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It feels a trifle ironic, my being placed in the "policy" section of the conference, because I once wrote a brief, one-paragraph manifesto called, "Against Policy" (Graeber 2004). It has always occurred to me that "policy" and "opinions" form a set, and a rather pernicious one: that is, "opinions" are what you have when you have no power, so your views on what to do have no effect on actual policy; most people have "opinions" because those who make policy don't much care what they think; "policy," conversely, implies some sort of technocratic elite analysing a situation and imposing their solutions on people who have not, on the whole, been allowed to deliberate on the matter themselves, or even, in many cases, been consulted.

So I don't really like the idea of "policy." Still, if we are simply talking about the practical application of some of the ideas we've been discussing, I think I could make a few comments, and pull various strands together. I've been conducting research about work for some time now, and as it happens I just received the galleys yesterday for a book on the subject I have been working on for some time. In the light of this research, I'd say there are two things that most immediately jump out

at me about the discussion we've been having—and in this, it resembles many discussions that we have been having about work and the future of work.

The first is that no one seems to remark on the profound irrationality of the framework of the discussion. That is to say that there seems to be a general feeling that the rise of the robots is a terrible thing; it will put millions of people out of work, and what are they going to do? It's assumed automation is going to be a problem. It strikes me that if there was any absolute proof that we are living inside a fundamentally crazy economic system it's that the prospect of eliminating most undesirable or dreary forms of work is treated as a problem. Why should that be a problem? For thousands of years, our ancestors dreamed of a society without work, or in which the need to work would be drastically reduced. Finally, we stand at the brink of such a world and suddenly we do not know what to do. We have trapped ourselves in an economic system that makes that a dilemma because we do not know what to do with all the people who are out of work.

This mindset goes back some time. I do not know whether anybody has ever read *Player Piano*, Kurt Vonnegut's very first novel; it is all about when robots replace all the factory workers and they are all sitting around getting drunk, playing pool and being depressed; that is, it's assumed that if not standing on production lines fusing things together, the majority of the population just wouldn't know what else to do with themselves (Vonnegut 1952). I find it telling that Kurt Vonnegut had dropped out of an anthropology programme at the time he wrote that book. Perhaps if he had finished the programme he might have learned that people around the world have often operated on three or four hours of work a day, as Marshall Sahlins was later to point out (Sahlins 1972/2017). Oddly enough such people do not become listless and depressed. They find all sorts of ways to entertain themselves. Lack of work is not an inherent problem.

So how did we get to the position where the elimination of work or the massive reduction of work is considered a problem? How is it we can't even conceive of an economic system that would, faced with the problem of less demand for labour and more abundance, can't just redistribute the work in a more or less equitable fashion so we can use our free time to enjoy the abundance? This shouldn't be a hard problem! Of all the economic problems one could be facing it's hard to imagine an easier or more desirable one. Yet we're flummoxed by it. We act as if market capitalism by its nature couldn't handle this. Which is odd because they also tell us we have to accept market capitalism as opposed to any other conceivable system because of its amazing efficiency. Suddenly it turns out that in the face of twenty-first century problems, at least, it's completely inefficient.

The second thing that nobody really remarked upon is that this—that the crisis of the rise of robots and the fear of automation has happened before. It happened in the 1930s, but then, right at the end of the 1960s there was another enormous moral panic. I know one person (Win McCormack) who was taking part in think tanks at the time, and he told me that all the Ivy League schools in America were organizing, "what are we going to do when all the jobs are gone, and the working class is thrown out of work." The *Player Piano* scenario felt quite imminent at that time. Then around 1971 or 1972 you get things like *Future Shock* by Alvin Toffler coming out which gives public voice to all this; Toffler makes an argument about what he calls "accelerative thrust," that the speed at which technological change is happening is geometrical: the number of new patents, energy use, and so forth (Toffler 1970). For instance, if you look at the speed at which the fastest person can travel, for example at that time, and it did seem to be increasing at such a rate that it was reasonable to assume that by now, we should be exploring other solar systems. It's a bit ironic that he used the term "accelerative thrust" though because in fact

that particular indicator hit its high water mark just around the time he was writing the book, then abruptly stopped: the fastest speed a person has ever achieved was achieved in 1969, with Apollo 10, and we have never gone faster since. Most of his trends started slowing down at just that moment.

Nonetheless, there was a general moral panic at the time, and a lot of it took the form of a very conservative fear of the social consequences of too much wealth, leisure, and rapid technological advance. (It's not insignificant that Toffler himself became a darling of the neocons.) Much of it was explicitly anti-feminist: "What is going to happen to the patriarchal family and when we are all test tube babies?" (People were anticipating Shulamith Firestone long before she wrote.) "What is going to happen when all the working class gets thrown out of work and everybody becomes a hippy?" Obviously this was in the context of the times when it was assumed that there would be efficient welfare states which would redistribute the goods at least to a reasonable degree. One policy result, which can be observed around that time, was a vast shift of research and development away from the "space age" and futuristic technologies popular at the time and towards medical, information, and military technologies—that is, largely to things that were useful for social control. One could make the argument they also started working to reign in the welfare state around that time: anyway, that's what eventually started happening.

Somehow we are at that moment of moral panic again, but this time, with somewhat different ground rules.

As I mentioned, the idea that machines are going to throw us all out of work and that this will be a disaster goes back well before the 1960s or even before Vonnegut; it harkens back at least to the Depression; even arguably to the Victorian age. Keynes coined the phrase "technological unemployment" in the 1930s as one of the main causes of the mass unemployment of the time. As a result, some argue why are we worried now, the structural employment always predicted in the 1930s

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would provide as these jobs are actually necessary), but no one is going to be doing paperwork that serves no purpose. So if all those people quit and form jug bands, even if those bands are not very good, or even start researching alien abductions or decide to set the world record for having sex at an advanced age, well, they'll be a lot happier, it's very hard to imagine over two thirds of them will come up with something everyone else considers entirely useless, and of course, if one of those poets does turn out to be a Shakespeare, one of those musicians does turn out to be a Miles Davis, one of those crank scientists actually does invent a teleportation device or warp drive, society will benefit more than we can count.

I would make a radical suggestion: that technological unemployment has already happened, that we are in a state of collective denial, effectively, we have decided that rather than opt for collective liberation we're effectively torturing each other out of sheer resentment at the idea someone else might be getting off easy without having to work. But the means for creating a sane society exists. It might seem radical, but it would be easier and beneficial because much of the work of automation has already been done. We just need to lift the veil on what is really going on around us.

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never happened. Or in the 1940s or 1950s. John F. Kennedy convoked a whole conference on what to do about the imminent unemployment with automation and the eventual emergence of robots—it didn't happen then either, so there's no reason to think this time is any different.

However, an argument could be made that the mass employment predicted since the 1930s actually did become structure—we're just unable to see it. At least this is what I want to propose here. If you look at the kind of jobs that were considered necessary in the times that Keynes was writing—and we were 10 years away from the time Keynes was predicting that we should have a 15-hour week—many, if not most, of the jobs were indeed eliminated (Keynes 1930). Technological unemployment did happen. We could be living just as he predicted. But instead we made up new forms of employment to keep people busy which were, we might say, only made necessary by each other. There's no real objective reason why most of them should have to exist.

Now, we're probably not entirely unfamiliar with this sort of argument but I'm not going to make the one you usually hear. The typical narrative is that we denied ourselves utopia because of the endless creation of new needs: a classic Christian trope, by the way, Fallen Man is cursed by insatiable desires which thus blind him to the dictates of his own reason. The slightly less theological way in which it's usually put is that given the choice between more leisure and more consumer goods, people collectively opted for the latter. We chose consumerism. This narrative of course goes along with the discourse of the rise of the service economy we've been hearing since at least the 1980s, but a lot of that is really just hot air. If you look at the numbers it just doesn't wash. A key question is how you define service work. If you define it simply as it was defined in Keynes' time, as giving people haircuts or serving them coffee, well, you find the number of people employed in services has remained pretty much flat at 20% in

most industrialized countries for the last 100 years. There's been changes in composition—fewer domestic servants, obviously, more baristas—but the total numbers have barely altered. What has happened is that information technologies have skyrocketed. Administrative, clerical, managerial, and supervisory jobs have skyrocketed. At the same time farming, largely, and industry declined (though not nearly as much as people say). So what's basically replaced the old factory and farming jobs is not service, per se, but office work.

This whole phenomenon became an interest of mine after I wrote a little essay, which was kind of a thought experiment, called "On the phenomenon of bullshit jobs" (Graeber 2013). I had a friend who was starting a new magazine, and asked me for something provocative. Well at the time I had a kind of list of essays I always wanted to write that nobody would normally publish so I trundled one out. The original essay was really a reflection on the puzzlement I'd often feel when I would meet people at academic parties or spouses of colleagues; I'd ask them what they do for a living, and quite frequently, the result was embarrassment. They said, "Oh, nothing really," or "well, to be honest, not much. I really just work two or three hours a day. Don't tell my boss but most days I mostly just play around on Facebook." I kept meeting these people. Or others would write off their entire line of work, "Well, I am a corporate lawyer, but to be honest, the whole industry is pointless, I kind of wish it didn't exist." So I started thinking: how many people are there like that? And what must the moral and psychological effects be! Imagine waking up every morning, going to work, and secretly believing your job is completely pointless and should not exist? Or knowing that you are just going to pretend to work for the next eight hours? That actually rather got to me because coming from a working class background, as I do, I know that the most awful part of any real job is that part of it is that you have to pretend to work even though you've finished the job, because the boss is looking and you're on the

create even more bullshit jobs. The only way to ensure that it wouldn't, would be to create a job guarantee on top of UBI, so no one would be forced to take a pointless job just to keep a roof over their heads; in which case, JG would just be a way of providing help finding useful work until people who now have time on their hands begin to self-organize enough they don't need bureaucrats to do that for them anymore. But certainly as an alternative JG would be disastrous.

Also it's based on false premises. First of all, it's perfectly clear that people do want to do something with their lives, so it's not like very many people given UBI would just sit around doing nothing all day; economics teaches us people want something for nothing, or for the minimum output possible, but if that were really true, people paid handsomely to do nothing all day would be happy as clams and in fact they almost invariably report themselves miserable. So then the next line of objection is "sure, but if you just let everybody contribute to society in any way they want, half of them will decide they're poets or try to invent perpetual motion devices, you'll have all these annoying street musicians and mimes wondering around, there will be crime and drug addiction, civilization as we know it will begin to disintegrate." This is what I mean by fear of freedom. Just take the point about useless jobs. How many bad poets are we really going to get? About 2%, 3%, 4% of the population? Obviously not even that. Meanwhile, right this very moment now we are in a situation where 37% to 40% of people in jobs already think their jobs are completely useless and, not only that, not even fun. If you are up there highlighting a medical form all day so someone can get a tax cut, or bribe a politician to insert their accountancy firm in between two health providers, you are not having fun. But no one would ever do a job like that except for the money. I can still imagine people doing sewer maintenance, or removing landmines, or becoming morticians or joining the merchant marine even though they didn't have to, especially if they got additional money for it (which people

calculated to be not quite enough to live on. I think Obama endorses this now. That makes sense: "progressives" or left centrists, liberals, nowadays are basically conservatives insofar as they're mainly interested in conserving the system in more or less its current form. Then there's a right-wing version, which is basically about using a guaranteed income to lower the domain of unconditionality in other parts of the welfare state, or what remains of it: health, education, or housing. That is what people like Milton Friedman were endorsing.

But there's also a left-wing version, which is about entirely severing livelihood from work—which means radically expanding the domain of unconditionality (since one would leave free health, education, etc. intact—and it would probably also require a degree of intervention in the housing market to prevent rentiers from gobbling too much of it up.) In this radical version you give every individual an income adequate to a rudimentary but comfortable life and then let people decide for themselves what they want to do with themselves, how they want to contribute to society. One might refer to this situation as "economic freedom." It sounds strange to us because we've come to identify economic freedom with the right to sell ourselves, or at best to own a piece in our own collective enslavement, but for most people in history of course freedom meant the right not to sell oneself, or to otherwise be reduced to working at another's orders. The normal reaction when you propose something like Universal Basic Income (UBI) of course is precisely, fear of freedom: "But if you just leave it up to every individual to decide what they want to do with themselves, they'll simply lounge around and not work," because they're lazy and won't be able to figure out what to do with themselves, "or, how do you know they won't do something stupid?"

This is incidentally why those who hail from the professional-managerial classes, but nonetheless recognize radical measures of some sort are required, often prefer a job guarantee (JG). But historically, such programmes always

clock so he doesn't want to see you slouching around whether or not there's anything that needs doing. And I thought, "good lord! what if your entire job is like that? What would that be like? Is that what middle class people do all day? No wonder so many of them seem so depressed and empty."

I wrote this little piece saying: maybe this is the reason we do not have the 15-hour week. Somehow, we have conspired to give ourselves these made-up jobs just because we feel that everybody should be working. That there is this incredible moral imperative. It was a thought experiment, but, if there was ever an experiment that was confirmed by the reaction, this would have to be it; because within three weeks of publication—and this was in an obscure periodical mind you, *STRIKE!* magazine, which had recently spun off from *International Times*, an anarchist magazine which hadn't even existed a few months before—well, within weeks, the essay had already been translated into a dozen languages. The server kept crashing. It received millions of hits. I started getting emails from people saying, "I work in financial services. This is so true. I got this essay eight times just today across my desk," which if nothing else shows that many people in financial services really do not have much to do. So the essay, "On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs," started circulating everywhere. People started writing confessionals. There were countless blogs: I think I saved about a hundred of them. People were writing things like, "Yes, it is true. I am a corporate lawyer. I contribute nothing to society. I am miserable all the time" or confessing anonymously online that they could not admit to friends and families what they really do all day, which was, very frequently, absolutely nothing.

So clearly I had identified a kind of taboo, a social issue that simply couldn't be publicly addressed as such. Think about it. Newspaper columnists or TV pundits are the social equivalent of preachers in this day and age, and they're always going on about how young people, and so on, are lazy and workshy; the

solution to every social problem always seems to involve more work; can you even imagine such a person getting up and writing a column about how actually a lot of the work we do is pointless and we all need to slow down and relax a little? Work is considered a value in itself, "hard-working" means "deserving," if you don't work hard you're undeserving, and all this is simply hard-wired into our political discourse. So the issue was literally unspeakable.

Yet it clearly was one of massive importance. At one point YouGov did a poll, directly inspired by the essay, I think in 2015, and there was another in Holland a year later. YouGov found that in the UK, 37% of all people who had jobs said that if their job did not exist it would make no difference whatsoever—which is just astounding (Dahlgreen 2015). I'd myself thought the number would be half that—15%, maybe 20% max. In Holland the number was 40%. Only 50% in the UK were absolutely sure their job served any social purpose at all.

In a way this is something we've kind of known for a long time, that a lot of people think their jobs are a complete waste of time; what I'm really proposing here is something that shouldn't be very radical, but apparently is. I'm saying: what if they are right? "Let us assume that these people know what they are talking about." After all who else would know better? If you think your job is useful in some way, I will take your word for it. If you think your job is completely pointless, then I will take your word for it too. But think about the implications. Because there are so many people who would never say their jobs are pointless. If you're a nurse, a bus driver, an exterminator, a grocer… You might not like your job but you definitely know that the work needs doing. And my own research has made it clear that real service work, store clerks, or waitresses and the like, feel the same way. So if 37% nonetheless feel their jobs are pointless, then that means that almost anybody sitting there in an office who you might

ecutive Producer, and every single one of them feels they have to weigh in and change something. All of them tinker with the script and the results are mush.

This kind of feudalization, with its hierarchies of managers and sub-managers and sub-sub-managers, has infected all types of organizations, public and private.

The question I've been asked here is: what are the "policy implications?"

It's pretty obvious you can't approach a problem like this head-on. In British academia we talk about the "creating committees to discuss the problem of too many committees problem." Try to set up a government initiative to address the problem of bullshit jobs and it'll just be the same thing: they'll end up creating more of them. A viable solution would have to go deeper, to question our assumptions.

For instance, in all the discussions we have been having today, every intervention has simply taken it for granted that jobs are necessary, that if a job exists, there must be a good reason for it. There seems strong reason to believe this isn't true. What if we instead started our policy discussions with the assumption that a lot of jobs are not necessary, and that the people who have those jobs know they are not necessary and are simply not in a position that they feel they can speak about such matters because the alternative would be to be thrown on the tender mercies of the unemployment system?

This is why I think the plague of bullshit jobs, and the misery it causes, is one of the best arguments we could make for universal basic income. One of the odd things about universal basic income is that it's backed by such a broad spectrum of economic and political thinkers, from Martin Luther King to Milton Friedman, but this is partly because different advocates are actually advocating quite different things. One might say there's three broad versions of basic income. There's the liberal version, where you are basically giving everyone an income supplement, that's nonetheless

supply chains, containerized shipping, Japanese style "just in time" production quotas? It is not like education or teaching at universities has become all that more complicated than it was 50 years ago. We are basically doing the same thing. But somehow, all of a sudden we need three times as many people to administer us while we're doing it. How did that happen? If you look at how it happened, it is quite clear. The number of administrators has gone up slightly in relation to both speakers and students, but the number of administrative staff has almost tripled.

What's more, in America, where it is possible to compare public and private universities, we find the rapid growth of administration is happening faster in private institutions than in public ones. Overall, numbers have tripled. Why? It is largely because every big shot administrator they hire now, every Vice Provost or Strategic Dean, has to feel like they're a corporate executive and that means not only a six-figure salary but that you're automatically assigned two or three flunkies when they come in— because after all, you're not a real executive unless you have two or three subordinates. They hire the assistants first. Then they figure out something for those assistants to do. So what do they do? Generally, they make up new forms of paperwork for people like me to do, time allocation studies, learning outcome summaries, elaborate reports justifying departments to continue to receive the same funding they already are. These kinds of dynamics exist everywhere. I call the results managerial feudalism. You can see the same thing in most large corporations. Layers and layers of managers are added and in between the producers and the top of the system, and the process reproduces itself in every field, starting from finance and large bureaucratic corporations but gradually becoming the model even for the creative industries: so that you have curators in art; producers in addition to editors in the news; in movies and TV writers now complain there are often five, six, even seven layers of suits in between you and the Ex-

suspect is secretly thinking "nobody really needs to be doing this" probably is, indeed, thinking exactly that.

Then you have to think about all the support work. If 37% to 40% of jobs are doing nothing then how many people who are cleaners, who water the plants in that building, or work in security—people who are doing real work—are doing their real work so that other people can sit around doing nothing? Then if you include the bullshitization of real work (paperwork and meetings deemed useless by those who do it), which according to some surveys is extremely high, you're definitely talking about over 50% of the work being done in our society being completely unnecessary. Think about that. We could easily institute a 20-hour week. (Obviously, the question would be how, which is where it gets to policy. I will get to that in a moment.)

So: how did we get to this ridiculous situation? It is something of a mystery. I explore a variety of possible answers in the book. One thing we can say for sure: one of the only things the left and the right seem to agree on policy issues is that the solution to any problem is more jobs. And this demand for jobs is somewhat indiscriminate. At least, you never hear anyone say, "We demand more jobs, but only ones that actually do something." Neither do you hear anyone object to policies designed to lower unemployment that some jobs are not worth having. In the same way, when in America or the UK they talk about rich people as "job creators," and thus justify using the tax system to reallocate even more of the national wealth to them, so they can create jobs, no one really says, "oh yes, and make sure those jobs are useful in some way." It is assumed that the market would never produce a useless job, and somehow giving money to rich people and putting political pressure on them to hire people is "the free market," so even if the people doing the jobs feel their jobs are useless, they must be wrong, jobs are useful by definition. At least in the private sector. (Which is another common misconception: if you look at the numbers,

bullshit jobs seem to occur roughly equally in the public and private sectors.)

You could say there are at least two levels of causality we need to look at: on the one hand, the internal institutional dynamics of large organizations which tend to create and maintain such pointless positions—and there's definitely an already-existing sociological and even economic literature on this—and the larger moral and political question of why no one does anything about it, or even in some cases, encourages it. I actually found a smoking gun interview with Obama where he actually admitted it: "Sure," he said, "Having a national health-type system or a single payer insurer would be much more efficient. People argue therefore we should have one all the time, but what are we going to do with the office workers? There are two or three billion people who work in the private healthcare industry. If we have an efficient system all of these guys will be out of work" (Sirota 2006). So here we are with the President of the United States saying that a socialist system would be more efficient than a market system but therefore, that he prefers a market system because it will keep lots of people in unnecessary jobs. There is a political will to keep things like this, a recognition on the part of authorities that they want to keep this engine of creating unnecessary jobs going— because after all, you can fire factory workers, or drivers, and tell them it's their own fault, but office workers, that's the core constituency of the democratic party and you can't completely alienate those guys. On the other hand, genuinely changing the system, creating not only socialized health but a more equitable distribution of wealth and labour, well, as far as Obama is concerned that's completely off the table. "Hope" and "change" don't cover hoping for changes like that. This is why I say that in the final analysis, Obama was a conservative. But the result is millions of people as he says toiling away at jobs they know to be socially useless, or worse, and the human toll of that is enormous.

someone higher up, until he finally realized he had a bullshit job because he was just there to make the bank look like it had an efficiency programme when in fact it didn't (Graeber 2018).

Another surprising thing I learned was that financial firms—basically, large operations in the Finance, Insurance & Real Estate (FIRE) section like banks, accountancy firms or insurance firms—whose business centres on distributing large amounts of money, will often intentionally mistrain people or otherwise take measures to ensure maximum inefficiency. I got one testimony from someone who worked for one of the big five accountancy firms that was handling Payment Protection Insurance (PPI) distributions, who said the company was intentionally training people wrong, putting offices in the wrong cities, destroying documents so they had to be created again, all because they knew that longer it took to distribute the money, the more of it they kept. It is a little bit like Jarndyce and Jarndyce in *Bleak House*. You want to have layers and layers of unnecessary bureaucracy if you are running a basically top-down redistribution of the economy, rather than one that's primarily organized around industrial production; the more you have financialization the more this kind of inefficiency pays. And the logic that starts in the financial sector slowly becomes the norm and extends everywhere.

It definitely extends to universities. This is my riposte, incidentally, to *The Economist* who wrote a reply to the original Bullshit Jobs article almost instantly after I wrote it. They tried to make the argument that this endless creation of new office jobs is actually necessary—it's all because with complex global supply chains, production has become so digitized and efficient that we need many times more people to manage it. So bullshit jobs they claimed were the equivalent of the boring alienating factory job of the 1940s or 1950s, but they are also equally necessary. Our wealth depends on them.

To which the obvious reply is: well then why is it happening at universities? What's the academic equivalent of global

As for the more mechanical question of the internal workplace dynamics that lead to the gradual accretion of such jobs, this is interesting but I probably do not have time to go into it in any detail. But it's clear that the financialization of the economy has accelerated tendencies that already existed in any large organization, and often quite rapidly. I didn't do quantitative research on the topic, but I did do some qualitative research and some of it was quite revealing in this regard. I solicited testimonies on social media, set up an email account, and received over 250 testimonies ranging from one paragraph to 18 pages in some cases—whole strings of bullshit jobs one after the other—and then followed up with the more revealing ones with often quite detailed questioning.

One of the more interesting testimonies was from an efficiency expert at a series of banks. He was technically a security expert, but his job was to study internal operations, then suggest reforms that would both streamline operations and make them more secure. He said that in his own estimation—and I guess no one would be in a better position to know—80% of people who work in the average large bank were completely unnecessary, either they were doing nothing, or they could easily be replaced by machines. Most of them, he added, were not aware of the supernumerary nature of their jobs: everything was organized in such a way that no one really understood the larger processes they were part of, so they just assumed those processes were not completely absurd. He also said that in 15 years, no reform he'd proposed was ever adopted. Every time he proposed a plan to get rid of some of this waste, it was eventually shut down because it would always mean that some executive would lose out on the number of people they had working under them, and this would be a major blow to their standing. You see, one's prestige within a large corporation (often, even, one's pay) is based upon how many underlings you have, and when someone realizes, "wait, this means I'm going to lose 25 of them," panic ensues. So his every suggestion was vetoed by

There are another couple of points that I think are really important to make here. One is about the effects of all this useless work on perceptions of value. Historically, it's important to remember that the labour theory of value was almost universally accepted by popular classes in the nineteenth century, particularly in America; there was this incredible outpouring of hatred towards corporate capitalists—"robber barons" as they called them at the time—when they first appeared; and this was followed by an explicit intellectual counteroffensive from the side of the robber barons themselves; starting in America with people like Andrew Carnegie. It took explicit aim at the idea that workers create wealth, or that one's work should be one's primary means of expression, self-realization, or the basis of one's feelings of self-worth. This was startlingly effective. After all, if you said "wealth creator" in 1850, everyone would assume you were referring to workers; if you say "wealth creator" now, they'll assume you mean bosses. This was accompanied by the idea that people should think of themselves as valuable according to what they consumed instead. The obvious problem here is: how do you validate labour in a situation like that? Other than simply as a means to earn your consumer toys since that didn't really cut it, in moral terms (and remember, the US is a very moralistic society.) More and more, the answer was to fall back on the old puritan principle that work is of moral value in itself.

If you flip through the sociology of work literature, or surveys about work satisfaction in rich countries, you almost always find yourself face-to-face with the same paradox. On the one hand, (a) people find their sense of self-worth and being in the world from their work; on the other, (b) most people hate their jobs. It's very hard to imagine how people could think both these things are the same time but clearly many people do.

The tradition of Puritanism—which by the way goes back much further than Calvinism, to Medieval or even some early

Christian ideas— provides an answer. People feel validated, they get their sense of self-worth from their work, because they hate their jobs. Work is a kind of secular hair shirt. It is supposed to be miserable. It is this suffering which provides the spiritual legitimacy which justifies the comforts and pleasures of consumption. The result is a feeling that the more pleasure and fulfilment you get out of the work the less legitimate it is, the less it's really work, certainly, the less you should be paid for it. (Everyone feels this way. How many of us who, say, do something that's actually interesting for a living, that they enjoy, haven't caught themselves thinking "I can't believe I get paid to do this!" This is even in cases where the work is providing an obvious social benefit, like advancing science, or providing entertainment.) There is a very deep moral perversity in these feelings, which cause us to feel that jobs that are satisfying should not be as highly paid as those that make us miserable. It would make sense if it was compensation for taking on unpleasant or dangerous jobs like, say, sewer maintenance, firefighting, or industrial fishing. But in fact these are often poorly paid as well: partly, because they are so necessary. It as if even the satisfaction that comes of knowing one is actually doing something useful for other human beings, that one is improving the world in some way, counts against the misery-value of the work, and therefore justifies worse conditions, less pay, and less overall social respect. There are always a few exceptions to every rule, but generally speaking the result is an overall negative correlation between social utility and pay. Jobs that are obviously useful do tend to get paid much less than jobs that largely are not, or anyway those who have those jobs feel are not.

What I find fascinating—and not a little bit disturbing—is the fact that so many people have come to feel that such arrangements are morally right. "You wouldn't want teachers to be paid too much, because you wouldn't want people who are just in it for the money taking care of our children." Peo-

ple say things like that all the time. (Oddly enough you never hear anyone say "You wouldn't want bankers to be paid too much, because you wouldn't want people who are just in it for the money taking care of our money"—which one might think was a much more obvious danger, but we'll leave that aside for the moment.) It causes this fascinating political resentment whereby—in America you see this all the time— right-wing activists are able to whip up resentment against teachers, effectively saying: "You are supposed to be self-sacrificing. And you get the pleasure of knowing you benefit our children! How dare you want pensions, vacations, good job security and tolerable work conditions too!." Even auto-workers, "you get to make cars, shouldn't that be enough for you? And you expect to be paid $28.00 an hour just because you're providing people with something they actually want?" Similarly, in this country, you see the same weird moral kink in the resentment against people working in the public services; after the financial crash, there was a rhetoric of common sacrifice, but everyone was willing to accept that the bankers who caused the crisis didn't need to make significant sacrifices, aside from a little public shaming, and all those legions of pointless office flunkies didn't have to make sacrifices, they had to suffer already in their knowledge of their own parasitism; but they did demand sacrifices from ambulance drivers, nurses, or firefighters. There is a sense that those people are supposed to be self-sacrificing. Why else had they chosen low-paying, or relatively low-paying, but vitally useful lines and therefore high-minded work? They are doing good in the world; now they can do some more by taking a pay cut. People might not have been delighted that the bankers got off free, but the political party that proposed these policies did get re-elected. Arguably, twice! Certainly they weren't considered monsters and unceremoniously booted out.

There is a perverse inversion of values here, but it's a direct result of this notion of work as a form of self-sacrifice, self-discipline, and self-abnegation.