

Reading Interrogations for Equality Seminar

Week 8. Work

October 22, 2009

Gina Schouten

I'm wondering what Arneson's arguments have to say about the following (admittedly underspecified) position regarding the distribution of meaningful work: Social institutions should be arranged such that everyone has a genuine opportunity to engage in meaningful work, either because having that opportunity is a valuable contribution to human flourishing, or because the work itself is a valuable contribution to human flourishing which may nonetheless be foregone in favor of other such contributions or none at all. (Though I envision this position to be asserting the value of meaningful work or the opportunity for it on a broader construal of what "meaningful" means than the one that Arneson adopts, I think I can just accept the definition he uses for the point of what I say here.) I am interested in thinking more about one main argument that Arneson offers to the effect that the above type of principle does not justify state intervention to fairly distribute this opportunity.

The argument I have in mind goes something like this: Given the very many different sources of human flourishing, such a position will, in practice, tend to support policies of state neutrality regarding meaningful work—that is, they will *not* support an institutionalized right to opportunities for meaningful work. A society, therefore, is not compelled by the principle I have described to adopt policies "that encourage people to choose artisan work and reject assembly-line work" (526-7). Fair enough. But what about policies to ensure that those who choose assembly-line work do not do so because of an unfairly constrained set of options, and that when they do so because of an *unavoidably* constrained set of options, there are other compensatory sources of comparable value available to them (such as, for example, a noncompetitive opportunity to work to further a cause that they support, and that they can pursue during the leisure time that their comparably higher pay affords them). Such a policy seems to go beyond the market socialism that Arneson endorses, but I don't yet see how his arguments against state intrusion beyond the parameters he sets for it apply against these types of policies. Am I wrong in thinking that Arneson would oppose the position I describe and the policies I think are supportable by it? If not, how does his argument against it work? (Additionally, I don't think the principle I describe above entails that we should "keep a desk in Whitehall" open for those who choose to forego meaningful work (533).)

Noel Howlett

The principle linked to works states that remuneration for work should reflect "how hard we have worked, how long we have worked, and how great a sacrifice we have made in our work. We shouldn't get more because we use more productive tools, have more skills, or have greater talent, much less should we get

more because we have more power or own more property. We should get more only by virtue of how much effort we have expended or how much sacrifice we have endured in our useful work.” This principle of remuneration is in keeping with the strong intuition of many egalitarians that a just system of payment for work rewards “only what we can affect and not what is beyond our control” (Wright, pp. 179).

This particular passage gave me some trouble in reading for this week. While I find most of it agreeable, I struggle to wrap my head around “we shouldn’t get more because we...have more skills, or have greater talent...” I find a strong distinction between *equal* and *just*, and room within that distinction for the differences in people to be valued and rewarded unequally. While egalitarianism can speak to many of my concerns in social justice, in this sense it carries with it an aspect that may make in untenable for me.

Perhaps I am just failing to see the social economy (“all production in Albert’s parecon is organized on the direct provision for needs on principles of reciprocity and voluntary association” (Wright, pp. 181)) over the economic conception I have been raised in, but I believe there may be good reasons to value and reward people based on talent and skill as opposed to just based on need. It is unclear to me if these reasons are a) unequalitarian, b) part of a plan to create/maintain an elite that will benefit the least well off, or c) part of some other conception of fairness in which resources may be distributed unequally so long as the distribution is done fairly.

Arneson speaks to part of my concern in the quote that I began with saying: “whether a particular job strikes a particular person as interesting depends not just on her inborn abilities but also on how these abilities have been developed into talent by education or other experience” (Arneson, pp. 522). I find that the distinction between skills/abilities and talent further complicates things. Albert speaks to rewarding people based on how hard they have work and how much they have sacrificed. However, it is unclear to me if this principle applies only in the present or in the sacrifices in developing a skill or talent can reasonably convey greater standing for rewards throughout one’s life. This may be something akin to private ownership of one’s talents, like property, and therefore undesirable in a parecon.

Clearly, access to the resources to develop abilities into talents is not equal and thus rewarding such development can perpetuate standing inequalities in profoundly unjust ways. This may in fact be where my struggle begins. If we could alter this access inequality and all people would have equal access to the resources needed to develop their talents, would the egalitarian still have a problem with remuneration that is based in part on talent/skill?

Kevin Cunningham

Arneson argues that a pluralistic perfectionist ought to be state neutral to meaningful work. Specifically, he holds that perfectionism in practice reduces to welfarism in principle. His argument runs something like the following. Any perfectionist theory would have to be disjunctive because there are many human goods that are equally worthwhile to preserve. So, one labor organization (an efficient business) might realize one value, while another (a workers’

collective) might realize another, depending on the worker. Values interact in ways that it make it difficult to prohibit specific practices and prioritize others. So, for the sake of argument, say that drinking alcohol per se is not constitutive of the good life. However, I like to drink because it helps realize other values of the good life: friendship, leisure, stress relief so that I am better able to work, etc. If this behavior does contribute to some value, then the perfectionist is not in a place to prohibit it. Given these complex interactions competing values, and different individual starting points, perfectionism ought to be neutral about employment.

I think a version of perfectionism could offer a response. We could structure employment to maximize net flourishing, even if some individuals suffer as a result of being partial to employment. So, say by discouraging individuals from engaging in being miners, we could gain a higher “perfection score” even if some would-be miners were frustrated. Arneson gives a response to this sort of objection, saying it is an open question whether the world with the miners or the world without the miners would produce a perfection store because of various influences, such as efficiency, greater leisure-type, and type of work (527). I’m not sure what kind of response this because, by hypothesis, the world without the miners had more human flourishing. It probably reflects Arneson’s skepticism that there is (or at least one could show that there was) a single best set of goods to instantiate (524). If so, then this contention requires a larger conversation.

Kelly Robbins

First, some thoughts on exit options and meaningful labor. I am concerned that the market socialism Arneson describes cannot provide workers with meaningful exit options from their current jobs. Full employment and democratically controlled firms would mean that significant and steady economic growth would be required for real exit options from any one firm. Arneson seems to share my worry when he suggests that the state would be responsible for creating new firms to meet the demand for job change in the cases where there was also consumer demand to support this growth (535). I am not at all convinced that the state could meet the need for job change in a way dependent on consumer demand, especially not where our concern is to provide meaningful labor (options) to the *individual*. This is because part of the meaningfulness Arneson is concerned with is the option to change professions or compensation packages based on individual preference. I think so far Arneson would agree with me, but he does bring up a similar concern as a possible argument in favor of a right to meaningful labor, in his discussion of competitive behavior in a rigid labor market. Here he suggests that state policies promoting a right to meaningful labor might be a strategy for dealing with the rigidity problem. Even if we were sympathetic to this argument, I suspect we do not have very good reasons for believing that market socialism or capitalism could introduce policies that promote job bundles/business styles that distribute meaningful labor equally while also providing real exit options.

Second, on a loosely related note, some thoughts in defense of perfectionism. Arneson discusses and rejects perfectionism as a support for a right to meaningful labor. I am not sure perfectionism can support this right, but I think Arneson is mischaracterizing perfectionism, or at

least ignoring some versions – so a reevaluation is in order. Arneson claims that perfectionism does not plausibly favor production-oriented social arrangements (525), presumably because he does not think a “tolerably pluralist” perfectionism favors production-oriented goods over consumer goods. I think this is a leap – even a perfectionism that openly valued goods for people qua consumers could support a state whose policies contributed only to the production side of the social arrangement. There are many conceptions of the good – of these, some are good for the individual who has them and for society collectively. Of these, there are some that the state has a business encouraging, and many that it does not. The question for the perfectionist should be whether there is moral justification for the state promoting meaningful labor – and this question is not effected by the recognition of other equally important goods that the state may not promote, except instrumentally (e.g. some consumer goods). Without extensive analysis, my own inclination is that a better argument can be made for the state discouraging the unequal distribution of *meaningless* labor, which would mean a perfectionist would recommend a system more like Albert’s job re-bundling than Arneson’s democratic firms.

Miriam Thangaraj

Arneson argues that the meaningfulness of work is subjective and multifaceted – the nature of work is welfarist rather than perfectionist. While meaningful work is a part of, perhaps even a necessary condition for human flourishing, it is far from sufficient, and the relationship between flourishing and the intrinsic and instrumental value of work is varied and subjective. Hence, to have state mandates for what is meaningful work may turn out to be draconian instead of contributing to human flourishing. Therefore, Arneson rejects a pro-active state role in distributing meaningful work; given its subjective character, and the impossibility of determining how to maximize meaningful work for all, the more pragmatic approach is to minimize the social costs of making a wrong distribution decision by being “neutral”.

Having rejected the role of the state, Arneson proceeds to select the market as the more appropriate (because more “neutral”) distribution mechanism. He claims that by allowing the market to arbitrate the price of work, the desirability or dirtiness of work will be compensated for adequately through demand and supply mechanics. In order to take the oppressive sting out of demand and supply economics and preclude profit mongering, he proposes shared ownership of enterprises and an egalitarian distribution of the economic vote. Such a socialist market does require some paternalistic state intervention, however, in order to prevent market distortions occurring as a result of ignorance, incapacity, or labor rigidities that may lead to artificial/inefficient prices.

Such a formulation values work solely by defining work in terms of the price it fetches on the market, which reflects the degree to which it is unappealing to people, which is itself a rather unappealing way of thinking about work... Given the profit motive of the socialist market, the price of work is also indubitably related to efficiency, which may bring it into tension with economic democracy. If it is collectively decided that democratic decision-making is inefficient for an enterprise, as it is likely to be, would that live up to the ideal of human flourishing? In the same vein, just because everyone in a collective enterprise agrees to work longer hours and hire

fewer workers to increase profits may not in fact increase human flourishing. If the success of an enterprise continues to be measured in terms of profit, is the guarantee of agency sufficient for flourishing? At the level of society, does the competitive basis of the market redraw us-vs.-them lines at the group/enterprise level? For instance, trade unions in India have often “competed” with each other to the detriment of all. There may be a larger case for paternalistic state protection...

Also, I’m not sure I can understand *how* a socialist market would function – the necessity for all to have a job, or the fact that doing an adequately compensated job that incapacitates the worker in the process, all make labor inflexible, making it harder for the market to operate. How often will the state need to intervene? It seems to me, that rather like with neoliberalism, a large ‘managerial state’ is called for – which may go against Arneson’s welfarist basis for neutralizing the role of the state in distributing work.

Alex Hyun

The issue of perfectionism comes up again in this week’s readings. Gomberg’s radical proposal to have everybody share in both routine and complex labor depends on the permissibility of a certain kind of perfectionist social theory, as he recognizes (*How to Make Opportunity Equal*, p. 51). One issue I’d like to discuss as a class is whether this sort of perfectionism is permissible, and whether Arneson’s arguments against the permissibility of such perfectionism succeed (*Meaningful Work and Market Socialism*, p. 524). His first argument is especially interesting: he seems to reject perfectionism because he has “no idea of how to begin arguing for the superiority of one or another basic conception of the good.” But is he being too skeptical? It seemed to me like one of the things philosophy is good for is that it can help us figure out which conceptions of the good are more plausible than others.

Another issue I’d be interested in discussing is freewill. This issue comes up again in the Gomberg reading. In a mere two pages, he seems to show that freewill is an illusion, and hence, that there isn’t a morally significant difference between the effects of chance and those of choice (p. 22-23). In the context of Gomberg’s project, this is important because it seriously undermines the Level Playing Field conception of equal opportunity. I am skeptical of Gomberg’s argument for determinism, and I was wondering what other people think about the matter. Two weeks ago, there seemed to be some consensus that children lack freewill; or at least, that for the purposes of how we decide to treat them, it makes no difference whether or not they are really morally responsible for their actions. Do we want to say the same about adults?

Ben Kilbarger

I’m interested in learning more about the causal story of racism.

Gomberg is worried about societies that are racist, by which he means: “some members suffer lower life expectancy, more disease and injury, greater poverty, and higher unemployment

as a consequence of a racial identification.” (6) To make the point more generally: he’s concerned about societies being structured in such a way that irrelevant factors (like racial identification) cause people to be worse off, all things considered.

I’m interested to know how we can establish causal accounts like this. The whole thing is much more clear when a society is explicitly racist. The society of the US in 1840 caused people of African descent to be much worse off as a direct consequence of their racial identification. That was pretty much the letter of the law.

How does the causal account work in a society like the US in 2009? The claim is that racial identification causes a life to be worse off. I think that’s right, but what is the causal story? It’s not enough to say that people with certain racial identifications are worse off than others. Causality has to be established, right?

When I think about it, that strikes me as a real challenge, because in a society like ours it’s very widely considered a very bad thing to be racist in the described way, whether individually or institutionally. So how do we get a really robust account of causality about this sort of thing? And what, really, is the story supposed to be? Is it that the effects of the explicit racism of earlier times are still resonating? Or that there’s thinly-veiled racism happening right now, new racism, as it were? Both, I think. But I’m not sure.

Really, I just feel that the causal story in Gomberg goes by too fast. I’d like to know more about how we establish a robust causal link, and just what that link is supposed to be. This strikes me as very important for at least these reasons: we want to be able to publicly defend and justify efforts to break the causal link. If it means radical social change and/or a lot of resources (read taxes), then we’re going to need a pretty irrefutable account of how the causal link is happening. And we’ll want to make sure we have the right causal story, so that we know whether or not the cause is relevant, and if it’s irrelevant, which irrelevant cause it is so that when we target it we’re going after the right one, like having darker skin or being lower-class.

Catherine Willis

Tasks and jobs are socially constructed. Gomberg's argument that we need to get rid of jobs that consist uniquely of routine labor rather than creating equal opportunity for people to have a chance at non-routine jobs is compelling. However, I question the approach that both he suggests and Parecon would enact to this end. They both suggest a reorganization of the division of tasks that make up a job (Parecon suggests mechanisms for this more explicitly than Gomberg). Rather, we need to realize that unequal power relations and the availability of cheap labor made the current division of labor (by which I mean division of tasks into routine and complex jobs) possible. The way we have organized task into jobs and defined the tasks themselves do not make sense in any other context.

Example. To illustrate with the case of farming. Californian agriculture is, and has for a long time, been characterized by large monocultural farms which employ many workers to do repetitive tasks of weeding, picking etc. This was because of the successive availability of workers from China, Japan, and Mexico, facilitated

by federal policy. The job of farming in this context is managing labor and sales.. In the mid-West until recently there was no pool of workers to draw from so this division of labor did not exist, the “job” of farming was inclusive of all of the tasks that farming required (issues of gendered division of labor aside).

In general, given that this labor pool exists in society in general we have even created jobs that may not even need to exist (eg. bathroom attendant, cleaning ladies*).

Combining tasks into jobs – the best way to go? Once we realize that these tasks aren't natural divisions of labor but result from power structures, we can perhaps ask, not that they be matched with tasks from the other end of the routine-complex spectrum, but that jobs be designed to make sense in a context that is not driven by inequality in power. For example, instead of creating a job that combined the tasks of brain surgery and cleaning bed pans, we could perhaps create the job of “integrated brain care” (for lack of a better name), whose job is to take care of people with brain ailments. This would likely mean doing everything from cleaning bed pans and rooms, serving food, patient consultations and follow up, brain surgery, preventive education, etc, likely on a team. The majority of the job would then not be surgery and mundane tasks would be integrated and inherently more meaningful. This seems entirely more fulfilling for everyone than creating jobs made up of highly specific routine tasks which actors have little control over, and complex tasks. Part of job satisfaction comes from doing things well, and doing things well comes from knowing what and why you are doing and believing that it is important. This goal would seem harder to achieve with a patchwork of tasks that make up a job.

This does raise the question of feasibility and long term results. Is a Parecon system more feasible than the one I propose? How would we achieve the one I propose? The only answer that I have to this draws from a study I read a while ago on how improvements to the welfare system in Kerala (India) resulted in the creation of better jobs, by allowing laborers in the worst jobs the power to quit until better conditions were offered (and the employment rate did not go down). This of course would only get us partly there, and other policy tools would be needed (restrictions on income differences within a company, on outsourcing mundane tasks). Another possibility is that a Parecon reorganization, which would start with highly fragmented jobs, might be a stepping stone to more coherent jobs.

*The task of cleaning may be required for an individual who is not able to do it for themselves for reasons of age or illness. However, in many cases cleaning ladies exist because, given the unequal division of labor it is both cheaper and possibly more pleasant for those with complex jobs to not spend the time doing these tasks.

David Calnitsky

I wanted to outline some differences between Albert and Wright so to get a better grip on the Parecon debate. I think the most important difference revolves around how the market is understood. Albert argues against any role for the market for the following reasons: they misprice goods by externalizing social costs, they generate antisocial motives, they create

unequal incomes and unequal access to empowering work, they remunerate according to unequal bargaining power and output rather than effort/sacrifice and need, and they always lead to more markets. Wright doesn't necessarily disagree, but argues that those outcomes are largely associated with unregulated markets, rather than markets *per se*. Proper regulation could neutralize most of the above (externalities can be internalized, etc).

Wright does not accept the idea that markets inevitably spread, while Albert does. This might be a critical point because if the assumption is reasonable then it seems that regulated markets always face pressures to deregulate, and the list of market-ills will slowly reemerge. If this is true, is it less true with respect to the pressures on worker/consumer councils to dissolve?

It seems that in large part it is the unknown effects of abolishing markets (the outcomes of which are potentially worse than other options) that leads Wright to support a hybrid form where markets continue to play a role. Albert's response is something to the effect of "but shouldn't we try?" That is, if we know that markets generate all the ill-effects listed above (and if you accept that they can't be properly regulated because of how they spread), then shouldn't we try to refine and regulate *Parecon*—a system consistent with classlessness, etc.—rather than refine and regulate the market—a system consistent with class domination, etc? That is, why not apply the same logic to the system we at least know to be in line with values we favor? This difference comes down to both risk and one's perspective on the horrors and reformability of the market.

Wright offers four reasons why democratic egalitarians might favor a presence for markets. The first is the market's ability to account for future preferences. This seems to depend on how flexible and accommodating the planning process is—if I want to make an omelette today, but didn't account for enough eggs when I submitted my consumption register six months ago, what happens? Additionally, this seems to come down to a debate over the market, for Albert thinks real social prices are so badly distorted by externalities, it is impossible for markets to reflect our preferences today or tomorrow. This question is both empirical and depends on the degree to which markets can be regulated.

The second reason is that markets allow potentially desirable risks to be taken without permission needed from councils. Albert argues however that risk taking is still regulated under capitalism, but by credit markets and banks. Aside from those with big hoards of capital I think this is correct. Hence the risk element might function similarly, however with democratic councils rather than big banks as the regulators.

The third reason is the potential problem of dealing with information complexity under *Parecon*. It is clear that a good deal rests on this problem. Albert insists that the computation processes would not be more complicated than the systems used by modern credit card companies. Additionally, after the first year, facilitation boards that have to generate indicative prices for everything, can simply modify the previous year's data (given demographic, technological, and social changes, etc). Again, Albert relies on the "but shouldn't we try" appeal.

On the consumption side, I think it's hard to imagine every household generating a giant excel file containing all the eggs, skirts and widgets they will need to consume in a year. Many items will come with qualitative notes to justify items (because all of this is under public scrutiny) and to clarify (because all skirts have sizes and styles). Albert insists that after the first year this will be no more difficult than doing your taxes. This quantitative and qualitative demand data has to be aggregated, assessed, adjusted, and readjusted to be in line with the

producer councils' supply. Information is also central to designating objective empowerment ratings of every single task in the economy, organizing them all into job complexes, and then balancing those job complexes within industries and across industries across the country. Finally, it is central to the effort and sacrifice ratings made upon each individual by their comrades so to precisely determine the consumption claims of all and each.

Finally, there is the problem of the huge organization-related time-commitments required of individuals. Albert argues that in a participatory democracy there would generally be more time required for decision making and less for decision enforcing. Further he claims that a good deal of the "meeting time" would fall within the work hours of a given job complex; it would not consume leisure time. Additionally, Pat Devine makes the point that contemporary societies dedicate huge amounts of time toward administration, especially admin concerned with managing social conflict and resulting alienation. While I think the time commitment issue is a potential problem, I think the coordination/information issue is far more daunting.

Eunhee Han

Egalitarians have criticized market economy on two distinctive features: the capitalist class relations and the alienation from work. Arneson (1987) ("Meaningful Work and Market Socialism") argued that even in the hypothetical socialist economy (called "Market Socialism") where state distributes wealth and income based on individual efforts and needs, the alienation from work could still remain. Instead of pursuing the right to meaningful work, Arneson suggested that the ideal market would balance out supply and demand of workers with a variety of preferences. Therefore, in a well-regulated hypothetical market, "there is no ground for assigning individuals a further right to meaningful work beyond whatever array of meaningful work options the market happen to generate" (p.536). His argument is attractive liberal and non-paternalistic. However, I doubt about market function. As Arneson mentioned, market is not perfect as well as individuals are not perfectly rational. In the socialist market, for example, workers govern a firm and current employees in the firm decide the package of burden and benefits that the firm may offer to future employee, which may also discriminate/privilege specific preference like state policy interventions. In this socialist market, inequality can occur and some people cannot find meaningful work. As Erick argued, market has efficient economic functions. However, I wonder if there is any possible evidence that market (even well-regulated socialist market) can efficiently balance out supply and demand of meaningful work or preferences without any state supplemental supply of meaningful work or subsidies for marginalized preferences in the market.

Jeffrey Grigg

The division of labor and social prestige are core questions in sociology (as is the existence of elites, although perhaps less fashionable than in the past [Davis & Moore 1945]). I found Gomberg's thesis quite interesting, and I am sympathetic to many of the points he made, including: the near absurdity of holding children accountable for their "autonomous choices" (p.

15), that racial allocation of bad jobs compounds the underlying problem of the allocation of bad jobs (p. 17; I think I recall Charles Mills making a similar point), and the potential social instability of overtraining (pg. 35).

I also accept his definition of unlimited goods: In order to be ‘unlimited,’ the number of positions does not have to be infinite. It simply has to be expandable so that it can match the number who aspire to and meet the qualifications for the position” (pg. 57). Social esteem and self esteem may well fit the bill, but I still feel like either I’m missing something or Gomberg is. Although esteem may address many problems, even more than I see right now, I don’t see how solving the esteem problem leaves us with a society that is that much better than the one we have now. I think my issue is that Gomberg’s proposal strikes me as an occupational equivalent to an “esteem pill” (I haven’t always seen the utility of this hypothetical tool, but I think I’m coming around to it now). If everyone esteemed themselves and one another, would our egalitarian work actually be done?

Another thing: on page 76 Gomberg uses the classic surgeon/janitor hospital example, and rightly clarifies that janitors won’t be performing surgery under his proposal. And anyone who works with surgeons or cares about someone who does will likely support the idea of surgeons performing more routine work. But often these proposals focus on the humbling of surgeons rather than the elevation of janitors. Gomberg avoids this trap to some extent, but I do think that these kinds of proposals are vulnerable to some form of the leveling down objection, particularly if fewer operations will be performed if the surgeons are spending time away from surgery and no one is prepared to step in and do the work. Many surgeons seem to believe that only they can do what they do, and without them others will suffer and die. This doesn’t give them license to treat others poorly, but it may be true.

Piko Ewoodzie

This week’s readings dealt with work and equal opportunity towards a flourishing life. From the onset, I was impressed with the fact that the authors already assumed that all people deserved to have a job. Beyond this baseline, the authors sought to resolve inequalities that were a result of holding certain jobs. Marmot and Wilkinson, Kohn and Schooler, as well as Kohn provided convincing arguments for the ways in which different kinds of occupations differently affect the functioning of people. Arneson, Albert and Gomberg sought to provide some suggestions on how to provide equal opportunity for all to have meaningful occupations. Gomberg’s thesis is to make access to meaningful jobs and unlimited good. This flows from his contention that equal opportunity will never be accomplished so long as we meaningful jobs remain a limited good that people compete for. Theoretically this made sense to me, and I looked forward to the way this would practically play out in the real world. I found the description of how his thesis might work at a hospital unsatisfying. What good really comes out of allowing brain surgeons clean the bathroom, or allowing the receptionist to be in the operating room? What we care about is not that everyone does the same thing, what we care about is that the good things that come from occupations are evenly distributed. We care that status, esteem, perhaps income, is evenly distributed among different occupations. Does this entail making everyone experience the work

activities of the other? I don't think so, and I think we lose a lot more than we gain from that approach. I think a better way of getting to Gomberg's plan is to re-design the mechanism through which the positive social benefits are distributed. For example, how can we make it so that doctors are as well regarded as garbage collectors? Making the incomes equal would be a start but we know it is not the only answer.

I was not able to completely follow Arneson's article (it is not him, it is me), so perhaps we can spend some time take it apart. Michael Albert's proposal, at least as summarized by Wright, also proposed a sharing of "complex" and "routine" tasks but the most radical aspect of his proposal, "economic coordination through participatory planning," was a bit confusing to me. It would be worthwhile to elucidate his main ideas and see how well it would serve us.

Justin Lonsbury

In his piece, Arneson argues against organizing labor in a way that would ensure that all had an opportunity to perform meaningful work on the grounds that such an approach is too perfectionist. Instead, he prefers a market-based welfarist approach that would honor workers' preferences, recognizing that some workers may *want* to work under strict supervision with little self-direction. Gomberg, Kohn and Schooler, and Kohn, however, note the significant ties between meaningful work and health, self-esteem, willingness to contribute to the broader community, and the nature and quality of leisure activities. I'm wondering if Arneson overstates the case against perfectionism. Is perfectionism ever acceptable? Can we ever know objectively what would be best for someone? If a welfarist stance is one that places utmost priority on allowing individuals to choose what is good for themselves (with full information and rationality), how is this not also a conception of the good, and therefore perfectionist? I'm confused.

Regarding Gomberg, I wish that he had been more explicit as to how sharing of labor would work. To make complex work available to all, he suggests that it could be possible to break down positions into more specific abilities so that they'd be accessible to everyone (pp. 76-77). This, though, seems to make complex work less complex and less estimable. It seems likely that people would end up learning specialized skills of very limited applicability rather than genuinely complex and broadly useful skills. Will learning a handful of new skills and tricks be that great of a boost to self-esteem? I still wonder how making opportunity for complex work accessible to all would play out on the ground. Gomberg concedes that "sketchiness is inevitable" and explains that a "blueprint is inappropriate when we do not yet have enough experience to know how best to share labor" (p. 158). However, he also believes that the "*transition from a society that divides routine from complex [labor] to one where both are shared will be violent and coercive*" (p. 84). If I'm going to get behind something that would likely become violent, I want a blueprint.

Lastly, also regarding Gomberg's proposal, I wonder what people think of Gomberg's statement, "[D]istributive justice cannot erase the pain of positional comparisons or the need to show that we are as good or better than others" (p. 149). I kind of like this critique, but I'm wondering if contributive justice is or could be as non-positional as Gomberg imagines. Should we attempt to

leave behind our “moneyist conception of the good”? In the absence of money, would the number and perceived worth of our contributions end up acting as a means to compare people, and thus serve the same role as money in determinations of self-worth?

Sarah Bruch

Equality of opportunity

Gomberg argues that the level playing field conception of equal opportunity does not address a core dimension – the competitive nature of opportunities. Gomberg argues instead in favor of thinking about equal opportunity as it relates to contributive justice – where contributive justice requires equal opportunity to contribute. I do not completely understand Gomberg’s arguments after this point, but I think he argues that to achieve the non-competitive equal opportunity with concern for the principle of contributive justice we should sever the link between individual contributions and material rewards, in part because of the difficulty of distinguishing between autonomously chosen behavior and behavior that is the result of circumstances, and instead link contributions to the distribution of social esteem and share labor so that the positions are not so distinctly better or worse than each other. One thing that I would like to discuss, in addition to maybe walking through Gomberg’s argument, is fleshing out the conceptions of equality of opportunity we have covered (this week and especially the week on education), and maybe discussing their implications for policy.
