

Chapter 6

Work and Employment

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§6.1 Employment

Although full employment has been the declared goal of government in many countries since the Second World War, it is unclear what constitutes full employment, or indeed, employment. Large numbers of people drift in and out of paid employment as their personal circumstances change. Mothers of school children take up part-time jobs while their children are out of the house; retired tax inspectors do a little bit of tax advising for favoured clients; the widow occasionally takes in paying guests. Such cases, though numerous, are mostly ignored. So, too, is the fact that many people who work are not employed. The barrister, the clergyman, the author, the Member of Parliament, all work extremely hard, but are not employed. The emphasis is on full-time paid work, usually some sort of manual labour not demanding a high level of technical skill. Unskilled labour has been with us for a long time: in the bible we read of men who had stood idle in the market place until being hired at the very last hour.¹ Their lot is a pitiable one, and we do well to concern ourselves with it. But we cloud our understanding if we take it as typical, and assimilate all employment to the employment of standard-issue employees by employers. Employment is highly heterogeneous. “Wage-units” make little sense in a society where BBC presenters get wages a hundred times that of barmaids. In thinking about employment, we should not think of a single paradigm, but a wide variety of different people prepared to do many different things in return for money, though not always only in return for money. We range from the highly skilled technician to the unskilled labourer, and from the devoted professional who would be willing to do what he does even if not paid to do it to the deeply reluctant labourer whose

¹ St Matthew 20:1-15.

ideal is, in lines attributed by John Buchan to the Scottish crofter,
 Oh that the turfs would cut themselves,
 The fish clump up on the shore,
 that I upon my bed might lie
 Henceforth for ever more.

Employment must, therefore, be considered in particularity: in particular trades and arising from different opportunities and motivations.

Contrary to what many economists seem to think, labour is not a commodity; rather, a labourer is a cooperator in a cooperative enterprise from which the other party gains most of the natural benefit, and pays money to compensate. Employees get paid to do things the employer wants done. They are paid to do what they are told, but have to be able to understand what they are being told to do, and have to exercise at least some minimal discretion in doing it. Some, hewers of wood and drawers of water, do not need much skill, but even lowly jobs need some *nous*—there is some need to know which wood to hew, and where to take the water.² For cooperation to be possible, both parties must internalise the values held in common that constitute the basis of their cooperative activity. If someone employs me to do something, I have to internalise his goals to the extent of understanding what he tells me to do, and trying to do it. Even if it is only hewing wood or drawing water, I need to set myself the goal of sawing up the relevant logs, not the furniture in the house, and drawing water from the well, not from a stagnant pool or the cesspit. Usually the common understanding and commitment is greater, and requires the employee to identify, at least for the time being, with his employer, and make some of the values of his employer ones that he himself espouses. The valet wants his master to strike a fine figure; the chief executive wants his firm to prosper.

With greater identification come delegation and trust. The good workman knows how to do his job, and exercises his own judgement in doing it to the best of his ability. The business executive understands the business, and seeks to carry out the business in hand within the general guidelines laid down by his superior. In each case he may be motivated by the pay-packet, but in each case the packet involves not just his pay but the well performing of the job he is being paid for. Some degree of sharing is essential to

² See above, §4.2.

collaboration, which means that neither party can be exclusively governed by unmodified individual self-interest alone. Self-interest may motivate me to collaborate, but effective collaboration requires me not to play truant while fetching the water, not to trouser the cash instead of giving it to those who have earned it, and not to betray trade secrets to rival firms.

Once we recognise that employment is not just a commodity, and that we cannot understand it in economic terms alone, we are in a better position to understand it properly. Although pay is important, it is not all-important. Independently of identification with the employer's values, many workers take pride in their workmanship, and work, far from being a disutility, is a source of satisfaction. Employment often has social value: many older workers dread retirement, because it will cut them off from their mates. Even if the actual tasks they perform are humdrum or boring, the company they keep sustains their morale, and may constitute a social identification that gives sense to their life. Even when there is no companionship, the mere fact that they are being paid for what they do indicates that it is of some value to someone, and hence that they are contributors, not mere passengers or parasites. Employment not only provides an income, but confers status.

Labour is not a commodity—

different workers
have different skills,
different contacts and
different motivations

§6.2 Full Employment?

Classical economists believed that economies naturally reached an equilibrium position in which every worker who wanted work would be able to find it—though at a wage well below what he had expected. Keynes criticized their arguments and claimed that there was not just one equilibrium position into which the economy would settle in due course, but many, some of them having much higher levels of unemployment than economists had assumed. Macro-economic measures could, he believed, determine the level at which the economy would settle. Writing in the 1930s, when Britain was suffering from severe and prolonged unemployment, which was having a devastating effect on the unemployed and their families, he attributed it to bad macro-economic policies, in particular the return to the gold standard, and consequent deflation.

Keynes was right to argue against there being one natural equilibrium position, but wrong to think that any one of them was linked with full employment. Once we reject the acceptability of starvation wages, the strong link between full employment and macro-economic policy is broken. It is a mistake to try and run the economy with demand artificially enhanced, in order to have everyone employed as a matter of course. Demand, as we have seen, cannot simply be summed up into a total.³ At any one time there are different demands for different services at different prices. Fluctuating conditions may result in skilled workmen finding that there is no longer a demand for their services. In the exceptionally sunny summer of 1976 the sale of umbrellas collapsed, and a skilled umbrella-maker would have found himself out of a job, if he had not been able to turn his umbrella-making skills to making other useful accessories. Unemployment in Britain between the two world wars, although it may have been exacerbated by the return to the gold standard, was due to the exhaustion of coal seams and foreign competition. The former has always been the fate of extractive industries—in the mid Nineteenth Century there were rich seams of iron ore on the Brendon hills in West Somerset and North Devon and large towns, which were completely abandoned when the iron ore was worked out. Competition from abroad arose because foreigners had learned how to spin cotton, weave fabrics and build ships, and could do so at a lower cost, having more up-to-date methods and lower labour costs. It was felt to be unfair

³ See above, §5.3.

competition, but was the result of our having rested on our oars, and not having modernised our machinery and work practices, and not having moved on to invent new technology. Management and the unions, and indeed the whole temper of society were alike to blame. Macro-economic measures could not be targeted on the pit villages of County Durham and South Wales, the shipyards of Jarrow, or the mill towns of Lancashire; and the only way to get work was to move to towns like Luton and Oxford, where the new motor manufacturers were located. Many young men did, but it was difficult for older miners with families and houses to uproot themselves. Macro-economic policies, though they bear on employment, need to take many other considerations into account. Full employment is not an economic issue, but a political and social one, though with economic consequences.

How to re-employ in ICI at Billingham unemployed shipbuilders in Jarrow?

Unemployment in the 1930s left deep scars, because it was concentrated in certain areas and occupations, devastating whole communities. The remedies needed to be similarly particular. Retraining programmes can enable those whose skills are no longer needed owing to technical change, to acquire new skills that are marketable. After the Second World War the government encouraged new industries to locate themselves in formerly distressed areas, and spent public money on removing the pit-heaps that disfigured the landscape in coalfields. The problem in the Twenty-First Century, however, is different. Unemployment is not localised to particular areas or particular trades, but is general and widespread. In part it is still due to foreign competition, and part of the remedy is to train workers better, and equip them with marketable skills. But that takes time, and though it is obvious that literacy and numeracy are required for many jobs, it is not clear what other skills are marketable, or indeed, whether there is market for them. We need policies to provide markets for skills that are realistically available.

Some have already been outlined. If there are stable institutions in good standing, which are not afflicted by liquidity problems, and have good credit, they can profitably pursue counter-cyclical

policies, spending capital on improvements during recessions, and saving during booms. If a government had been fiscally prudent in the past, it would be able to do the same. Up to a limited point public-spirited individuals and institutions can lower their standard of financial prudence, and employ people to do work that will not yield a profit. Many householders in the 1930s would find a job in their houses or gardens for an unemployed man. Sir John Jarvis bought the liner *Berengaria* to be broken up at Jarrow. In many villages the farmers acknowledged some obligation, as in the biblical parable, to employ every labourer wanting work; and similarly firms would try to hang on to loyal employees in the hope of better times ahead. But farmers and firms cannot afford to expand their wage bill indefinitely if there is no corresponding increase in their sales.

The market for low-productivity skills is greater, if there are people with money in their pockets, who can spend it on goods and services beyond the reach of poorer spenders. To keep a gravelled drive free of weeds is labour-intensive; only the well-off can afford such a display of affluence. A footman has to be tall and have fine legs, but does not need skills difficult to acquire. If there are rich aspiring grandees, he may find employment, even though businessmen are shedding staff. Although it is unfashionable to speak well of inequality, inequality does provide some defence against unemployment.

But there may be more low-productivity labourers than can be carried by social and charitable practices, or the conspicuous consumption by the rich. Economics, unalloyed with humanity, would have wages fall to a sufficiently low level that people would be able and willing to afford such services that could be supplied. Shoeshine boys get a pittance, but do get customers. At one time in the late twentieth century immigrant Indian women were employed to develop films, but were paid a paltry wage. They were sweated labour. When digital images ousted silver halide photography, they ceased to be exploited. But, as one said, "Better to be an exploited immigrant worker than an unexploited one". Hard-nosed economists are quite happy with that conclusion. The economy does not owe anyone a living. All that should be provided to a labourer is the fruit of his productivity. But what if the worker is disabled, or a child? Traditional morality has urged compassion for widows and orphans, and many Christian charities have been founded to succour the aged and sick. We think that the sick, the

old and the widowed should have enough to live on; and if there are others whose productivity would win them only a low wage, humanity, unalloyed with economics or politics, would give them a living wage however little they contributed to the public good.

But the welfarist has problems. The underlying assumption is that unemployment is a misfortune, like ill health or disablement, which comes from outside, and has nothing to do with the unemployed's attitudes or choices. For many it is, but not necessarily for all, and we have, therefore to ask the question: What is disablement? Should a life-long aversion to work count? It may be that very few are thus afflicted: It was said of East Germany that not even communism had been able to separate a German from his work; and in other countries, too, there are people who value having a job. But not everyone.⁴ If the work-shy are few in number, the national budget will stretch to it with no questions needing to be asked, but if they are many, hard-working citizens will resent the shirkers getting away with it, and will begin to feel that they are being mugs to pay taxes which enable the lazy to live a life of indolence; and their resentment may well spill over into contempt for the genuinely ill and disabled, and all those who through misfortune are compelled to live on benefits. What underlies that resentment is a sense that employment does have something to do with attitudes and choices, and that work is for many a disutility, only compensated for by the money it earns. For them if that money is forthcoming some other how, there is no point in working. If I am averse to the kind of work that is available, and can get just as much by drawing unemployment benefit, I could rationally decide not to work: I am not a workaholic, and can do better things with my time, such as watching television, than spend it sweeping streets. Such calculations have economic consequences too. Jobs which are productive, but not sufficiently productive to earn a wage significantly higher than unemployment benefit will

⁴ Buchan's work-shy Scotsman, described in the previous section, is neither a new nor a localised phenomenon. His Fourteenth-Century English equivalent was to be found on the road from London to Canterbury. What? Should he study as a madman would Upon a book in cloister cell? Or yet Go labour with his hands and swynk and sweat, As Austyn bit? Augustine commanded? How shal the world be served? Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved! Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, The Prologue ll.187-188.

not be taken, (except perhaps by immigrants willing to work hard for an exiguous wage). Useful work will not be done. The economy will suffer.

Quite apart from its political and economic side effects, unconditional long-term unemployment benefit is bad for the beneficiaries. They need to know the realities of their situation, so that they can make realistic choices about what to do in order to get back into economically effective work. Shielding them from the truth is no kindness, and can induce welfare dependency, which saps the individual's will and sense of identity. Employment gives them dignity, enabling them to feel that they are not being parasites, but are contributing to the common good. Soft-hearted welfarism is unkind. Tough love is needed, but all too easily the adjective predominates over the noun. Love is not the sort of thing that can be provided by the State. Voluntary organizations can enable individuals out of the goodness of their hearts to address individuals as individuals, but employees of the State inevitably are seen to do what they do, because they are paid to do it. In some societies churches and youth clubs and Rotarian groups can do much to help the unemployed to return into employment, but it may well not be enough to meet the need.

The government can help by employing people. In recent years the government has mopped up unemployment by expanding the public sector, and taking on administrators, inspectors and quangocrats. This has provoked much resentment. Critics contrast the public sector with the "wealth-creating" private sector. But that is to make the same mistake as the physiocrats, who in the Eighteenth Century contrasted the farmers and farm labourers, who alone produced food, with the rest of society, who consumed it and were mere parasites. The manufacturer makes things, whereas the teacher and doctor do not. It is quite true that the teacher and doctor would be in a bad way if there were no manufacturers, but equally the manufacturer would be in a bad way if there were no teachers or doctors. People in many different walks of life produce goods or render services that are essential to society, and while those in each one can claim truthfully that without them we should all be worse off, they need to remember that they too would be worse off without the efforts of other essential workers. We depend on those in the public sector to guard our shores, maintain peace and order, to administer justice, to provide health and education. Those who do it create wealth just as much as those who work in factories or supermarkets.

That criticism of the public sector is mistaken: others are more telling. It is often complained that those employed in the public sector regard themselves as having “positions” which entitle them to an income without any strong obligation to work. Certainly in some countries public officials give the impression of having been appointed as a reward for services rendered to a politician or power broker, and of being fairly relaxed about serving the public. No doubt there are non-functioning functionaries in Great Britain too, but the main trouble is not idleness or a propensity to go on strike, but excessive zeal, as they spend their time wasting other people’s time with questionnaires and forms to fill in. Bureaucracies breed regulations and red tape. If there are many separate economic entities, competition will cut through red tape, because customers will go to where they are least bothered. If we want not to be strangled by officialdom, we need to insist on slimming the public sector down.

An even more telling reason is the avoidance of corruption. In the private sector, although some subordinates take bribes to abuse their trust, the system is largely self-correcting. If I run a garage and you want me to service your car, it is impossible to bribe me, because the money you offer is not a bribe but a straightforward payment. In the public sector it is quite different. Throughout history bribery of public officials has been endemic. The Victorians managed to curb it, even to cure it, by having a small cadre of high-minded Civil Servants imbued with a strong ethos of public service, but it is not clear that there are enough high-minded people imbued with a strong sense of public service to man all the positions in the public sector today. And, most tellingly of all, it is not just crude bribery that corrodes public life, but the more insidious forms of lobbying and influence. A large modern firm, manufacturing motor cars say, finds it more profitable spending money of getting the government to alter tariffs that are levied on foreigners producing better cars more cheaply. Both in London and in Washington, as well as in Brussels, there are a large number of agencies trying to steer the government into paths profitable for their clients. This is not good news for the public. It makes it much more difficult for Members of Parliament and Civil Servants to reach their own independent judgements of what ought to be done, if they are constantly being got at by lobbyists with a hidden agenda. Inevitably there have always been some interests seeking to influence those in public life who steer the nation through the seas of chance and

change. But it is desirable to keep their number down, and to have most of them motivated by disinterested ideas of the public good rather than private pecuniary interest. Even though most Members of Parliament and most government officials are honest, the fact that the opportunity is there breeds suspicion that they have yielded to temptation, and are being improperly influenced by hidden lobbying from rich friends and powerful financial interests. If we want to avoid erosion of trust and corruption in public life, small is beautiful.

Nevertheless, as a short-term measure it is reasonable for the government to ease unemployment by employing people, who would otherwise be unemployed, to do things that are of public benefit. Instead of paying people, as Keynes suggested, to dig holes and fill them up again, which is obviously useless and hence demoralising, it can spend money—not borrowed, to be paid back later (as would be appropriate for a genuine investment), but as part of current expenditure, charged to the welfare account—on improving amenities: getting rid of pit-heaps, clearing away snow or litter more promptly, frequently, or zealously than hitherto, instituting and maintaining municipal gardens. Much can be done by creating useful employment. But it can easily go wrong. Make-work schemes are often poorly administered and ineffective. Railway “by-passes” built in the 1930s often proved to be poor value for the tax-payers’ money. Hospitals used to employ as extra orderlies former patients who needed “light work”, but sometimes they hindered more than they helped, and finally went on strike. It is a general problem with State-financed projects: the direct costs are monitored, the benefits estimated, often optimistically, but the externalities ignored. If it can be afforded, it may be an effective way to boost employment to build new airports, new railways or new roads. But before deciding to do so, we need to assess besides the possible benefits, the likely costs to the environment and to those living nearby. We need to be wary of make-work schemes. Nevertheless, a humane society can seek to provide, at public expense if necessary, meaningful employment for those who want it—a “high gardening economy” so to speak—while ensuring that everyone able to work has a strong incentive to seek gainful employment.

The question how tough or how tender we should be to the work-shy, the idle and the incompetent is a real one, to which economics by itself gives no answer. We find it difficult to strike the right balance. If we are tender, we may sap the will to work and to live responsible lives: if we are tough, we may penalise the unfortunate, and grind down the weak and the poor.

Full employment is a political, not an economic, issue.
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§6.3 Work

Work has a bad reputation. Theologians see it as Adam's punishment, and economists as a disutility we have to undergo in order to get pay. But that does not fit the facts. Although it is undoubtedly an disutility for many, the unpaid brows of many gardeners trickle with sweat as the village prepares for its open gardens day, and hopes to be adjudged the best kept village in the county. A story, possibly apocryphal, relates how there was war in Buckingham Palace because on occasion footmen had made up a bed, which was the proper job of chamber-maids, who demanded that the bed be unmade, so that they could make it up themselves. A compromise peace was negotiated, whereby the bed was allowed to remain un-unmade on this occasion, but footmen were to be forbidden in future from trespassing into the chamber-maids' province. Critics thought it absurd. The chamber-maids and footmen were going to go on getting their pay regardless, so why should they be upset? But the dispute makes sense. Jobs confer status. *Ego, ergo ago* means also that I am what I do, and what I do constitutes my identity, both in my own eyes and in those of other people. I want what I do to be important. Although sometimes I am content just to play, I often want to do more than just amuse myself. I want to achieve something, and to count as an achievement, it has to be difficult: *καλὰ τὰ χάλεπα* (*kala ta chalepa*), it's the difficult things that are fine. Even in the golf club, I want to beat my opponent, win the tournament, bring my handicap down. It does not have to be competitive. Mountaineers climb mountains on their own, and instead of being difficult, actions can be significant because they are useful or serve a good cause. Women do voluntary service, not in order to outdo other women, but in order to help—taking patients to hospital, doing meals on wheels, cleaning the village hall, doing the flowers in church. Many men similarly are public spirited, and man lifeboats, coach young cricketers, serve on local councils and the magistrates' bench. Such unpaid activities are often seen not as hobbies but as work, because they are undertaken not for amusement, but for some serious purpose. Paid activities, too, can serve serious purposes. Being paid need not detract from the value of what is done. The pilot of a rescue helicopter draws his pay as an officer in the Royal Air Force, but can equally take pride in having saved a life. Even if the actual tasks they perform are humdrum or boring, the company they keep sustains their morale, and may constitute a social identification that gives sense to their life. Many

older workers dread retirement, because it will cut them off from their mates. Even when there is no companionship, the mere fact that they are being paid for what they do indicates that it is of some value to someone, and hence that they are contributors, not mere passengers or parasites. Work is not for everyone a disutility, to be undertaken only for an adequate pecuniary reward.

When work is not a disutility undertaken only for an adequate pecuniary reward, there are reasons for making it, as much as possible, rewarding in itself. At a crude economic level, it means that the pecuniary reward does not have to be so great: clergymen and teachers are often paid a pittance, because they will still go on working without the incentive of a larger pay-packet. More importantly, the work will be better done, and the worker happier, if the conditions foster his commitment to the job. If the job is evidently worthwhile, it gives a boost to those who do it, and they can each take pride in having done it well. Soldiers see themselves as serving their country, and saving their families and friends from the enemy. Hospital workers may be doing lowly jobs themselves, but are contributing to the health of their fellow citizens. Many other jobs, not naturally regarded as obviously valuable by the public at large, can still inspire pride and respect. The employer thinks them valuable—else he would not pay for them to be done. The partial identification of the employee with the employer means that the employee's achievement of the employer's values is valuable, too, in the employee's scheme of things. But the identification needs to be reciprocal. Just as the employee needs to put some trust in the employer's aims, so the employer needs to trust the employee to do his bit. He needs to trust the employee's ability to make up his mind for himself how best to fulfil his commission. And the employee needs to be able to think that the employer sees him as a valued contributor to the enterprise. If the employer does so regard him, he will respect his judgement, and reckon that he is exercising his judgement to further its success. The more autonomy the employer allows to the employee, the more the employee will feel that what he does is a significant contribution to the success of the whole enterprise, and the harder he will try to do it well. If I am a child, I may well be told which side of the road I am to walk as I go to the shop, what I am to ask for, how much to pay, and where to cross the road on my way back. But later I want to put away childish things, and be asked simply to buy some golden syrup. And more generally, the greater responsibility we delegate

to subordinates, the better they will regard their job, doing it better and taking more pride in having done it well. The policeman will be a better policeman if he is trusted to maintain law and order in his patch, and not told to make a certain number of arrests, or achieve other specified targets. Of course, not all detailed instruction is unwelcome. Cooperative activities need coordination: the sergeant-major's commands are necessary to the perfect execution of drill; the prima donna's solo is not spoiled by waiting on the conductor's baton. And equally the minutiae of aseptic practice are not seen by nurses as derogating from their autonomy. But needless micromanaging is. We do not like being told, when we are perfectly capable of doing it without being told. It is a great demerit of modern society that in the name of accountability and transparency, people are not left to get on with the job, but are hemmed in by all sorts of instructions and restrictions. It betokens a lack of trust in them, and demotes them from being respected operators into being merely hired operatives. Down-graded jobs are performed by de-moralised workers.

Part of the trouble is that we have lost the distinction between error of judgement and negligence. If we trust employees to exercise their own judgement, they will sometimes make mistakes. The doctor decides to spare the poorly patient an invasive procedure that would make quite sure that her symptoms, easily explained otherwise, were not due to a malignant growth; it was a reasonable judgement, taken in good faith as best for the patient in her frail condition. If it proves wrong, it does not show that he was negligent, as he would be if he operated with un-sterile instruments. The consequence of obliterating the distinction, and attributing every bad outcome to negligence is to engender a culture of defensive practice, in which decisions are not taken in the best interest of the patient, but in order to ensure that whatever happens, the practitioner is not to blame. The patient may suffer trauma and great pain if the investigation is carried out—may even die—but it will not be the doctor's fault: all the correct procedures were carried out. Similarly in other walks of life. If we will not respect the judgement of those who are aiming to do their best, the best will not be aimed at. It will always be better to be safe than run the risk of having to say "sorry", and employees will regard themselves as box-tickers rather than as fellow-workers doing a good job.

Autonomy is under attack from many other quarters. The dominant social schema is hierarchical, with subordinates reporting to

superiors. The dependence of the subordinate on the the superior is obvious, and taken for granted, without the correlative dependence of the superior on the subordinate being recognised at all. In the present age our familiarity with computers leads us to think of programs being meticulously constructed, and needing to be bug-free. But biology offers a much better analogy. Biological organisms are largely autonomous. Not only do individual specimens live largely on their own, but cells and biochemical systems are largely self-subsistent, needing only occasional regulation from outside.

Autonomy as an ideal is important, even though it may be taken too far.⁵ It is a useful exercise for a young man wondering what career he should choose, to engage in a thought experiment, and imagine himself at the age of thirty six, say, or forty eight, and receiving a letter from a solicitor informing him that a distant relative has left him a fortune. Would he immediately hand in his notice? If he would, it would be a sign that his work, though possibly well-remunerated, was not something he really wanted to do: if he would not, then it was clearly something that was inherently satisfying and worthwhile. Rather few people, however, have private means, and most members of the professions need to have stipends in order to be able to devote their time and talents to their professional work. The word 'stipend' indicates a significant economic difference. It suggests that the recipient is not being paid a wage, to get him to undertake an unwelcome chore, but is being given a sufficiency of the wherewithal to enable him to devote himself to his vocation, unhampered by financial necessities. It suggest that his work is intrinsically worthwhile, at least to himself, and generally in the estimation of others. The professions have a high social status, which bolsters their morale, and helps them do their jobs well, and which makes other trades and occupations aspire to professional status, with entry qualifications and standards of behaviour to keep everyone up to the mark. Much of this is admirable, and makes for a happy and well-functioning society. But it is well to be wary, and keep a watchful eye over what is happening and what may happen.

Money talks. Even to high-minded people it whispers. It is what we could with more of. Even the clergy are aware of the pecuniary value of different benefices, and may be ready to accept preferment to a better living. After all, if better resourced, they will

⁵ See below, §8.3, pp.171ff.

be empowered to do more. Other temptations are equally insidious. Barriers to entry may keep out rogue operators, but they also keep down competition, and make higher salaries sustainable. And although the professional ethos requires that the professional man should make his services generally available,⁶ it is easy to become judge in one's own cause when the choice is between inconveniencing oneself and serving the public. Civil servants are sometimes dilatory. In other countries it is generally necessary to bribe officials to get them to do their duty. It is easy to have an inflated idea of the importance of one's own job, and one's own deserts in doing it. There were indolent clergymen in the Eighteenth Century, idle dons in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, and ineffective administrators in the present age. Competition shows up and penalises the indolent, the idle and the ineffective. The consumer who pays the piper can call for prompt attention, and is likely to get courteous treatment and effective service. The difference shows how the demand for autonomy can be overblown, and can lead to abuse and malfunction.

Autonomy *is* good. Some degree of autonomy is necessary in any economic transaction, and often it is good that there should be more. But it is not the only good, nor an all-encompassing one. There is an essential heteronomy in collaboration and more so in the institution of money. The moneyed society is in danger of being exclusively heteronomous in its understanding of employment, and we need to give due emphasis to the importance of trusting the employee to do his best, making his own judgements about how to do it, but we need to remember also that if we live together, we often have to do as others will, and not just as we happen to feel inclined. It is important to consider and cherish autonomy, collegiality and other social conditions which enable and encourage workers to do their best. But at the same time we should take steps to prevent the shop being closed in a manner inimical to the public interest. It is good for the Church that some clergymen are appointed by lay patrons. It is good for universities that some professors are appointed by outside authorities. It is good for the National Health Service that private practice is permitted, and can coexist with and within the NHS. The suitable element of lay control depends on the circumstances, and varies very much from case to case. But it is an important safeguard

⁶ See below §8.3, p.173.

People are not as high-minded as they like to think, nor as low-minded as economists suppose. Even if they do not seek for any other reward than the knowledge that they are doing what ought to be done, they would not mind receiving some tangible tokens of recognition, and some times actually seek them. Hard-nosed economists scoff at the knighthoods and medals that are awarded to members of the armed forces and civil service, and say that they should be simply paid more. But that is to misunderstand what motivates men to serve their country, perhaps dying for it, and certainly devoting the best parts of their lives to it. They are not in it for the money—if they were, they would go into business or high finance. They may not be completely high-minded—they hear it when money talks, and sometimes heed it, and are moved by an infirmity of the noblest minds; but in the moneyed society they need to have money, and it is natural to want to be thanked for what one does, and public recognition is an appropriate token of public gratitude.

§6.4 Work or Play?

If Keynes is right, and there is no single equilibrium level in an economy securing full employment for everyone, but many different ones, we have to ask which level would best suit our needs. Traditionally, economists, thinking that economics is about scarcity, have thought we should aim to maximise economic activity, and have devised a concept of Gross Domestic Product, and monitored its growth. We should be wary of following suit. Scarcity in economics is a conceptual necessity, if money is to be usable, not a fact of life; under examination the GDP has flaws; and maximising policies are always suspect. From our standpoint, economic activity is a special case of cooperative activity, namely that where the cooperators' surplus is so unevenly distributed that there is need for compensatory payments to equalise the benefits of cooperation. It is reasonable to assume that in general the more such activity there is, the more people are getting what they want. But time is short, and time spent on economic activity is time not spent in other ways.⁷ It is not a hard, irrefragable truth that I am better off working overtime and buying a new car than I am if I spend the week-ends fell walking with my family, and we make do with our

⁷ See above, §5.4.

old family banger. With considerable unfairness to both sides, we can contrast an American style of life, in which people work very hard and have few holidays, with a French style of life in which people have a short working week, retire in their fifties, and spend a lot of time conversing in bistros or fishing in solitude. The American is always doing, and can feel that what he does is of objective value since the market values it, and can reckon that since he is a financial success, he is a success, period. The Frenchman enjoys the sweetness of life, and can reckon that though he has not amassed a fortune, he has had enough money to be able to do the things that really matter. In actual fact of course each may be reluctant to forgo the benefits the other enjoys: the Frenchman wants not only early retirement but a superfluity of material goods as well; the American prizes his possessions, but gripes at the stress he undergoes at work, and its unreasonable demands on family life. Nevertheless they are making choices, choices not determined by economics alone. Economics is not an autonomous discipline, but a moral science resting on values wider than just those of economics.

It does not follow that economics has nothing to say about desirable levels of economic activity. Economic policy can influence how people behave, and bad economic policies have done so with disastrous effects. Policies that avoid disastrous consequences are to be preferred, even more so if their consequences are actually benign. One benign consequence of the moneyed society is to widen choice. The market decentralizes decision-making, enabling different people to decide for themselves what they want to do. Inevitably, therefore, it makes much economic activity anonymous and impersonal, and less of a meaningful social activity. Work comes to be thought of as something we would rather not do and have to be paid to do. If we set economics in its place as a moral science, we can come to see that this is not the case, and that work is not simply the unpleasant task we all have to undertake, but a whole range of activities, not all of them unpleasant, not all of them necessary. Although we may, as a matter of political morality, have to compel the work-shy to work, we should be careful not to over-generalise, and think we ought all of us to be working all the time. It is a mistake easily made, provided we do not think about it. If we do think about it, we may still regretfully insist that some work is done, though reluctantly, by some unwilling workers, but we should be ready to recognise that much good work is done by people not paid to do it, and to see the world of money as a valuable adjunct, rather than the central feature of the good life.