say on employers' policies

109 (11) being trusted in one's competence

110 (12) career ladders

111

112 Due to the vast amount of time labour consumes from people's lives, work becomes
113 a central vehicle to promote the development of capabilities and achieve recognition
114 among peers and within one's social circles. Further, for almost everyone work is a
115 necessity, as the only means to secure livelihood. As a central component in people's
116 life it becomes extremely difficult to live a flourishing life when continuously
117 engaged in demeaning or menial work (Veltman 2014).

118 In contrast to meaningful work we have menial work. Work does however
119 not have to incorporate all the above-mentioned qualities to be regarded as
120 meaningful, however the absence or insufficient provision of these traits reduces
121 work quality. Having said that, the reader may raise the question: How should we
122 treat a job that is considered objectively meaningful, but subjectively tedious, or vice
123 versa? We will skip to the next section, the clarification of the concept of
124 contributive justice, and return later to this challenging problem related to the
125 characterization of work.

126

127

128 **What is contributive justice and what does it require?**

129

130 Criticism on work quality has a long tradition in the post industrial revolution era.
131 The most enduring and influential criticism on work is the Marxist accusation of the
132 alienating nature of some types of work, with its roots in mid 19th century. A second
133 wave of scholarship on labour came as a reaction to scientific management –
134 Taylorism – a school of thought established at the beginning of last century that
135 sought to raise productivity by a detailed division of labour that reduced training

136 costs and helped to counter absenteeism (cf. F. W. Taylor 1911). Scientific
137 management and the later innovation of the moving assembly line (Fordism) were
138 inculcated of deskilling the labour force (Braverman 1974; Wood 1987). Deskilling
139 was not only criticized for its negative effect on the workers' health. The
140 outsourcing of work to cheaper production sites left a number of workers
141 unemployed; these, used to do low skilled labour for many years or even decades,
142 mostly failed to adapt to new work environments creating a burden (instead of an
143 opportunity) for society. In addition many Western companies saw that productivity
144 was stagnating in the early 1980s. One of the countries that maintained productivity
145 and innovation was Japan, a fact that raised the attention of scholars. After studying
146 Japanese management practices, business models that incorporated work rotation
147 and increased responsibilities among work groups for their modules began to be
148 reconsidered in Western firms (Sayer 1989). A further event was brought by
149 growing consumer concerns, which led us witness from the 1990s on the raise of a
150 number of fair trade initiatives aiming to secure adequate remuneration and safe
151 work conditions (Raynolds 2014). Despite that none of these lines of criticism is
152 considered obsolete, it has become evident that a broader normative framework is
153 needed to judge work environments. Sociologists of labour rescued a concept that
154 had been first used in moral theology: the idea of contributive justice (United States
155 Catholic Bishops 1997). Catholic moral theologians criticized the direction industry
156 was going, which was reducing the possibilities for workers to dedicate an adequate
157 amount of time for family life, limited the opportunities to positively contribute to
158 social welfare and was creating a competitiveness that destroyed good social
159 relationship (idem). In the last decade and a half, the idea of contributive justice has
160 been expanded and secularized, which allows us to identify six elements which can
161 now be said to represent the idea of contributive justice (cf. Britz and Lipinski 2001;
162 Gomberg 2007; Sayer 2009), these are:

- 163
- 164 (1) Opportunities to participate
 - 165 (2) Opportunities to develop skills
 - 166 (3) Opportunities to learn to be productive
 - 167 (4) Fair evaluation of inputs (fair competition of ideas)
 - 168 (5) Duty to do one's share according to one's capabilities
 - 169 (6) Meaningful work and tedious tasks should be distributed (more) evenly
- 170

171 The different demands ask for widespread individual and collective action. Let us
172 take a closer look at these six demands that have been attributed to the idea of
173 contributive justice so far.

174

175 *Opportunities to participate*

176

177 The current number of jobseekers reveals that there is a significant demand for
178 opportunities to contribute positively to society.¹ Following a majority rule,

¹ Globally, the percentage of people who regard themselves as unemployed is relatively low. We should however read those statistics with care, most of the

179 policymaking in democratic states should favour an organization of labour that
180 increases the number of opportunities to contribute according to one's capabilities.
181 When restructuring work environments, managers should take care not to sacrifice
182 meaningful jobs for minor reasons. Meaningful work becomes thus a scarce
183 resource over which many people compete (Walsh 1994) and policy efforts should
184 concentrate in creating sustainable meaningful work.

185 This reasoning brings in some problems. Advocates of a basic unconditional
186 income start with the premise that society cannot secure full employment (Van
187 Parijs 1991). Governments should rather give people an unconditional income and
188 allow every single individual to decide how to live their lives (seek further paid
189 employment or live modestly doing what they desire). We thus have two
190 incompatible policy proposals. In many cases artificial job creation may go against
191 the possibilities to offer (paid) free time when using these resources to create new
192 jobs. Some criticise the paternalistic role of a government who gets involved in
193 shaping participatory work environments (cf. Arneson 1987; later making some
194 concessions Arneson 2009).

195 Participation is currently not only hindered by the structure of work
196 environments, but also by access to education, access to means of production and a
197 variety of property regimes over innovation.

198 Many specialized jobs require a prolonged education after primary and
199 secondary school, this either through long apprenticeship or through tertiary
200 education. Opportunities to participate have to be accessible for people from all
201 backgrounds, where household income and place of birth (or any other form of
202 work irrelevant discrimination) should not play a role. While limitation of resources
203 obliges to make selections, aspirers should be able to improve their odds primarily
204 through own efforts rather than by using household resources. Currently, in most
205 cases, household resources as well as place of birth are the central parameter to
206 determine career opportunities [reference]. Careers where people retain a student
207 or apprenticeship status for a prolonged time despite working independently and
208 not receiving a significant amount of training (other than self-training) or
209 mentorship, as we currently see in academia, international organizations and NGOs
210 (who ironically embrace the principle of equality of opportunity), and increasingly
211 in industry, limit participation possibilities and reduce the quality of work when not
212 adequately remunerated and protected by labour rights.

213 Access to material infrastructure to contribute positively to society should be
214 more widespread as well. Underfinanced or inexistent cultural and scientific
215 infrastructure and restrictive migration laws are among the biggest limiting factors
216 for wider participation.

217 Patents, copyright, plant breeders' right and material transfer agreements
218 are all instruments used by proprietary science practices that limit the possibilities
219 to fully participate in scientific and cultural life (cf. Shaver 2010; Shaheed 2012;
220 Timmermann 2014; Chapman and Wyndham 2013). Access to scientific literature,

people around the work are not eligible for any kind of unemployment benefits (cf. International Labour Organization 2014). Securing basic needs obliges them to consider whatever options are available as work.

221 genetic resources, materials that have become industry standards, and freedom to
222 follow certain processes, affect people's possibility to participate in intellectual life.
223 Most companies do not open up access (e.g. through humanitarian licences) to
224 proprietary scientific objects even for those who are clearly unable to pay (e.g. for
225 agriculture, see Louwaars 2007).

226 An additional problem we face is the again increasing weekly standard work
227 hours (Heymann and Earle 2010). In some jobs it is not possible to work less than
228 the average colleague, in others it is, but people cannot stay competitive in the
229 labour market if they opt to do so. Some regulation or alternative rating systems
230 could help people combine leisure and/or family life with work. Work places gain
231 intellectually and socially when at least some workers have wide experiences
232 outside the work environment.

233 Lastly, as has been mentioned countless time over the last decades, extreme
234 poverty is the most severe limitation for human flourishing. Hunger, disease,
235 physical and psychological threats, inadequate shelter, difficult access to safe water
236 and sanitation systems, are by far the biggest impediments people have for wider
237 social inclusion and the use of creativity. People who are hungry spend almost all of
238 their time thinking about only one thing: food (Caparrós 2014).

239

240 *Opportunities to develop skills*

241

242 Acquiring and developing skills is crucial to reach and maintain employment. Not
243 only that, the possession of skills is also important for building-up self-esteem and
244 the living of a fulfilling social life. Pursuing complex tasks is something humans
245 value on their own. We may think of Rawls' Aristotelian Principle, arguing that
246 people who acquire skills enjoy improving these and feel good when conscious
247 about their virtuosity (Rawls 1999; R. Taylor 2004). Achieving proficiency in an area
248 is something many see of central importance in their image of a good life.

249 In addition, many skills can be extrapolated for uses outside the work
250 environment. To take an example, good communication skills acquired at work
251 become great assets for people interested in getting involved in wider social circles.

252 However, it is important that skills, or more widely capabilities, are not only
253 learned, but that people have opportunities to regularly make use of them (Sayer
254 2012). The joys of mastering a discipline or craft are principally felt when
255 performing or completing work. Being deprived of the opportunity to exercise one's
256 craft could be perceived as even more frustrating than not mastering anything at all.

257

258 *Opportunities to learn to be productive*

259

260 Arguably, one could also count being productive as a skill itself. However, with
261 competitive global markets and such vast differences in productive capacity science,
262 technology, social circles and education may confer, it becomes important to treat
263 productivity as a separate trait. Being much less productive than others doing the
264 same type of work can be a major disincentive (or even impediment) to contribute.
265 Reduced productivity is also less sustainable, as individuals have to work for much
266 more hours for the same or less results. A competitive market does not generally

267 value effort when setting prices on identical or very similar objects. Having to work
268 for a larger number of hours to produce an object competitors make in much less
269 time will have a direct effect on the quality of work, as remuneration and
270 recognition for effort will fall short. Even the produce of craftsmen has to offer
271 additional assets consumers are willing to pay, otherwise people will choose for
272 mass produced cheaper alternatives.

273 As mentioned, many professions require material goods and a given
274 infrastructure in order to be carried out. Taking contributive justice seriously would
275 require some redistribution of resources in order to facilitate the material and social
276 basis to be competitive. Here we can either secure unhindered access to the material
277 (as well as immaterial) objects of production or transferring property rights in
278 order for people to be able to secure their livelihoods by their own means (cf.
279 Claassen 2014). In addition, an efficient police force has to be in place so that people
280 can protect the fruits of their labour and their tools from theft.

281 Generally, a strong interpretation of equality of opportunity condemns a
282 starting position where some groups begin with much stronger productive
283 capacities than others.

284

285 *Fair evaluation of inputs (fair competition of ideas)*

286

287 Important to sustain willingness to contribute to society is that people's input is
288 fairly evaluated. Ideas should underlie a fair competition. Establishing a fair
289 competition is however very difficult, as people with fame, power, control over
290 media, or priority access to information and technologies, have ample opportunities
291 to distort a fair competition (cf. Sparrow and Goodin 2001).

292 Favouring ideas that come from a preferred ethnic group, gender, or race,
293 can amount to a massive disincentive. Discrimination can have multiple faces.
294 Miranda Fricker distinguishes between testimonial injustice and hermeneutic
295 injustice. The first considers taking less serious or ignoring the person behind an
296 idea, the later the discrimination of content depicted in certain ways (Fricker 2007).
297 We should add to this category also possible self-discrimination of people who
298 identify with an underrepresented group. To take an example, a society that values
299 in certain fields less the opinion of women may demotivate women to criticising
300 male counterparts. Or contrarily, over-incentivize women to prove their skills at a
301 much higher level than expected at a given stage of work experience, with no few
302 cases of overworking or the impossibility to balance work and social life.

303 An open question is in how far a fair competition of ideas should level the
304 ground among competitors. One could argue that a fair competition should help
305 people coming from socially discriminated groups and/or having certain type of
306 disabilities with additional tutoring or material assistance to reduce the additional
307 burdens they face.

308 Sustaining a fair competition comes however at quite a cost. Evaluating ideas
309 is time consuming and people can save a lot of resources by continuing to rely on
310 sources that have proven effective in the past. Broadening one's sources increases
311 originality, which can work as an incentive to evaluate ideas coming from a broader
312 variety of origins.

313

314 *Duty to do one's share according to one's capacities*

315

316 More controversial is the argued for obligation to be active in society (Britz and
317 Lipinski 2001) or even a duty to contribute according to one's capacities
318 [reference]. This element of contributive justice raises a number of controversies.
319 First, humanity through several declarations proudly reserves a freedom of speech.
320 People ought to have the liberty to choose in which direction to exercise their
321 freedom to express themselves or not to express at all. Second, we may create a
322 disincentive to develop skills if conscripted to make us of them. As a reaction, people
323 could simply choose to concentrate in areas where their skills will not be demanded
324 as strongly from society. A researcher specializing on cosmetic surgery instead on
325 neglected tropical diseases saves a lot of trouble if she aims at making profit. Third,
326 taking a duty to contribute according to one's capacities seriously leaves open the
327 question in how far people have obligations to develop skills and to what degree.
328 Does someone with a talent for music has the obligation to practice her instrument
329 for 10 000 hours to become a virtuosa (cf. Sennett 2008)? Depending on how we
330 answer this question we will have a very different image on how a just society looks
331 like.

332 Making contributions compulsory will have to be countered by a defence of
333 the liberty to slack, to be lazy or at least to not have leisure time reduced. Leisure
334 time is a human right that took a huge effort to be universally recognized (Universal
335 Declaration of Human Rights, art. 24). Although this issue could be settled by
336 consensus, we have an additional difficulty when the potential each person has to
337 contribute varies so strongly depending on expertise and geographical location.
338 That what counts as fair leisure time will be affected by how urgent the person's
339 skills are needed (e.g. to fight disease or hunger), making consensus problematic.
340 We may ponder about a physicians' right to enjoy her teatime in chronically
341 underserved areas.

342 On the other side, there is a social condemnation of free-riding. In a society
343 where we are in everyday circumstances unavoidably in touch with other people we
344 need a number of social institutions to guarantee basic securities and freedoms. In
345 this sense, free-riding is not doing one's share when it is our turn (Barry 1982).
346 Placing oneself in a position where one is unable to help, especially when eventual
347 need was foreseeable and training possibilities available could be perceived as a
348 form of being unwilling to contribute (cf. Wolff 2004).

349

350 *Meaningful work and tedious tasks should be distributed more evenly*

351

352 Meaningful work seldom comes without the need to undertake less interesting
353 tasks. There are a number of maintenance and administrative tasks that need to be
354 done as part of larger projects. We could say that for every meaningful job there is a
355 share of tedious tasks that has to be done. A more even distribution of meaningful
356 and tedious tasks would require taking a certain "fair share" of tedious tasks as well
357 (Sayer 2011). Fortunately, many uninteresting tasks become less tedious when
358 undertaken as part of a more meaningful endeavour (Sayer 2009). Therefore,

359 contributive justice can only be achieved when more powerful groups do not
360 monopolize meaningful work and leave tedious tasks to weaker groups or group
361 members.

362

363

364 **How do we justify contributive justice?**

365

366 To continue with our exploration, we will divide the arguments that defend
367 contributive justice in two bands: those based on utilitarian arguments and those
368 focussing on rights-based reasoning. For the sake of simplicity, we will start with the
369 first line of arguments, highlighting the social benefits of contributive justice.

370

371 *Social benefits of addressing contributive justice*

372

373 One of the primary disadvantages of a single group monopolizing meaningful work
374 is that it creates epistemic poverty. Meant herewith is that the failure to include
375 people with diverse backgrounds deprives an intellectual endeavour from
376 alternative perspectives (cf. Kitcher 1990). People who were exposed to different
377 experiences, vary in talents and weaknesses, developed distinct skills, have
378 diverging personalities, suffer different vulnerabilities, had to adapt to multiple
379 problems, or simply differ in humour, among many other traits and histories, will
380 address problems from different perspectives. Diversity may also improve problem-
381 solving capacity by offering solutions that are more likely to be apt to the
382 environment and social circumstances they are meant for.

383

384 A well-known example of epistemic poverty is the inadequacy of
385 contraception in societies where women do not perceive themselves as sexual
386 agents. When contraceptives are primarily invented in the Global North by Western
387 scientists,² cultural suitability is often neglected or with the same negative effect,
388 unknown to the developers (Anderson 2007).

388

389 In addition, problem-solving capacity benefits from publicity and an
390 expansion in the number of participants, or as open source advocates say “Given
391 enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow” (Raymond 2001, 30). Wide participation in an
392 open and non-discriminatory environment speeds up research and allows
393 independent verification. Especially the harm caused by pathogen outbreaks that
394 endanger food security and public health can be substantially constrained by wide
395 scientific and civic participation in the search for solutions and containment of the
396 hazard (cf. Langat et al. 2011).

396

397 Scientific literate consumers provide additional benefits when offered the
398 chance to give feedback. Consumers as end-users are especially apt in finding new
399 uses of products and suggesting new improvements (Gault 2012).

399

400 Not only science, technological innovation and culture benefit from diversity
and a society where people are developing more skills. Citizens who are engaged in

² While the contraceptive pill was brought to the global markets by xxx from the
Global North, some elements were used already in indigenous communities of XXX
[find source and reference]

401 continuous learning and development of skills are better equipped to defend
402 democratic institutions and civil rights. There is also an increasing concern about
403 the number of people who are voting without adequately informing themselves and
404 carefully assessing options (Brennan 2011). Also, when people do not possess
405 sufficient skills for comprehensive advocacy, their most likely resort to change
406 institutions is through violent revolts. Democratic institutions require permanent
407 defence from being attacked or succumbed by scrupulous private interests. People
408 who did not or could not develop sufficiently the needed capabilities largely free-
409 ride from democratic citizenship efforts made by others. In addition, it becomes
410 increasingly necessary to assess as a society which technologies should govern our
411 lives and which not, a process that requires a solid public understanding of science
412 and technology.

413 Finally, work quality has a substantial effect on people physical and mental
414 health. Improving work environments has therefore huge payoffs in terms of public
415 health, adding to overall welfare (cf. Murphy 1993; Yeoman 2013).

416

417 *Rights-based arguments*

418

419 Work is necessary to secure human subsistence. Food needs to be produced, sewers
420 cleaned, houses built, and the ill cured. However, science and technology have
421 drastically reduced the amount of time needed to secure basic rights. We have often
422 heard that it now only takes on average XX minutes a day to produce one's food
423 (using technologies available in the Global North), compared to XX hours a century
424 ago [reference]. The advancement of science and technological development allows
425 for a drastic reduction in weekly work hours. While some people work far less hours
426 than a century ago, we can observe, as mentioned, a new rise in household working
427 hours since the late 1970s. Repeating these facts obliges us to provide an answer to
428 why, despite technological innovation which after temporary exclusivity becomes a
429 public good, so many people are in need to work in menial work for such long hours
430 without adequate salaries or sufficient social recognition. The idea of scientific and
431 technological advancement being a public good is incompatible with an outcome
432 where only a small fragment of the population harvests the benefits of
433 automatization.

434 An additional justification for decent work conditions can be argued for
435 based on cooperative justice for recognizing previously established institutions,
436 particularly land ownership titles (Timmermann and Félix 2015). Whatever the
437 benefits of past land ownership arrangements that permit inheritance and large
438 inequalities in distribution are, cooperative justice demands that such benefits be
439 more evenly distributed among those parties who recognize previously established
440 arrangements they had no say on and cooperate under these schemes.

441 Another important issue is in how far autonomy is compatible with a highly
442 uneven distribution of meaningful work. As mention some work has to be done in
443 order to secure subsistence needs. We may say that everyone has to work (or find
444 someone who is willing to work) this minimum amount of hours that are required
445 to satisfy this need. Some societies may opt for compulsory taxation so that people
446 unable to work are covered as well, obliging members to work somewhat longer.

447 After this minimum number of hours that are needed to cover the very basic needs,
448 work should have a character of voluntary. As some work for hire remains
449 necessary, dealing with meaningful work has to be part of a theory of justice
450 (Roessler 2012). A society that regards highly autonomy must guarantee an
451 institutional order that does not overburden certain social groups involuntarily with
452 menial work.

453 Related to the issue of autonomy is the capacity meaningful work has to
454 empower people, or in how far limits in occupational diversity places specific
455 groups of people in a position of disadvantage. As mention, work stimulates the
456 development of capabilities. This has a number of advantages. Skilled workers
457 become less replaceable, thus having greater bargaining power when negotiating
458 with employers. Occupational diversity allows people with different innate and
459 acquired capabilities to find work where they have greater chances in becoming
460 proficient. When people have only access to low-skilled or menial work, especially
461 work that requires repetitive manual skills or brute force, many will not find jobs
462 where they are good at and/or jobs where they cannot comply with existing laws,
463 putting them in danger and in a position of disadvantage (cf. Wolff and De-Shalit
464 2007). In case a certain region only offers jobs that require brute force, we will have
465 a selective empowerment that will mainly benefit able-bodied men, having negative
466 effects on gender equality and options available for disabled people and the elderly.
467 Failure to disperse and create diverse work opportunities not only affects equality
468 of opportunity, but also marginalizes a large segment of the population and makes
469 them much more vulnerable to abuses by wage-earners. Diversity in contribution
470 possibilities will ensure that a wider diversity of people is empowered.

471 A differential treatment on which type of work is recognized as such will
472 have a huge effect on people choosing or having to perform the given work. Perhaps
473 domestic and care work are the two types of work where people have been fighting
474 for official recognition the longest. These are not the only examples. Teachers
475 repeatedly have to complain to get the time needed to prepare before and after
476 classes to be recognized as work. The same counts for the practicing time
477 performing artists and professional athletes need. The reader may have heard a
478 number of times about work outside academia referred to as “real work”. It
479 becomes difficult to recognize on an equal basis the different amounts of effort
480 people dedicate to their jobs, as this demands some knowledge of the different work
481 environments and the efforts it took to reach to the point of being able to perform
482 the assigned tasks. Education and work rotation can help people gather better
483 insights on what other people are doing on their daily basis.

484 Additional arguments for a wider provision of meaningful work are ensuring
485 fair equality of opportunity and helping people gather an identity through work
486 (Herzog 2011). Unfortunately, I will have to leave a discussion of these two issues
487 for a later version of the paper.

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491
492

493 **What are the conflictive implications of contributive justice?**

494

495 We will concentrate on three major objections to the idea of contributive justice: (1)
496 the liberty to enjoy menial work and the objective judgement of one's work, (2) the
497 technological and scientific favouritism contributive justice may imply and (3) the
498 freedom to boycott unfair systems.

499 We will start with the first issue. Improving people's chances in attaining
500 meaningful work requires some scale on which to value work. While at first sight
501 one could settle by simply stating that it is good enough when people subjectively
502 are satisfied with their work. There are some conflicts with this solution. First, some
503 people are difficult or impossible to make happy through work. A system that insists
504 to fulfil their lives through work will fail if it does not take into account a wider
505 dimension, e.g. well-being during leisure time, or in some exceptional cases fail
506 altogether. Second, people tend to aspire only what they can reasonably aim at and
507 thus set lower standards when they are used to deprivation (Dieterlen 2003; Sen
508 2009). Career aspirations reflect rather ties to initial deprivations than free choice.
509 Doubting on the authenticity of self-reported labour satisfaction brings in the huge
510 problem of elaborating a scale that measures objectively work quality, with the
511 unavoidable consequences that someone's work is objectively perceived as menial,
512 while subjectively seen as great, or the other way around. If policies are set to
513 reduce the amount of menial work in order to create meaningful work, people who
514 valued highly their occupation may lose their job and pushed towards objectively
515 highly esteemed work that does not fulfil subjectively the person working. Some
516 people can gather an enormous amount of well-being doing objectively menial
517 tasks,³ and who are we or the state to prohibit this? As an alternative, guaranteeing
518 sufficient leisure time (to balance out monotonous work) also allows people to find
519 meaning outside the work environment (Roessler 2012).

520 The second objection inculcates contributive justice of favouring complexity
521 over simpler undertakings. This is an accusation that generally our current
522 knowledge economy faces. Particularly in agriculture, it is still an open question if
523 breakthrough science delivers necessarily better results than small-scale
524 incremental innovation (Thompson 2010). Continuously failing to meet high
525 standards and expectations greatly affects human well-being. The unceasing push
526 towards higher performances has led to a recent reappraisal of Eastern
527 philosophies that advocate the maintenance of balances and self-sufficiency.

528 A third criticism to contributive justice is in how far the concept is
529 compatible with conscious objection and the liberty to boycott unfair systems.
530 Demanding wider participation goes at odds with respecting people's liberty to
531 object to a lifestyle or social order by minimizing cooperation. Throughout history
532 people have made use of their liberty to avoid cooperating with partners they
533 perceive as unjust and this even in cases where it comes at substantial personal or
534 group costs (Ooms 2010). Most of the demands behind the idea of contributive
535 justice already imply that the system in which people participate is worthy of
536 people's cooperation.

³ I thank Richard Arneson for challenging me with this issue.

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538

539 **Can we live with these implications?**

540

541 Perhaps the most prominent accusation against any top-down demand to
542 restructure work environments in order to improve work quality is the charge of
543 perfectionism, or generally the principle that the state should not interfere with the
544 liberty of workers to enjoy undemanding labour. However the current structure of
545 work environments is not fruit of the sum of individual well-informed choices.
546 Workplaces are structured following up-to-date or often even out-dated business
547 management models that aim to secure profits which are essential for the long-term
548 survival of the company, or in many less benign cases, simply to maintain power
549 relations that allows company managers to exert control over their employees (cf.
550 Spencer 2013). Absence of enforceable universal labour laws incentivizes poorer
551 countries to offer a cheaper and cheaper workforce as an essential element in a
552 competition to attract foreign capital by offering the lowest manufacturing costs.
553 From this perspective, an appeal to maintain the current integrity of workplaces
554 loses much ground and we have to be critic in granting a group of workers who
555 enjoy the current *status quo* anything resembling a veto power to object changes to
556 existing work structures (*idem*). From a moral perspective, it is important to realize
557 that vast inequalities in the distribution of meaningful work are avoidable, work
558 places could be redesigned to allow a wider provision of interesting, demanding and
559 autonomous work (Arnold 2012).

560 Further, analysing this problem from a global perspective urges us to
561 acknowledge some very hard facts. While there are some workers who greatly enjoy
562 their low-skilled jobs, these workers as well as pretty much everyone else,
563 consumes on a regular basis products made by workers who do not enjoy their low-
564 skilled jobs at all. Quite the contrary, labour conditions in sweat shops, large part of
565 the developing world mining industry and cash crops farms, are having a terrible
566 effect on the workers' physical and mental health. We could significantly improve
567 labour conditions without major changes in our lifestyles. A point that leads us to
568 the third criticism towards contributive justice – the liberty to boycott.

569 Besides the ecological footprint today's consumption patterns leave, a major
570 reason to oppose to current manufacturing practices is the unacceptably low labour
571 standards of a great number of industries. People should have some liberty to not
572 having to contribute to a system they perceive as unjust, especially when they are
573 not enjoying most benefits such societies offer. However, the wider idea of
574 contributive justice exactly embraces this very criticism on labour standards and
575 aims at changing business management models while not advocating a major
576 disruption of production.

577 As far as the accusation of technoscientific favouritism goes, the charge will
578 only have substance if a too narrow definition of meaningful work is used.
579 Craftsmanship has been compatible throughout centuries with the idea of
580 meaningful work (cf. Sennet 2008). There is a substantial demand for creative
581 output that is unique and original, in areas as diverse as architecture and cuisine.

582 Work quality assessment should embrace a much broader definition of meaningful
583 work covering all knowledge and skill-intensive work for which there is demand.
584 At last, I hope to have shown that the idea of contributive justice is a
585 worthwhile concept to dedicate a wider normative analysis, as it could be made into
586 a great tool to assess knowledge-intensive work.

587

588

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590

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