

*ATTENDING TO OUR WORK:
A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING
AND EVALUATING THE DIVISION OF LABOR*

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UNDERSTANDING AND EVALUATING THE DIVISION OF
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The study of philosophy—including the production of a work of this nature—requires, as it has in times past, a benefactor. My benefactor is my wife, Anne, who has supported and encouraged my work in a variety of ways. It is more than appropriate, therefore, that this work is dedicated to her. I have no better friend than Anne. Her happiness is a much-needed foil for my perfectionist’s tendency to be unhappy, and her sweetness softened the occasional hard words that garnished my studies and this work. Happily, I think she understands whence all this comes. I could not be more grateful for an understanding companion.

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Introduction: A Philosophical Opportunity: A Framework for Investigating the Division of Labor

The division of labor—the breaking down of a complex labor process into component tasks that are performed by a number of laborers, with each laborer working on a particular task or set of tasks—is a ubiquitous and constitutive feature of human society, not only presently but historically. It is entrenched as a characteristic of political institutions, manufactories, academia, and even the family. It shapes communities, occupations, and the character of individuals. Simply put, the division of labor *affects human life*. Although its ubiquity and entrenchment make the division of labor appear either sacrosanct or difficult to comprehend, the extent of its effects on human life has drawn—and rightfully continues to draw—the attention of those who, for one reason or another, take interest in the human laboring condition. But to appreciate the division of labor fully is no small task. To examine it, to evaluate it as a feature of human life, to influence its application in some way, seems to require the kind of thinker who, as Nietzsche claims, “resists his whole age, stops it at the gate and demands an accounting.”¹

Oddly enough, a full accounting of the division of labor has proven difficult to attain, thanks in part to divisions of labor that narrow the nature and scope of inquiries into the subject. This is especially true in the contemporary world. Economists focus on the division of labor as it relates to productivity. Psychologists concern themselves primarily with the mental wellbeing and personal development of workers when labor is divided. Sociologists and anthropologists might be interested in divisions of labor in different societies, the effects of these divisions on various social structures, or in making cross-cultural comparisons. Historians track changes in labor and its divisions over time. Although often seeking to generate empirical data, these thinkers occasionally pass judgment on the division of labor by appealing to norms and values within their respective fields of inquiry. An economist, for example, might praise a particular

division of labor insofar as it is conducive to increased productivity, while a sociologist might decry that same division for its fragmentation of a community. On an issue of such great importance to human life and institutions, well-informed and careful thinkers can arrive at opposing evaluations that confuse—or even paralyze—the critique of the division of labor. For their part, philosophers tend to exacerbate—rather than resolve—this cacophony of evaluative judgments.

Philosophers have treated the division of labor in ways just as specific and various as those pursued by economists, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians and others. They, too, have evaluated the division of labor through political, economic, and moral lenses. Unfortunately, the relative narrowness of their inquiries and interests has led philosophers to offer widely disparate evaluations of the division of labor—much like their colleagues in other disciplines. But philosophy can offer us hope here as well. There is obviously a need for some common ground for assessment, some framework within which key issues can be identified and addressed. The purpose of this dissertation is to direct philosophical inquiry at key issues and assumptions at work in most—if not all—accounts of the division of labor in the hope of generating a framework for further analysis and study. This framework will prove both philosophically and prospectively useful. For one thing, the history of philosophy includes a number of influential but discordant accounts of the division of labor, and I claim that this discord can be traced to its roots in assumptions about the elemental issues that are illuminated by the framework. Furthermore, the framework provides structure and focus to contemporary dialogues in that it draws attention to subjects that need to be addressed more thoroughly and carefully if we are to understand, evaluate, and wisely apply the complex contemporary division of labor. Indeed, whether one seeks to better understand influential accounts in the history of

philosophy or to contribute to contemporary debates, this framework elucidates issues that are central to an effective critique of the division of labor.

The search for the framework begins in Chapter 1 with a review of a contemporary assessment of the division of labor offered by psychologist Fathali Moghaddam. A critic of increasing specialization insofar as it appears to sacrifice individual development to attain collective goals, Moghaddam turns the tables on proponents of specialization by pointing out that many of their assumptions about the economic and social legitimacy of specialization simply do not pan out. Regardless of whether or not one finds Moghaddam's work fully persuasive, it is nonetheless valuable for two reasons: 1) it inspires the reader to take new (or renewed) interest in specialization by raising concerns about its effects on personal and civic life, the workplace, academia, and the Third World; and 2) upon examination, the entire work is shown to rest on certain key assumptions—related in many ways—about the *effects* of the division of labor, the nature of human *capacities* and their engagement in labor, and the *proper relationship between the individual and society at large*. Moghaddam unfortunately gives short shrift to his assumptions on these matters, yet I suggest that they are at the heart of his disagreement with the proponents of specialization. These issues are the common ground on which proponents and critics can meet—more often than not, however, they appear peripheral to the contentious and seemingly more relevant discussions about specific issues like the productivity of specialized labor or the degree to which such labor is degrading for individuals. Such appearances must be questioned and ultimately corrected. Attending to the issues of the effects of the division of labor, the nature of human capacities and their engagement in labor, and the proper relationship between the individual and society provides a framework not only for understanding the foundations of Moghaddam's account, but for interpreting other accounts along similar lines.

To demonstrate the philosophical value of this framework, I propose to employ it in the examination of influential and archetypal accounts of the division of labor that are drawn from the history of philosophy. Great philosophers—including Plato, Aristotle, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Adam Smith and Karl Marx—have addressed the division of labor either directly or indirectly as it related to broader projects. Although each philosopher offers a unique evaluation of the division of labor, these can be better understood by looking at the assumptions that each makes regarding the central issues in the framework. By using the framework to discern these assumptions and consider the philosopher’s motivation for making them, one not only sees the viability of the framework but one also gleans some valuable philosophical insight into the issues and questions involved in an effective evaluation of the division of labor. Plato’s account of the nature of human capacities, for example, might help one make sense of contemporary views according to which workers with certain skills are “fit” for certain jobs but not others. To demonstrate the viability of the framework and elucidate some philosophical issues that lie within the ballpark of the division of labor, Chapters 2-4 are dedicated to exploring philosophers’ assumptions about each of the three key issues of the framework (respectively): the effects of labor, the nature of human capacities and their engagement in labor, and the proper relationship between the individual and society. Of course, philosophers are not the only ones to comment on the division of labor; as I noted earlier, economists, psychologists, sociologists, anthropologists, historians and others have taken interest in this widespread and constitutive feature of human life. Recognizing this, the application of the framework to influential philosophical counts will occasionally draw upon valuable commentary and research provided by workers in these fields.

Once the philosophical value of the framework has been established, the dissertation will take a more prescriptive tone in Chapter 5. Out of respect for Moghaddam's work, which served as a significant inspiration for this project, I will offer my own contributions to the contemporary debate about the division of labor—but I will do so in terms of the framework issues in order to bring the participants in this debate onto the common ground that they provide. Admittedly, each of the issues deserves *much* greater attention than can be provided here; however, the goal of this dissertation will have been met if its readers begin to appreciate the importance of these issues to an adequate evaluation of the division of labor. I shall arrive at one potentially frustrating—but actually quite promising—conclusion for philosophers and others interested in pursuing their questions about specialization: specialization is not something that can be condemned or praised outright; instead, specialization presents the contemporary individual with the *dilemma* of striking a balance between its negative and positive aspects in order to serve both individuals and society at large.

As a commonplace and entrenched feature of contemporary life, the implications of the division of labor for human lives and institutions are dramatic. As such, the division of labor demands attention. Discordant evaluations of the division of labor—both within and between disciplines—betray the need for a common framework within which the division of labor may be adequately assessed. In what follows, I will provide a useful framework for understanding and evaluating the division of labor by looking at the assumptions of philosophers and other thinkers about the effects of labor, the nature of human capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and society. Although this work is admittedly wide-ranging and of necessity only begins to address the difficult and multifaceted issues it raises, this is the kind of step that must

be taken to allow for progress in the study of the division of labor—whether one is interested in accounts found in the history of philosophy or one is concerned with the tenor of contemporary debates surrounding its place in human life. The tradition of philosophical commentary, the reach of the division of labor into diverse aspects of human life and society, and the hope that these studies can contribute to positive changes in the contemporary division of labor and the character of work make this a project of significant philosophical, interdisciplinary and practical value.

The reader is encouraged to reflect upon his occupation, the content of his job, and his reliance on (or independence from) others as a result of his expertise. It is no easy task to call one's work into question, since for many of us our jobs are essential to our livelihood in various ways. Even so, consider your place in the contemporary division of labor in your community. What makes your job worth doing? How does your job relate to other occupations? Would you work on something else—perhaps something dramatically different from what you do now—if you could? What (if anything) is stopping you? Is there a “better” job for you? Or is there something that makes you “cut out” for the job you do? Drawing together these and many other related questions, ask yourself: if I were to evaluate this division of labor, what criteria should I use? This last question is the rightful starting point for this dissertation.

Notes:

¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, ed. Bernard Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), Book Three, §156.

Chapter 1: Identifying Key Assumptions in a Contemporary Account of Divided Labor:
Toward a Viable Framework

The division of labor deserves—and occasionally receives—renewed philosophical and academic interest. Unfortunately, however, there is little agreement on whether or not the division of labor is something beneficial or harmful to human life. Some contend, for example, that it is economically beneficial or that it anchors social solidarity. Others respond that specialization impinges upon individual development and relegates people to a degrading dependency upon others. When faced with such a cacophony of judgments, one reasonable place to begin to sort things out is to search for some common ground: in the case of specialization, what criteria might one use to make an effective evaluation? In this chapter, I begin the search for a framework to examine the division of labor in a more orderly manner than heretofore by singling out one contemporary critic—Georgetown psychologist Fathali Moghaddam—and looking at how his assumptions on key matters affect his intriguing criticism of specialization.

Suppositions about the *effects* (actual or potential) of labor/divided labor, the nature of human *capacities* and their exercise through labor, and the *proper relationship between the individual and others* dramatically affect Moghaddam's evaluation of the division of labor. These issues, furthermore, are the elements of a powerful framework both for examining other accounts of the division of labor and considering its future direction. This chapter begins with a review of Moghaddam's basic position on the division of labor. Following this, three sections are dedicated to identifying Moghaddam's assumptions about the effects of labor/divided labor, the nature of human capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and others. By drawing

out the effects of these assumptions on Moghaddam's evaluation of the division of labor, we will have a framework for looking at other accounts in terms of their assumptions on these three key issues—an exploration that I will begin to undertake in succeeding chapters.

The plight of the individual: A brief overview of Moghaddam's account

Before looking specifically at how positions taken on the effects of labor, the nature of human capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and others affect his evaluation of the division of labor, a brief summary of Moghaddam's account is in order.

Moghaddam is primarily concerned with the negative effects of specialization on individuals. He sees a paradox in increasing specialization—a paradox suggested in the title of Moghaddam's work: *The Specialized Society: The Plight of the Individual in an Age of Individualism*. Moghaddam contends that in a time (i.e., the present) when the individual's rights and personal development are held in high esteem, the increasing specialization of labor for the sake of economic growth and productivity restricts individuals' education and development along increasingly narrow lines. The "plight of the individual" is the difficulty that he faces in trying to develop a broad range of skills and personal interests when his occupation pressures him to specialize.

Moghaddam does not think that the individual's plight is a hopeless one. Although divisions of labor are ubiquitous and deeply entrenched in the modern economy, Moghaddam encourages a "serious reexamination" of both contemporary specialization and the *ideals* that motivate and guide us—with an eye toward reforming

the present state of affairs.¹ At present, the modern individual must often forsake the ideal of full development of his abilities and interests in favor of attaining economic ideals (like increased productivity) through his specialization. Instead, Moghaddam believes that the determination of which ideal to favor is a grave *moral* matter to be resolved not by economic calculations but by citizens in debate and dialogue.²

The tension between economic and individual development is essentially a tension between two general “contrasting ideals” that Moghaddam labels *collective actualization* and *individual actualization*.³ The goal of collective actualization is complete and efficient collective activity. Members of a community choir seeking to perform a selection with four-part harmony attempt to attract the right balance of soprano, alto, tenor and bass singers. The key to collective actualization is conducting individuals into their specific roles and putting them together in a collective activity. The goal of individual actualization, however, is the fullest possible development of individual abilities. Individuals so developed may be able to participate effectively in collective activity, but that is not the ultimate goal of individual development as such. A chorister might possess an impressive vocal range that can be confined to singing the alto part for the sake of participating in a choir. But just as the chorister might chafe at being restricted to a specific part because she is quite capable of singing other parts—even if her restriction benefits the choir as a whole—Moghaddam notes that there is a “conflict” that persists between individual and collective actualization. This conflict lies in the apparent difficulty of realizing both ideals at the same time.

The conflict in the pursuit of the ideals of individual and collective actualization is exceptionally pitched when the division of labor is at stake. Although he recognizes

that some division of labor is necessary for practical reasons—e.g., individuals may not have the time, resources, dedication or opportunity to develop fully the range of their abilities—Moghaddam also claims that the division of labor often negatively affects what individuals become by defining their roles as laborers.⁴ He worries that present divisions of labor increasingly subject individual development to the needs of the marketplace and the factory. Economic demand often dictates the skills that individuals seek to acquire and develop.⁵ This is, in fact, Moghaddam’s main problem with increasing specialization: it emphasizes the attainment of economic and collective ideals rather than the ideal of individual actualization. Moghaddam calls for a renewed emphasis on the ideal of individual actualization; his response to the tension between collective and individual actualization in the division of labor is that in cases of conflict, the development of the individual is to be preferred to the development of the collective.

To facilitate the reexamination of the ideals guiding the contemporary division of labor, Moghaddam challenges the well-entrenched economic assumptions that are thought to justify the trend toward increasing specialization. Specialization affects more than just economic productivity—it also affects the kinds of persons that we become through our labor and education. Moghaddam presents his challenge to the economic underpinnings of divided labor in three “proposals”:

1. *There are limits to the economic advantages of specialization.* Increased specialization does not *always* lead to increased productivity; in fact, there is reason to think that specialization hinders productivity in important ways.
2. *Specialization has more than economic consequences; it also has social, psychological, and moral ramifications.* Increased specialization fragments communities and tends to make specialized individuals increasingly dependent upon others. Specialization also counteracts the pursuit of individualism in many ways.
3. *Specialization is associated with a problematic modern tendency to find technical solutions to what are essentially moral problems.* Moghaddam seems to think that

specialization is a kind of “quick fix” that does not touch on the moral issues underlying certain problems like a lack of productivity or the struggle to acquire knowledge. He is not entirely clear about what makes something a “moral” problem; however, his claim (noted above) that the determining of appropriate ends is a moral matter to be resolved by citizens engaged in public discourse suggests that sorting out moral problems requires *dialogue* rather than a technological “silver bullet.”⁶

With these proposals in hand, Moghaddam embarks on a wide-ranging critique of specialization. His intention is not merely to direct attention to the economic ideals that motivate and guide the trend toward increasing specialization, but to question the assumptions on which these ideals are based. Moghaddam raises questions about the economic viability of increasing specialization. He also suggests that it is severely affecting academia.⁷ The competition for resources in academia invites a specialization that becomes institutionalized in the proliferation of departments, academic journals, and research centers. Faculty are forced into exceptionally narrow areas of expertise in order to land and secure employment, and as a result students increasingly sense that their studies are disjointed and without overarching direction. Moghaddam also suggests that specialization hampers the Third World, whether by drawing its most able students to more industrialized and politically stable nations or, if these students return to their home countries, by making them unable (or unwilling) to adapt their specialized skills to the resources and needs of the Third World.⁸ Additionally, Moghaddam explores the effects of the division of labor on the fragmentation of social and civic life; he even asserts that relativism about morality and knowledge is strengthened by the institutionalization of specialization and the creation of “experts” in new fields of study and research.⁹ In the end, Moghaddam worries that economic ideals have had too much sway over the contemporary division of labor, and he advocates renewed emphasis on the ideal of

individual actualization as a counter to these and other pernicious effects of the pursuit of economic and collective ideals through increased specialization.

My point in reviewing Moghaddam's criticism of increasing specialization is not to criticize him in turn. I admire Moghaddam's efforts to incite renewed interest in the division of labor—whether in psychologists, sociologists, philosophers, or citizens generally. To a degree, I share Moghaddam's concern with the restrictive effects of increasing specialization on individual development, and in the remainder of this work I will occasionally elaborate on some of his useful contributions. Yet perhaps Moghaddam's most important contribution to the debate surrounding the division of labor is his attention to different ideals and assumptions involved in its evaluation. Moghaddam criticizes a number of the assumptions underlying the economic ideals that inspire the increasing division of labor. But in what ways have certain assumptions affected *Moghaddam's* account? Although Moghaddam correctly draws attention to some general ideals and assumptions that affect various evaluations of the division of labor, he does not go far enough; even the ideals of individual and collective actualization appeal to deeper assumptions. I suggest that Moghaddam's criticism of increased specialization rests on key assumptions about the *effects* of labor/divided labor, the nature of human *capacities* and the degree to which they are exercised in labor, and the *proper relationship between the individual and others*. Attending to these three issues provides a framework for a closer examination not only of Moghaddam's position, but the positions of others as well. This framework allows disputants to recognize the key issues on which they really differ—often by making assumptions that are not clearly expressed or defended—in their various evaluations of the division of labor. By drawing attention to

these issues, philosophy contributes a framework for further evaluation, not only of positions taken on the division of labor, but the division of labor itself.

Is it beneficial or burdensome? The effects of labor/divided labor

Attending to the *effects* (whether actual or potential) of specialization is the primary intention of Moghaddam's work. He entertains two common, influential, and related contemporary defenses of specialization (that stem, as we shall see in the next chapter, from Adam Smith's seminal treatment of the division of labor): 1) the claim that specialization best serves *economic* goals by enhancing productivity; and 2) the claim that, by enhancing productivity, specialization leads to the attainment of some *moral* good, such as the eradication of poverty or the material enrichment of society generally. Moghaddam is skeptical about each of these claims; for his own part, he claims that specialization effectively serves neither of these economic or moral goals, while it also fails to serve what he takes to be a more important, overriding moral goal of human activity: individual actualization.

Specialization is commonly thought to be the key to increased economic productivity. Moghaddam traces the historical and ideological roots of this notion back to Adam Smith. Along the way, he briefly notes the impact of figures like Frederick Taylor, Henry Ford, and Alfred Sloan in applying specialization in management, assembly-line manufacturing, and organizational structures (respectively).¹⁰ But true to his first proposal—that there are limits to the economic benefits of specialization—Moghaddam responds by noting that many employers are moving away from strict divisions of labor, instead encouraging more “flexible and dynamic” ways of organizing

labor that result in increased productivity.¹¹ Moghaddam thinks that excessive specialization overlooks the “human factor” involved in labor: one’s psychological life.¹² Restrictions in the scope of one’s labor impoverish one’s psyche by focusing one’s thoughts on a relatively narrow range of activities and objects. Finding this deplorable, Moghaddam places great value on work that “enriches” rather than “deskills” workers through jobs that involve, among other things, the exercise of a variety of skills and allow workers greater creativity and control over the productive process.¹³ In making these suggestions, Moghaddam refutes the assumption that increased specialization serves economic purposes by increasing productivity. In some cases—especially when the laborer’s psychological life suffers—specialization actually *decreases* productivity.

Momentarily setting aside Moghaddam’s skepticism about the division of labor and its role in increasing productivity, let us assume that specialization *on the whole* increases productivity. Apart from its being economically advantageous, increased productivity promises to serve some important moral ends. Should one find it morally reprehensible that some cannot access or otherwise afford certain goods thanks to a shortage in supply, the division of labor can help to meet these needs through increased productivity that improves supply and consequently lowers prices—in other words, increased production makes products not only more available, but more affordable. In addition to helping alleviate the miserable condition of the poor, the division of labor generates a greater diversity of employments, goods and services that can improve the standard of living for most—if not all—members of society. On this interpretation, the economic benefits of specialization—grouped together under the term ‘progress’—have a

moral dimension. It seems that a significant moral case can be made in defense of the division of labor if it effectively generates sweeping economic blessings for humankind.

In responding to the suggestion that the division of labor generates highly valuable moral outcomes, Moghaddam extends his criticism of the economic viability of specialization by claiming that economic goals like productivity and growth are merely “superficial markers” of progress.¹⁴ Genuine progress, he claims, involves the holistic development of individuals’ capacities and talents. Although increased specialization might generate some economic benefits for the collective (a claim that Moghaddam disputes), it does so at the expense of individual development. This is a result with moral costs that are far too high to pay. Specialization disrespects the individual by subjecting his personal development to market pressures and other economic forces. In fact, Moghaddam thinks it is a perverse paradox of Western capitalism that it professes advocacy of individual freedom while at the same time restricting personal growth through its tendencies toward increasing specialization.¹⁵ The essence of Moghaddam’s response to the claim that increasing specialization serves morally valuable ends is the suggestion that economic goals are not the only moral ends for which we should strive. Moghaddam offers the goal of individual actualization as a standard of progress that is morally preferable (or at least indispensably complementary) to the more superficial economic standards of progress like efficiency and economic growth.

It is important to see that just as Moghaddam challenges the assumption that increasing specialization yields both economically and morally beneficial results, he invokes his own assumptions about the purposes of labor/divided labor. The assumption that individual actualization is the standard against which the division of labor is most

appropriately evaluated runs throughout his critique of the supposed economic and moral benefits of specialization. Individual actualization must be chief among the effects of the division of labor in order for the latter to be morally justifiable. But what justifies individual actualization as a goal worthy of pursuit, one to be preferred when it comes into conflict with those supposedly more superficial goals of economic productivity and growth? Moghaddam's answer seems to be that individuals are *capable* of so much more than that to which specialized labor limits them. So Moghaddam's invocation of the ideal of individual actualization rests on a further assumption that individuals have a fairly broad range of capacities that are not well-developed under conditions of increasing specialization. Moghaddam's crucial assumptions on the issue of human capacities and the degree to which they are exercised through labor now deserve our attention.

Specialization and the ability to do so much more: The nature of human capacities

It is hard to underestimate the great diversity of products and occupations in contemporary industrial society. There are postal workers, painters, accountants, grade-school teachers, doughnut fryers, insurance adjusters—the list seems endless. Within these various occupations there are further divisions: for example, 'postal worker' might apply to the mail carrier, the postage seller, or the mail sorter/transporter. Each of these jobs usually is completed by a different individual or by different groups of individuals. With the expansion of information, goods, and services (often thanks to technological advances that enhance communication or methods of production), how can an individual hope to perform—let alone master—even a fraction of the tasks that seem necessary to the functioning of contemporary society?

Given various practical limitations on time, accessibility of resources and training, or the possession of the basic abilities (one might call them ‘natural abilities’) required for certain activities, Moghaddam considers the claim that specialization is inevitable in the face of the proliferation of information, goods, services, and the jobs that produce and provide them in the modern economy. The negative consideration of the individual’s limitations is congruent with the positive consideration of an individual’s *capacities* for various labors and activities. For Moghaddam, the extent to which a specialized society fails to contribute to a more well-rounded development of the individual’s capacities is enough to raise concerns about the direction of specialization in contemporary society. In making his case, Moghaddam addresses some important issues along the way; I shall briefly take a detour through his treatments of the supposed practical inevitability of specialization and the relativity of specialization to a range of knowledge in order to show that his remarks hinge on his position regarding the nature of human capacities. We shall see that Moghaddam makes a number of key assumptions about human capacities and the degree to which they should be exercised in the activity of labor.

In response to the claim that practical limitations might make specialization inevitable in the face of the diversity of information, goods, services and occupations found in a contemporary industrial economy, Moghaddam admits that “since individuals cannot be expected to go deeply into all areas of knowledge, some narrowing down has to take place.”¹⁶ Specialization is essentially a practical means by which individuals “cope with” the expansion of the modern economy.¹⁷ However, Moghaddam refuses to concede that *all* kinds of specialization are inevitable. He claims that we have the ability to shape the division of labor according to the *ideals* that we seek to realize. Perhaps the

proliferation of information, goods, and services has been the result of a dogged pursuit of ideals like economic growth and increased productivity. As we saw in the last section, however, Moghaddam advocates a shift away from the contemporary focus on these economic ideals to a renewed emphasis on the ideal of individual actualization. In his eyes, the goal of individual actualization supersedes economic goals when the pursuit of the latter severely restricts the pursuit of the former. Some degree of specialization may be necessary given human limitations; the extent to which we specialize, however, can be guided according to the ideals we seek to realize.¹⁸

The issue of degrees of specialization brings another key aspect of Moghaddam's critique into the foreground. Moghaddam is willing to recognize that 'specialization' is a relative notion. He notes the observation of Oxford educationist John Wilson that specialization is "relative to a range of knowledge."¹⁹ Within the range of the study of European history, for example, one might specialize in the study of the history of the British Isles; within the study of the history of the British Isles, one might specialize in the study of the history of England; within the study of English history, one might specialize in the study of Medieval England; and so on. A critic of Moghaddam might ask: If specialization is relative, how can one tell when specialization has "gone too far"? This question parallels questions about the balance between breadth and depth of education: in what way, for example, should specialized historical knowledge (e.g., about Medieval England) be tempered by and contextualized within a broader understanding of history? Moghaddam does not give definite answers to these questions; the guidance he provides, however, hinges again on the ideal of individual actualization. One may rightfully question the specialization that drives workers into repetitive, monotonous and

narrow tasks insofar as such labors only require a fraction of an individual's overall skills. Additionally, one may rightfully question the specialization that requires extensive knowledge about a fairly narrow domain, for although it may require the exercise of a number of one's skills, these skills are being exercised toward only one of a number of possible ends (much like a piano player might expend his efforts to learn only one piece in his lifetime, albeit a fairly intricate one). Moghaddam follows Wilson in calling the former "shallow specialization" and the latter "deep specialization," and he asks that each ultimately be evaluated in terms of their effects on the individual's development of his potential—i.e., the extent to which the individual is actualized.

This detour through Moghaddam's positions on the inevitability and relativity of specialization shows that these issues, along with the issue of the effects of labor/divided labor addressed in the last section, can be evaluated against the standard of individual actualization. Now, I suggest that Moghaddam's ideal of individual actualization rests on further assumptions about the nature of human capacities and the extent to which laboring realizes one's potential. If individual actualization is the goal to be achieved, it would help to know what capacities and potential the individual has to be developed and actualized. Moghaddam takes identifiable positions on the nature of human capacities and the extent to which these are malleable through education and training. He indicates that individuals have a broad range of capacities, interests, and talents; furthermore, individuals are not fixed in their capacities—they are able to acquire and develop many skills through education and training.

The goal of individual actualization, according to Moghaddam, is the goal of making complete persons "as far as their special potentials allow."²⁰ This phrase has

both extending and differentiating aspects. To say that individuals should develop “as far” as their capacities allow them suggests that individuals have fairly extensive sets of abilities that they can develop, exercise, and use to develop new abilities. Talk of “special potentials” further suggests that individuals have different sets of talents—not every individual shares the same set of talents and abilities. Indeed, Moghaddam says that individuals possess “varied and multiple talents.” The problem with increasing specialization is that it places less emphasis on making individuals “whole and distinct” persons—i.e., specialization denies individuals’ capacities to “flourish as persons.”²¹ In other words, specialization all too often hinders the extent to which individuals develop their unique abilities.

Moghaddam is not entirely clear about the *source(s)* of the individual’s talents and capacities. For reasons that will become clear later (Chapter 3), the positions that one takes on one’s “natural endowment” of abilities and one’s potential for acquiring new abilities through education have an effect on one’s evaluation of the division of labor; to foreshadow, if one thinks that humans have some “natural” differences in their basic abilities (e.g., some may be well-suited for physical activity, others for contemplation), one might further think that some division of labor is justified in order to make use of individuals’ inherently different capabilities. Moghaddam might be said to offer a blended account of the sources of individuals’ abilities in that he wishes to recognize both natural and acquired capabilities as parts of what each individual is to actualize. On one hand, he favorably cites Matthew Arnold’s claim that the “complete life” involves the satisfaction of “instincts”—suggesting that nature, for Moghaddam, dictates (via instinct) the inclinations and abilities to be acted upon in the pursuit of the full, complete life.²²

On the other hand, Moghaddam favorably cites Owenism (led by Robert Owen and his attempt to found a model community in early 19th century Scotland) and the “pre-Raphaelite brotherhood” (a group of painters and thinkers in 19th century England) as examples of groups that sought to provide the right environment in which to mould craftsmen with extensive skills.²³ Indeed, Moghaddam appeals to the *malleability* of human behaviors, skills, and interests in his criticism of the notion that relatively fixed and limited human capacities make specialization not only practical, but inevitable.²⁴ Specialization unduly confines the individual to the exercise of relatively few abilities—abilities that are malleable and may be far more richly developed under other, less specialized laboring conditions.

In addition to restricting individual development, the specialized society makes the individual increasingly dependent upon others in order to live. The laborer that spends eight hours at the lathe or behind a desk needs the help of others to grow and prepare his food, build his home, make his clothes, generate electricity for the various devices he employs at home and work, etc. What of this dependency engendered by specialization? Is it somehow inappropriate for an individual to be dependent upon others? Or is it in fact quite appropriate that an individual cooperate and interact with others in his labors? What is the proper relationship between the individual and others? This latter question has arisen out of an examination of Moghaddam’s position on human capacities and as such it is worth considering in its own right in the next section.

The one and the many: The proper relationship between the individual and others

Often closely associated with positions taken on the effects of labor/divided labor and the nature of human capacities and the extent to which they are exercised through labor, a position taken on the proper relationship between the individual and others can also influence one's evaluation of the division of labor. Such a position initially appears explicable in terms of one's account of human capacities. Presumably, if individuals simply are not capable of performing all tasks essential to their livelihood (thanks to their limited capacities), there is a strong reason to think that man is essentially a social animal: his proper place is in society, where he can reproduce, interact, and labor with others. Even though human capacities play a role in this particular explication, however, the issue of the proper relationship of the individual to others deserves to be explored further for two reasons. First, a number of influential accounts drawn from the history of philosophy address the division of labor in the context of its relation to the proper organization of a political entity. While positions taken on the nature of human capacities and the effects of labor/divided labor may play a role in these accounts, they are peripheral to the central issue of the proper organization of individuals or groups in a larger society. A second—and related—reason for a separate consideration of the issue of the proper relationship between the individual and others is that this issue allows for the evaluation of divided labor in unique terms. Whereas one might complain, for example, about the division of labor in terms of its restriction of individual development, one might also complain about the *dependency* to which it reduces individuals. These two reasons justify an excursion into the issue of the individual's proper relationship to others. For his part, Moghaddam's contemporary criticism of specialization hinges on

some assumptions about this matter. Before we identify these, however, a quick preliminary remark is in order.

It is important to specify the use of the word ‘proper’ in the characterization of this key issue. The focus is *not* on descriptions of the *actual* relationships that obtain as a result of specialization; instead, the focus is on the relationship that *ought* to obtain between the individual and others. In order to evaluate the division of labor, more than a mere description is needed. An evaluation requires a comparison of actual conditions with a more ideal state of affairs. What I shall be looking for, in the work of Moghaddam and others, is an account of the proper relationship of the individual to others that serves as the standard for evaluating actual relationships.

Returning to Moghaddam’s account, I suggest that the position he takes on the proper relationship between the individual and others is somewhat unsettled. The reason for this is that in addressing the “competing ideals” of individual and collective actualization, Moghaddam notes only in passing that there is a “conflict” between the two. It is a conflict that he recognizes but says little about—perhaps because it is a conflict that is immensely difficult to settle. The conflict is essentially the long-standing tension between individual and society. There are times when individual and social development feed off of one another—e.g., the development of the Internet as a network of social communication has also introduced individuals to new ideas and opportunities that can enhance their personal lives. However, there are times when the interests of individuals and society conflict—e.g., when a government engages in widespread surveillance for the sake of preventing terrorism, even though such surveillance may have a chilling effect on the exercise of individuals’ legitimate freedoms. We have seen that

Moghaddam's rule of thumb, in cases where social and individual interests conflict, is to prefer individual to collective actualization—a rule that presumably shows Moghaddam's position on the proper relationship between the individual and others. But his position remains somewhat unsettled in that apart from this rule of thumb, Moghaddam supplies no clear rubric for determining just what is or is not conducive to individual development. This may be of little matter to Moghaddam, because his intention is simply to emphasize anew the goal of individual actualization; such renewed emphasis, he seems to think, does not require an explicit account of how to settle *every* conflict between the individual and the collective.

At first glance, one might wonder how Moghaddam's position differs from the general attitude of Western industrial societies toward individualism. Is it not true that the ideal of individual actualization—the promise of satisfying individual needs and freeing individuals for the sake of pursuing their own interests—drives modern industrial society, even with its trends towards increasing specialization? Moghaddam has a surprising answer: there is an *illusion* of individualism in contemporary society, but the reality is that individuals are paradoxically dependent upon others in many facets of modern life. Moghaddam credits much of what he sees as a decline of communities and civic participation to specialization and the contemporary attitude that one should “mind one's own business.” New technologies, particularly in communication, have been developed in attempts to solve what Moghaddam takes to be the fundamentally moral problem of community fragmentation, but he concludes that these new technologies end up generating paradoxical results: they open new avenues for interpersonal

communication while at the same time they allow for—or even exacerbate—individuals’ withdrawal from society.

Moghaddam turns the tables on the view that modern specialized society helps attain the ideal of individualism.²⁵ The hero of this view is the “rugged individualist” who, in personal and community situations (including romantic love), takes matters into his own hands, working in the face of apathy or outright hostility from others, or (in the case of romantic love) entering into a relationship of one’s own choosing over the objections of friends or parents. Although there is a contemporary sense that individualism is entrenched and even increasingly valued, Moghaddam claims that in reality individuals are increasingly *dependent* on others—in fact, he claims that “the most profound long-term impact of increasing specialization” is not what is occurring in the workplace, but what is happening “in the wider social arena: in relations between individuals and in the nature of community life.”²⁶ Moghaddam asserts that in many respects, individuals are more than willing to turn facets of their lives over to “specialists” of many kinds. He calls this the *paradox of dependent individualism*.²⁷ Although individuals may increasingly claim independence from family, religion, or other forms of authority, they also appeal to lawyers, physicians, accountants, nutritionists and other specialists when faced with personal problems or needs. Moghaddam thinks there is an odd reasonableness about this; in a society with a tradition of liberalism and individual rights, it seems that one ought to mind one’s own business in matters that seem not to concern him or to which he feels inadequate. But this attitude can—and does—lead individuals down disturbing paths. Nowhere, perhaps, is this clearer than in the case of Kitty Genovese.

Moghaddam recounts the story of Kitty Genovese's murder as an example of how specialization—and its attendant injunction to mind one's own business—has some disturbing social and moral consequences. In the early morning hours of March 13, 1964, Kitty Genovese was attacked on a street in Queens, New York. Despite scaring off her attacker a few times with her screams, and despite nearly 40 people turning on lights or opening windows to see what was going on, no one bothered to call the police, and Kitty Genovese was found dead in a stairwell. The Genovese murder called into stark relief the contemporary attitudes of minding one's own business and not getting involved in another's business.

Moghaddam thinks that the failure of Genovese's fellow citizens to come to her aid vividly shows that specialization has affected what we take to be morally appropriate behavior for the individual with respect to others. Specialization gives rise to a sense that one should not get involved in that which is not one's specialty. If two people are fighting on the street in front of my house, then that is none of my business; let them sort it out, or let the police sort it out, because it is *their job* to control domestic violence, not mine—I am just a philosopher! On Moghaddam's account, a culture of specialization breeds this “mind your own business” or “call the experts” mentality when dealing with problems. So in bemoaning the decline of communities that he believes should be recognized as centrally important to individual actualization (such as families, close-knit neighborhoods, volunteer groups, etc.), Moghaddam suggests that this social fragmentation is reinforced by specialization's moral imperative to mind one's own business. Furthermore, although a number of new technologies are advanced for purposes of bringing together communities (such as the Internet, cellular phones, text

message devices, blogs, and so on), Moghaddam finds that these ultimately result in a *communications paradox*.²⁸ New methods of communication are bringing together some communities while neglecting others. In academia, for example, new technologies like email and blogs are often being used by faculty to correspond with *other specialists* in one's field rather than to engage in meaningful cross-cultural or cross-disciplinary dialogue—even with colleagues on one's own campus. Moghaddam also questions the quality of the communications facilitated by these new technologies. Electronic meetings by voice or text are increasingly supplanting rich face-to-face interactions that employ body language as well as verbal language. Moghaddam even suggests that the speed of new forms of communication cuts against the patience, diligence, and effort needed to produce meaningful scholarship. For as much as these new technologies promise to bridge the gaps in our increasingly fragmented and specialized communities, Moghaddam thinks that they sometimes become the very tools of further fragmentation and specialization.

In the end, although Moghaddam notes that “conflict” can arise in the pursuit of the ideals of individual and collective actualization, he is ready to resolve this conflict by embracing only those communities that enhance individual development. In his eyes, a sham individualism masks—or even attempts to justify—the modern fragmentation of many important community relationships. This so-called individualism actually encourages persons to “mind their own business” in a manner that makes them crucially dependent upon others (“experts”) to complete tasks that one formerly completed either on one's own or with the assistance of one's family, friends, and neighbors. Attempts at putting our fragmenting communities back together again through communication have,

in some cases, only resulted in further fragmentation and interdependence on one hand, while lowering the quality of communications on the other. Genuine individualism—the actualization of one’s potential through the development of a wide array of skills, talents, and abilities—is the guiding ideal for Moghaddam. The individual’s proper relationship to others is one in which his individual and collective activities are geared toward his personal development. For Moghaddam, contemporary specialized society offers only illusory individualism and illusory (or low-quality) communities drawn and held together by new forms of communication. In reality, Mogaddam claims, the contemporary specialist is a dependent, narrowly developed individual; yet his proper condition is one in which his potential is more fully realized in communities that contribute to, rather than detract from, his personal development.

Concluding remarks: Toward a framework for assessing the division of labor

I have explored Moghaddam’s work in this chapter for a number of reasons. First, I want to show that there is contemporary interest in the division of labor and its effects on human psychology, social interactions, and the economy. Second, I want to show that Moghaddam’s examination of the guiding ideals and underlying assumptions of the modern trend toward increasing specialization is a particularly rich and insightful method of looking into the division of labor. Finally, I want to draw attention to Moghaddam’s own assumptions regarding the division of labor, particularly with respect to the positions he takes on three key issues: the effects of labor/divided labor, the nature of human capacities and the extent to which labor exercises these capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and others. My goal has been to show that

positions on these issues may individually or jointly affect one's evaluation of the division of labor. Prospectively, I suggest that these issues are hiding in the background of much discussion of the division of labor, and I hope that by focusing on these key issues, some progress can be made in the continuing debate about the division of labor and its effects on the human condition.

Moghaddam addresses both the economic (or, more generally, 'practical') and moral effects supposedly engendered by specialization. He questions specialization's ability to consistently deliver gains in productivity; in fact, he suggests that there has been a recent turn towards flexibility and a broader engagement of laborers' faculties and interests in order to raise productivity to new heights. While specialization may increase the material wealth of society through increased productivity, Moghaddam claims that this comes at the cost of a more holistic development of individuals. This price, he thinks, is too high to pay. He advocates individual actualization as an ideal that should temper—or in some cases supersede—economic goals like growth and increased productivity. Moghaddam's underlying supposition is that individual actualization is a legitimate alternative to the economic ideals to be attained by labor/divided labor. This supposition is grounded in Moghaddam's account of the nature of human capacities.

Moghaddam supposes that individuals possess a wide variety of talents, skills, and interests. Furthermore, the nature of one's labor shapes just which of these capacities are exercised and developed by an individual—the narrower the labor, the narrower the development of one's capacities. Again, the standard of individual actualization is offered for evaluating divisions of labor: a division of labor is more or less acceptable based on how it enhances or restricts individual development.

Apart from his concern with individual development and actualization, Moghaddam also offers criticism of specialization in terms of the *dependency* to which specialized individuals are reduced. He suggests that much of modern individualism is illusory—in reality, individuals are increasingly dependent upon specialists. Furthermore, the fragmentation of communities and the decline of civic life have not been adequately remedied by new technologies of communication. The dependent state to which a specialized individual is reduced is not the proper relationship between the individual and others; for Moghaddam, the proper relationship between the individual and others is that relationship in which communities are built and strengthened in order to realize the ideal of individual actualization.

Moghaddam carefully examines the ideals and assumptions that guide and support specialization. In the process, he invokes key assumptions of his own, particularly with respect to the issues of the effects of labor/divided labor, the nature of human capacities and the extent to which labor exercises these capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and others. Having identified these key issues, I claim that we now have a framework with which we can look at other evaluations of divided labor and attempt to show that they, too, rest on key (but often unexpressed or presumed peripheral) assumptions about some or all of these issues. The history of philosophy since Plato includes some influential accounts of the division of labor—some in favor of the division of labor, others intensely critical of it. The framework outlined in this chapter is useful, as we shall now see, not only in exploring these various accounts but providing a structure within which the contemporary debates about the division of labor and its direction may be discussed in a more orderly and focused manner.

Notes:

¹ Fathali Moghaddam, *The Specialized Society: The Plight of the Individual in an Age of Individualism* (Wesport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1997), 12.

² *Ibid.*, 144.

³ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 12, 127.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-3. Although Moghaddam does not cite Garrett Hardin's recognition of "no technical solution" problems in support of his position here, he could certainly do so; Hardin's position is noted later on in Chapter 5, when I discuss the extent to which contemporary specialization is a problem that requires a radical redress.

⁷ The effects of specialization on academia are noted in Chapter 3 of *The Specialized Society* (intriguingly titled "The Tyrannical Machine: Specialization in Academia").

⁸ This is elaborated in Chapter 5 of *The Specialized Society*.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 122. Moghaddam claims that "the role of specialization in strengthening relativism is seldom recognized." The proliferation of information and occupations, as well as the territorial behavior of specialists, creates (Moghaddam suggests) a sense that one cannot speak (let alone know) about anything beyond one's area of expertise. This sense reinforces the relativistic claim that there are different ways of understanding a given subject matter, and in many cases one view is just as good as any other—i.e. there is no objectively correct approach to the subject.

¹⁰ The impact of each of these persons on contemporary specialization is reviewed in Chapter 4 of *The Specialized Society*. In summary, Smith (as we shall see in later chapters) opens *The Wealth of Nations* by attributing growth in productivity to the increased division of labor. Frederick Taylor, an American industrial engineer, provided a plan to guide managers in implementing a rigorous division of labor on the factory floor. Ford's use of the assembly line streamlined production in a way that increased productivity and lowered prices not only for his company's automobiles, but for other industries that adopted assembly line techniques. Alfred Sloan, head of General Motors from the 1930s to the 1950s, successfully reorganized GM by developing specialized divisions for marketing, sales, manufacture, etc.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

¹² *Ibid.*, 70.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 73. Moghaddam's full list of recommended criteria for divisions of labor is as follows: 1) jobs should involve some *unpredictability*; 2) jobs should require the use and coordination of a *variety* of one's skills; 3) laborers should enjoy a sense of *completion* of their tasks; 4) jobs should have a *social* component allowing for interaction with others; 5 and 6) jobs should allow for some *flexibility* and *creativity* in problem-solving and task-completing; 7) laborers should have some *growth potential* in their jobs, and their jobs should be structured so as to encourage one's growth; 8) laborers should be able to exercise some *control* over productive processes.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* Moghaddam's remarks on the relativity of specialization are greatly inspired by Wilson's comments.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

²² *Ibid.*, 15.

²³ *Ibid.*, 74-76.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

²⁵ This criticism is levied primarily in Chapter 6 of *The Specialized Society*.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 116.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 123-124.

Chapter 2: The Effects of the Division of Labor: Practical and Moral Justifications

In Chapter 1, I looked at how Fathali Moghaddam calls specialization into account for its effects on individual development. Moghaddam's work is valuable primarily for two reasons: 1) it is a contemporary evaluation of the division of labor, one that is attuned particularly to the effects of specialization on academia, the Third World, and individual actualization; and 2) it explores, in the light of recent psychological and sociological studies, some of the philosophical and economic assumptions that underlie specialization. Moghaddam criticizes increasing specialization for its human cost, especially in the fetters that it places on individual actualization. While sympathetic to Moghaddam's position, I suggested that his attack on the assumptions that underlie increasing specialization itself rests on key assumptions about the effects of the division of labor, the nature of human capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and others. These three issues constitute a framework not only for understanding some of the discordant accounts of the division of labor in the history of philosophy, but for structuring ongoing debates through a focus on these central issues.

The specific task of this chapter is to show that assumptions about the effects of the division of labor are at the foundation of a number of influential accounts in the history of philosophy. An examination of these effects introduces, at least in outline, the related issues of human capacities and the proper relationship of the individual to others that will be explored in more detail in later chapters. I will begin with some preliminary remarks that will guide not only the investigation of this chapter, but those of future chapters. Following this, I will suggest that the effects of the division of labor are *essential but not the sole considerations* in its evaluation. Then I explore influential

accounts from the history of philosophy insofar as they appeal to effects in justifying or criticizing the division of labor. I conclude by raising a series of related issues that need to be sorted out in order to provide a viable account of the effects of the division of labor—issues which ultimately transition into considerations about the subject of the next chapter: the nature of human capacities.

Some preliminary remarks: The technical and social division of labor and other issues

As it is the overarching goal of this project to provide clarity and structure both to the examination of historical accounts as well as to the contemporary debate on the division of labor, it is important that I pause here in order to offer some initial remarks that will guide what follows.

What *is* the division of labor? The division of labor involves the division of a work process into its component tasks and assigning workers to one or more of those component tasks. But as philosopher James Murphy notes, such a definition describes two different operations.¹ In one sense, the division of labor refers to the delineation of distinct tasks that make up the work process in question. In another sense, the division of labor refers to the assignment of workers to these distinct tasks. Murphy calls the former the “technical division of labor” and the latter the “social division of labor.”² Murphy rightly points out that the social division of labor is the truly moral issue in the evaluation of the division of labor. What matters morally is not how a task is broken up into more elemental tasks; rather, what matters is how individuals are assigned to those elemental tasks. In this and succeeding chapters, Murphy’s distinction between the technical and social divisions of labor will be helpful in sorting out a variety of accounts.

Additionally, I follow Moghaddam (who follows John Wilson) in recognizing that the ‘division of labor’ is understood relative to some context—a point initially discussed in Chapter 1. Relative to a small town, for example, ‘the division of labor’ refers to the distinctions between the roles of farmer, mechanic, banker, baker, and other distinct jobs one might find in a small town. However, in other contexts (or even within the small town) each one of those occupations may admit of a further division of labors: the banking service might be provided by tellers, accountants, loan officers, the bank president, and so on. This shows that divisions of labor may be drawn *between* and *within* occupations. Not all philosophical accounts are clear about the divisions to which they are referring—and this can be quite problematic or confusing. Marx, for instance, seems to attack the division of labor without regard for differences in divisions of labor between and within occupations. In the *German Ideology*, Marx characterizes the division of labor as that condition in which “each man has a particular, exclusive sphere of activity, which is forced upon him and from which he cannot escape,” adding that “he is a hunter, a fisherman, a shepherd, or a critical critic, and must remain so if he does not want to lose his means of livelihood.” Here, Marx has drawn the division of labor along occupational lines, with the occupations characterized as having distinct, unrelated objectives. By way of comparison, Marx claims that in a communist society, “where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes,” it is possible for one to “do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner...without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, cowherd or critic.”³ Later in the *German Ideology*, Marx makes a similar comment about artists who are subordinated to

some “definite art”—e.g., painting. Expressing concern for such “narrowness of [the painter’s] professional development” and his “dependence” on a division of labor along specific occupational lines, Marx asserts that in a communist society “there are no painters but at most people who engage in painting among other activities.”⁴ Yet in the *Communist Manifesto*, Marx directs his ire at divisions of labor *within* occupations, particularly at those exclusive spheres of activity found on the factory floor:

“Owing to the extensive use of machinery and to the division of labor, the work of the proletarians has lost all individual character, and, consequently, all charm for the workman. He becomes an appendage of the machine, and it is only the most simple, most monotonous, and most easily acquired knack, that is required of him.”⁵

In the light of the foregoing passages, Marx appears to treat divisions of labor between and within occupations as being on a par with each other. But is the painter’s specialization comparable to that of a factory worker? Although there might be something disconcerting about a man who spends his life painting at the expense of other activities, the painter’s occupation is certainly more complex and engaging than a menial, monotonous task in a factory. A society of butchers, bakers, and candlestick-makers contains workers with richer skill sets and occupations than a society of factory laborers. In this case, Marx’s failure to recognize the relativity of specialization to a context makes his criticism of the division of labor unclear. Perhaps all divisions of labor—whether between or within occupations—are somehow equally condemnable on Marx’s account; yet it seems reasonable to think that there are relevant differences between the two kinds of division that warrant different explanations for their condemnation. At the very least, greater clarity about the kind(s) of division in question is welcome. What Aristotle said about the inquiry into ethics also applies to the inquiry into the division of labor: “Our

discussion will be adequate if it has as much clearness as the subject-matter admits of....”⁶

Having said all this, I shall provide—where possible—examples of divisions of labor in order to make points salient. However, assumptions about the effects of the division of labor, the nature of human capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and others can play a role in any account, whether one is discussing divisions of labor among or within occupations, or workers whose jobs are comparatively more complex and varied relative to other workers. The point of this sidebar—as with the sidebar on the technical and social divisions of labor—is to note an aspect of the debate where confusion is exacerbating misunderstandings about the division of labor. In the light of these preliminary remarks, we are now ready to turn our attention to the effects of the division of labor and their place in its evaluation.

The expediency of the division of labor

In accounting for the division of labor, one might initially ask, “What are its effects?” Presumably, the motivation for this question is the thought that since the division of labor deals with *work*—an activity usually oriented toward the production of an object, the provision of a service, or the completion of some task—its value must depend on how effectively it serves its purpose(s). In other words, the division of labor may be evaluated in terms of its *efficiency* or *expediency*. Philosophers, however, have tended to see the division of labor as affecting more than just the work process, with its effects extending into other economic, political, social, and even moral realms. For the sake of brevity, I shall address the issue of expediency in terms of two general types of

effects: *practical* (including political, economic, educational and otherwise social effects) and *moral* (including individual actualization, justice, the good, and so on). Importantly, assessing the division of labor in terms of its practical and/or moral expediency must not overlook the means by which its ends are attained. Considering the division of labor in its totality—i.e., not just in terms of its productive results, but in terms of its methods and the effects of these methods on specialized laborers—is essential to an accurate assessment. With this in mind, we must now begin to attend to the various effects of the division of labor and their role in motivating a number of important philosophical accounts.

The division of labor as politically and morally expedient: Plato and Aristotle

Plato and Aristotle discuss the division of labor only indirectly as it pertains to their overarching interest in the proper political order. In spite of such indirect and contextualized treatments, there are at least three ways in which their accounts have significantly influenced historical and contemporary accounts: 1) both appeal to the *practical* (chiefly political) and *moral* effects of certain divisions of labor—in other words, divisions of labor are evaluated in terms of their political and moral expediency; 2) Plato suggests a *strict, one-to-one correspondence* between the technical and social divisions of labor—an idea that becomes a common assumption in later philosophical accounts; and 3) both ground the division of labor on a *natural foundation*, citing differences in natural aptitudes and limitations of human abilities as justifications for the division of labor.

Plato's discussion of the division of labor in the *Republic* occurs within the context of an investigation into justice. In order to better understand the justice of one man, Socrates proposes an investigation into justice "in the larger object" (the city).⁷ The just city is analogous to the just man; by finding justice in the city, Socrates claims, one may more easily find it in the individual. Plato thus launches into an examination of the ideal city, with its division of labor appropriately suited for ultimately attaining justice.

While the overarching interest of Plato's account is an inquiry into justice, he begins by noting the city's creation in response to various practical needs.⁸ Each individual, Socrates claims, is unable to suffice his own needs. Being in need of help from others, individuals gather "into one place of abode as associates and helpers"—and this is the beginning of a city. Socrates asserts that practical needs such as those for food, housing, and raiment are together the "real creator" of the city.

Plato divides labor within the city along occupational lines, specifying jobs for the satisfaction of key human needs: farmers for food, builders for housing, and weavers and cobblers for raiment.⁹ But here Socrates poses an intriguing dilemma: should a specific worker (e.g., a farmer) labor exclusively at one task for the common benefit, or should he divide his time among the various activities of farming, building, weaving, and so on? Socrates frames this dilemma in terms of the laborer's relationship to others. In the former case, the laborer "contribute[s] his work for the common use of all"; in the latter, however, he does not have "the bother of associating with other people" and can "mind his own affairs." Plato's framing of the dilemma in these terms suggests that the ties that bind citizens together in the city—namely, their mutual dependence on one another's labors—are wrongly severed if each man attempts to supply each of his various needs

without the help of others. But Socrates appears to realize that cooperation in order to meet basic needs alone does not sufficiently justify his division of labor. As soon as Adimantus agrees that it would be “easier” for workers to labor on one task only, Socrates exclaims that “it occurs to me myself that, to begin with, our several natures are not all alike but different. One man is naturally fitted for one task, and another for another.” Notice that in just a few lines, Plato shifts his argument for a division of labor from its place in the social order to the “natural” fitness of laborers to their specific tasks. Thus Plato’s account foreshadows the two other issues that are the subjects of later chapters: the relationship of the individual to others and the nature of human capacities.

As a result of their natural fitness for their tasks within the state, Plato claims that specialized workers will realize three production-related goals: an increase in the *quantity* of goods produced; an improvement in the *quality* of goods produced; and an *easier* performance of tasks. “The result [of workers being assigned one task on the basis of their natural fitness for that task],” says Socrates, “is that more things are produced, and better and more easily when one man performs one task according to his nature, at the right moment, and at leisure from other occupations.”¹⁰

As Plato develops his view of the city in the *Republic*, he ultimately distinguishes three “natural kinds” of persons, each well-suited by nature to perform one key service to the state.¹¹ The city needs workers to suffice its physical needs, such as those of food, shelter, and raiment. Soldiers are needed to maintain order within the city and to protect it from threats without. Finally, the guardians oversee and manage the city. Individuals of each “natural kind” perform their respective functions well insofar as they practice a virtue associated with their respective occupations: sobriety for the workers, bravery for

the soldiers, and wisdom for the guardians. With this social order in mind, Socrates claims, justice can be defined as it pertains to the city—and this was the overarching goal of his account of the city and its division of labor. Socrates reminds his interlocutors that at the beginning of their discussion, they laid down the “original” (or “founding”) principle of the city: “[E]ach one man must perform one social service in the state for which his nature [is] best adapted.”¹² This is *justice*; that city is just in which “each performed his one task as one man and [is] not a versatile busybody.”¹³ Socrates adds that justice, organized around this “principle of everyone...doing his own task,” rivals wisdom, sobriety, and bravery in its contribution to the excellence of the city. So the division of labor, according to Plato, not only serves *practical* goals like increased productivity, improved quality of produced goods, and easing the burden of work, but insofar as it serves these practical goals, the division of labor also serves an overarching *moral* goal of engendering justice within the city. Plato brings his inquiry full circle by drawing an analogy between justice in the city as the harmonious working of its parts (with each citizen performing his own task) and the just man as he who harmoniously integrates the parts of his soul (with each part performing its own task).¹⁴ The social division of labor within the city parallels the psychological division of labor within the soul, and both can serve the ends of justice provided that each part of the division plays its own role exclusively.

In two aptly-named works—*Politics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*—Aristotle follows Plato in locating the value of the division of labor in its political and (ultimately) moral expediency. The division of labor that best serves these ends, according to Aristotle, has a natural foundation: man, limited in his natural abilities, seeks out a cooperative

association in order to meet his needs. In meeting his needs and enhancing his well-being, the division of labor within the state helps to realize an important moral goal.

For Aristotle, the “chief end” that is shared by both individual and political action is well-being, or more generally, *the good*.¹⁵ But what is this ‘good’ at which both types of action aim? Aristotle holds that the good has three key features: 1) it is the final end of action; 2) it is desirable in itself (and not as a means to some further end); and 3) it is self-sufficient.¹⁶ This notion of the good is the ultimate standard against which any polity may be assessed on Aristotle’s account. But though the good is the final end of the political order, what is its origin? The sapling’s final end is a mature tree, but it begins as a seed—something phenomenally different from a tree. Aristotle’s accounts of the origin of the state and the relation of the state to the individual shed further light on his account of how the division of labor serves the good.

Following in Plato’s steps, Aristotle claims that the isolated individual “is not self-sufficing.”¹⁷ By himself, the individual is not adequately equipped to meet all of his needs. Through collective action, however, the individual can complement his position. This is Aristotle’s argument in favor of democracy; he claims, for instance, that “the many, of whom each individual is but an ordinary person, when they meet together may very likely be better than the few good...[f]or each individual among the many has a share of virtue and prudence, and when they meet together, they become in a manner one man...”¹⁸ Aristotle seems to agree with Plato that political communities form in order to meet needs, but he also seems to recognize that individuals may not always *need* to live in a community if their basic needs (e.g., food, shelter, and raiment) are simple and easily met. So Aristotle makes a Platonic move: he treats the state as having a natural

foundation by claiming that man is “*by nature* a political animal.”¹⁹ Man is naturally disposed to form various kinds of associations—with the state being the highest form of political association—in order to meet his needs.

Aristotle traces the creation of the state from its beginning in the family, which he claims is “the association established by nature for the supply of men’s everyday wants.”²⁰ Gradually, several families unite into a small village, and soon a number of villages unite into a community: the state. Aristotle draws together his ethical and political theories in his account of the state by defining the state in terms of *self-sufficiency*: “When several villages are united in a single complete community, large enough to be nearly or quite self-sufficing, the state comes into existence, originating in the bare needs of life, and continuing in existence for the sake of a good life.”²¹ Furthermore, as C. C. W. Taylor observes, Aristotle applies a principle of his biology—that if an earlier stage of development is natural, a latter stage of development is natural—in asserting that the state is a “natural” development.²² The state is the full development of man’s political nature, his inclination to cooperate with others not only to meet his “bare needs,” but to realize the good life. The state is self-sufficient, “and to be self-sufficing is the end and the best” stage of human development.²³ In fact, on the basis of this notion that self-sufficiency is achieved only through the state, Aristotle asserts that the relationship of the individual to the state is that of a part to a whole. Although it is individuals who come together—first in families, then in villages, later in states—it is the *state* that is prior to the individual, “since the whole is of necessity prior to the part.”²⁴ Aristotle compares the state as a political body to the human body: just as a hand

unattached to a body is effectively useless, an individual separated from a state cannot suffice his needs.

There is a sense in which these passages provide only a passing glimpse of Aristotle's theory of the division of labor. Considered in the abstract, the state that serves the good contains a division of labor insofar as men, being individually unable to meet their own needs and possessed of natural political instinct, are drawn into political associations in order to assist one another. Aristotle has not gone deeply into details; an account of just what jobs one might find under the best government is largely absent. Even so, one can see that Aristotle, like Plato, grounds the state in natural human aptitudes (or lack thereof) and a need for political association. Both Plato and Aristotle recognize that a proper division of labor, drawn along the lines that nature has provided in her endowment of abilities, has valuable practical and moral effects. For both of these philosophers, these practical and moral goals are realized in the realm of politics—so for them, the division of labor is a *political matter*. Centuries later, a new account of the origin, legitimacy and purpose of proper government still appealed to the value of the division of labor in serving the political order.

Individualism and the division of labor: Locke's account of political legitimacy

Although both Plato and Aristotle traced the polity to its origins in human needs and a natural fitness or propensity to form political associations in order to meet those needs, they effectively presumed that life in the city-state is the natural end and proper locus of human activity. But John Locke, in his seminal *Second Treatise of Government*, sees fit to question the authority of certain forms of government. Locke seeks a new

ground for political legitimacy; in the process, he overturns the Aristotelian notion of state priority in favor of locating the origin of legitimate political power in individuals' natural rights. In spite of his emphasis on natural rights and human equality, however, Locke retains a division of labor for its political expediency in the preservation of private property.

In his effort to find the origin of legitimate political power in something other than “force and violence,” Locke proposes to consider man in his natural state.²⁵ He characterizes this as a state of “perfect freedom” for individuals, in which they are governed only by the “law of nature” which “willeth the peace and preservation of all mankind.”²⁶ Locke also stresses that the state of nature is a state of *equality* among men—at least with respect to their natural rights. In asserting this equality, Locke breaks significantly from Plato and Aristotle. Whereas the latter traced the origin of the political order to *differences* in the natural endowments of individuals (particularly with respect to their capacities for certain kinds of work), Locke appeals instead to a fundamental *equality* of rights. By setting aside force and violence—methods of gaining power that often exploit differences in physical and mental acumen between men—Locke effectively dismisses natural differences of aptitude as a source of political legitimacy.

Each individual in the state of nature is endowed with certain natural rights, including rights to preserve oneself and mankind, the power to execute the law of nature (i.e., the power to punish), even a right to freely exercise one's rights.²⁷ A. J. Simmons argues that these natural rights together constitute a composite “right of self-government.”²⁸ When men join together in civil society, governmental power is constructed out of those natural rights of self-government that individuals cede to civil

society via their valid consent.²⁹ Locke thus turns Aristotelian state priority on its head: for Locke, there is no sense in which the state is prior to individuals, since governmental power originates in the natural rights initially possessed by individuals and ceded to government via consent.

But why form a government in the first place? For Locke, individuals submit to government for purely prudential purposes. In the state of nature, each individual possesses extensive liberties and powers of self-government, the exercise of which inevitably leads individuals into conflicts that spoil the very enjoyment of those powers. Man is “constantly exposed to the invasion of others,” “very unsafe [and] very unsecure”; his is an “ill condition” with its “inconveniencies” and the “irregular and uncertain exercise” of natural powers, especially on the part of others. The vicissitudes of the state of nature make man “willing to quit a condition which, however free, is full of fears and continual dangers.”³⁰ Seeking “the mutual preservation of their lives, liberties, and estates” (what Locke calls their *property*), men join together for the “great and chief end...the preservation of their property.”³¹ Furthermore, Locke thinks that the practical end of property preservation—an end which is also *moral* in that it is enjoined by the law of nature that “teaches all mankind...that, being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions”³²—is best served by a political division of labor. Again appealing to the “human frailty” to be “apt to grasp at power,” he claims that the legislative and executive powers should be separated in civil government—the former meeting only so long as it is necessary to make new legislation, and the latter continually executing the laws.³³

Admittedly, Locke has little to say about the technical and social divisions of labor with respect to the production of goods and the provision of services within the state. But his discussion of political legitimacy has important ramifications for philosophical accounts of the division of labor. Plato and Aristotle accounted for the division of labor insofar as it related to the political order of the state, and they grounded this division (in some manner or other) in a natural foundation.³⁴ Locke also appeals to a natural foundation for the state, but he concludes that men are fundamentally *equal* with respect to their natural rights afforded them by the law of nature. The division of labor, which Locke discusses only as it pertains to government, is the key to effectual government—and effectual government serves the practical (and, with respect to the law of nature, the moral) purpose of preserving property. Locke neglects the productive power of the division of labor—but this was not to be neglected for long. In the work of Adam Smith, interest in the factories of the nascent Industrial Revolution elevates the division of labor from a peripheral feature of political accounts into a matter of direct philosophical concern.

From politics to the wealth of nations: The work of Adam Smith

In his pivotal *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith makes the division of labor itself a matter of philosophical concern. Instead of considering it from the perspective of its contributions to the political order, however, Smith takes interest in the *economic* benefits of specialization. Although his work represents an important break from traditional philosophical treatments, Smith still appeals to the practical and moral effects of the division of labor and he locates its origin ultimately in man's natural faculties of reason

and speech. Furthermore, Smith takes humans to be roughly equal with respect to their natural abilities, with differences in ability attributable primarily to different degrees of education and training.

Plato, Aristotle, and Locke treated the division of labor primarily as a constitutive feature of an ideal, effective and legitimate political order. In contrast to these more ethereal considerations, Smith opens *The Wealth of Nations* with a bold claim about the real, practical expediency of the division of labor: “The greatest improvement in the productive powers of labour, and the greater part of the skill, dexterity, and judgment with which it is any where directed, or applied, seem to have been the effects of the division of labor.”³⁵ Smith believes that the division of labor produces real, identifiable results that matter in the here-and-now, particularly an increase in the productivity of labor.³⁶ Three characteristics of the division of labor together contribute to increasing productivity: 1) it improves the manual *dexterity* of the laborer; 2) it *saves time* by reducing the time lost in switching from task to task; and 3) it *facilitates invention*.³⁷ Smith famously characterizes the division of labor—in terms that recognizably apply to both the technical and social divisions of labor—in his account of how it improves manual dexterity: “[T]he division of labor, by reducing every man’s business to some one simple operation [technical division of labor], and by making this operation the sole employment of his life [social division of labor], necessarily increases very much the dexterity of the workman.” The division of labor also counters habits of “sauntering” and “indolent careless application” by removing the need for the laborer to put down and take up tools for a variety of tasks. Finally, the focus on their specific tasks makes workers so

familiar with their occupation that they will be better able to invent “easier and readier methods” of production.

Yet Smith does not pin his accolades for the division of labor solely on its role in increasing productivity. The division of labor, on Smith’s account, can produce a morally laudable result. Through the “great multiplication of the productions of all the different arts” that arises from a division of labor, a “well-governed society” attains a “universal opulence which extends itself to the lowest ranks of people.”³⁸ This opulence, this “diffusion of general plenty,” yields the alleviation—and presumably with time and further production, the eradication—of material poverty. If poverty is a moral evil, then the division of labor (Smith suggests) will ultimately remove it. The end (universal opulence) justifies the means (the division of labor). Smith’s capitalism is a *moral* theory as much as it is an *economic* one. Thus Smith, following Plato, Aristotle, and Locke before him, appeals to the practical *and* moral expediency of the division of labor in its defense. Smith even follows these philosophers in claiming that the division of labor contributes to the satisfaction of man’s needs. The mutual dependence of individuals on one another, occasioned by the division of labor, is expedient in that each man could not meet his needs without the “assistance and cooperation of many.”³⁹

Smith denies that specialization is solely a creation of human wisdom; rather, he claims that it springs from a “propensity to truck, barter and exchange”—a propensity to trade.⁴⁰ While Smith does not think that this propensity is itself a natural (or “original”) one, he does claim that it is “the necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech”—both of which are natural faculties. Individuals communicate through speech and employ reason for, among other things, the pursuit of their own self-interests.

Individuals that produce different goods might find it beneficial to themselves to trade with one another. Smith famously adds—in a surprisingly short passage buried in *The Wealth of Nations*—that such trading unexpectedly (at least for the self-interested individuals) yields benefits for society at large by the workings of an “invisible hand.”⁴¹

In tracing the roots of the division of labor to a propensity to trade and the natural human faculties of reason and speech, Smith breaks remarkably from his philosophical predecessors. Plato and Aristotle cited differences in naturally-endowed talents as justification for a division of labor within the city. Smith dramatically discounts these supposed differences. In fact, he thinks that rather than effecting the division of labor, differences in ability (or “genius”) between individuals are the *effects of* the division of labor:

The difference between the most dissimilar of characters, between a philosopher and a common street porter, for example, seems to arise not so much from nature, as from habit, custom, and education. When they came into the world, and for the first six or eight years of their existence, they were, perhaps, very much alike, and neither of their parents nor playfellows could perceive any remarkable difference. About that age, or soon after, they come to be employed in very different occupations. The difference of talents comes then to be taken notice of, and widens by degrees, till at last the vanity of the philosopher is willing to acknowledge scarce any resemblance.⁴²

Although Smith agrees with Plato, Aristotle, and Locke that the division of labor is practically and morally expedient, he does not think that this expediency is a function of significant differences of ability between individuals. If anything, the division of labor widens, rather than capitalizes upon, natural differences in aptitudes.

For Adam Smith, then, the value of the division of labor is found primarily in its practical and moral expediency. He also recognizes a natural foundation for specialization in reason and speech which gives rise (among other things) to a propensity

to trade. This differs from his predecessors (though his position resembles that of Locke) in that Smith opts to ground the division of labor in a rough equality of natural capacities rather than substantive differences. Even so, the general tenor of the history of philosophy until Smith is distinctly favorable towards the division of labor. Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Karl Marx, however, offer pointed criticism and as one might expect, they do so (in part) in terms of the effects of the division of labor. Unlike their philosophical predecessors and contemporaries, Rousseau and Marx are willing to recognize and give weight to some of the negative effects of the division of labor.

The division of labor and decrepitude: Rousseau and Marx

Jean-Jacques Rousseau fires some of the first volleys against the division of labor in his *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*. The title suggests the context of Rousseau's comments: he is interested in that which effects inequalities among individuals. Rousseau challenges the Lockean conception of the "state of nature" and the establishment of civil society for the protection of property. On Rousseau's account, the establishment and preservation of property has exacerbated human inequalities and led to the decrepitude of supposedly "civilized" man.

Rousseau recognizes two sorts of inequality: 1) *natural* (or "physical") inequality, such as differences of age, health, and physical and mental acumen; and 2) *moral* (or "political") inequality that rests on conventions surrounding wealth, honor, and power.⁴³ Like his predecessor Locke and his contemporary Smith, Rousseau suggests that inequalities of the former sort are less pronounced than inequalities of the latter sort. Moral inequalities are exacerbated by accumulations of private property.

While Locke claimed that the “chief” and proper end of civil society is the preservation of property, Rousseau cites private property as being the cause of great conflict and inequality among men:

The first man who, having enclosed a piece of ground, to whom it occurred to say *this is mine* and found people sufficiently simple to believe him, was the true founder of civil society. How many crimes, wars, murders, how many miseries and horrors of mankind would have been spared by him who, pulling up the stakes or filling in the ditch, had cried out to his kind: Beware of listening to this impostor....⁴⁴

This staking of one’s territory, this distinction between what is *mine* and what is *thine*, is associated with the division of labor. The division of labor involves one doing one’s *own* task. Divided labor makes workers dependent on one another in order to complete a project or to suffice the needs that cannot be met by one whose narrow occupation is the “whole of his life,” as Smith would later put it. It is the state of *dependency* to which the civilized man or specialized laborer is reduced that Rousseau deplors:

“[T]he moment one man needed the help of another; as soon as it was found to be useful for one to have provisions for two, equality disappeared, property appeared, work became necessary, and the vast forests changed into smiling fields that had to be watered with the sweat of men, and where slavery and misery were soon seen to sprout and grow together with the harvests.”⁴⁵

Indeed, for Rousseau it is the “mutual dependence and the reciprocal needs” of civil society, the ironic result of the pursuit of the “perfectibility” of reason and the individual at the expense of “the social virtues and the other faculties which natural man had received in potentiality” that has led to the “decrepitude of the species.”⁴⁶

Yet Rousseau’s concern with the division of labor is only indirect; it is of concern only insofar as it is related to the privatization of property and (ultimately) the wide inequalities among men. For Karl Marx, however, the Rousseauian concerns with

dependency and the arrested development of man's natural abilities in civilized society are more potently directed at the division of labor itself. Marx suggests that human labor in general ought to assist in the well-rounded development of human capacities and abilities. Labor that fails to do so—in particular, divided or specialized labor—stultifies and degrades man.

Marx recognizes that work is not just something one does. One is, in fact, very much *defined by one's labor*.⁴⁷ Even today, our occupations identify us. As James Murphy poignantly observes, “[T]he question ‘What do you do?’...embodies the insight that our work both reflects and determines our character: we become what we do.”⁴⁸ This insight has its roots in Marx's thought. Although Smith contended that divided labor served, among other things, to improve the “skill, dexterity, and judgment” of the laborer, this is only the brighter side of the issue. On the dark side of divided labor, Marx sees narrowly-developed persons working at narrow tasks. Regarding divisions of labor in manufacture, Marx recognizes that the increased dexterity praised by Smith is relevant only to a particular task; as it affects the whole range of the individual laborer's dexterity, however, manufacture “converts the laborer into a crippled monstrosity, by forcing his detail dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities,” making the laborer “a mere fragment of his own body” and a “mere appendage” of the machine or factory at which he is employed.⁴⁹ Marx, unlike his philosophical predecessors noted here, does not ground the division of labor in differences in physical and mental acumen (as Plato and Aristotle did), neither does he focus on the ways in which the division of labor augments these differences for the better (as Smith did); instead, Marx rails on the manner in which the division of labor “leads to an abortion of [the laborer's] intellectual

and physical faculties.”⁵⁰ In the spirit of Rousseau’s concern about the inequities introduced by a system of private property, Marx calls for the abolition of private property—a goal that can only be attained, he claims, “on condition of an all-round development of individuals.”⁵¹ In short, Marx is opening a door to a different account of the purposes of labor—one in which the proper purpose of labor is the extensive development of an individual’s capacities. Finding that it does not serve this purpose provides Marx with a ground for his intense criticism of the division of labor and its effects on the laborer.

The intention of this and the foregoing sections was to show that some influential accounts in the history of philosophy evaluate the division of labor at least in part in terms of its effects—whether practical or moral. As it should now be apparent that the supposed effects of the division of labor play key roles in its evaluation, I wish to identify a few related but secondary issues that need clarification as they pertain to the assessment of the division of labor.

Issues underlying appeals to the effects of the division of labor

a. The one-to-one correspondence between the technical and social divisions of labor

As an example of the productive advantages gained by the division of labor, Smith offers a story about a pin-maker.⁵² The process of pin-making can be divided, Smith observes, into eighteen distinct operations, each of which may be performed by distinct individuals. If those eighteen distinct operations (a technical division of labor) were performed by eighteen distinct individuals (a social division of labor), there would be a one-to-one correspondence between the technical and social divisions of labor.

Although Smith goes on to claim that he has seen these eighteen operations performed by ten men, with some men working on two or three distinct operations, his example suggests that for purposes of efficiency, the social division of labor may correspond perfectly to the technical division of labor. Smith is not alone in this suggestion. As we saw earlier, Plato held that the “original” principle of the city is the assignment of each individual to “one social service...for which his nature [is] best adapted.” Meddling in others’ tasks contributes to injustice within the city; hence, Plato favors a rigid division of labor that assigns one to the task for which one is well-suited by nature, while allowing for the production of more and better products in an easier fashion.

James Murphy argues that the supposed benefits of reducing the social to the technical division of labor are “misleading.”⁵³ Murphy’s criticism of the division of labor is derived from the Aristotelian notion that the dignity of work for an individual is found in the unity of “conception and execution”—i.e., dignified work involves an individual both creating/designing/planning a project *and* carrying out that project.⁵⁴ The contemporary division of labor in the factory or the office often separates conception from execution: a planner, engineer, or boss conceives of a project while a variety of different workers implements or builds it. The contemporary division of labor often divorces the intellectual and the physical aspects of work in a manner that is degrading to both conceiver and executer. English artist and art critic John Ruskin mourns the result:

We are always in these days endeavoring to separate the two [thought and work]; we want one man to be always thinking, and another to be always working, and we call one a gentleman, and the other an operative; whereas the workman ought often to be thinking, and the thinker ought often to be working, and both should be gentlemen, in the best sense.⁵⁵

Melvin Kohn and Carmi Schooler, in their investigation into the interrelationships of work and personality, assert that

the central fact of occupational life today is not ownership of the means of production; nor is it status, income, or interpersonal relationships on the job. Instead, it is the opportunity to use initiative, thought, and independent judgment in one's work—to direct one's own occupational activities.⁵⁶

Enriching laborers' jobs by allowing them greater control over the conception and execution of their work is essential, they claim, for improving both the nature of occupations and their psychological effects on the laborer. How might this be done?

Murphy's contention is simple: there is no reason to think that there *must* be a one-to-one correspondence between the social and technical divisions of labor. In his eyes, there is "a wide range of equally efficient divisions of labor": a technical division of labor may divide a work process into numerous component tasks, but jobs may combine these tasks in a number of efficient ways while challenging the worker to acquire and exercise a variety of skills.⁵⁷ Murphy accepts the division of labor as "indispensable" in a large, technological society; what he does *not* accept is the notion that the technical and social divisions of labor must correspond such that numerous workers are condemned to narrow, undignified occupations that separate conception from execution. He challenges each of Smith's claims about the practical benefits of specialization: that it increases dexterity; that it saves time; and that it provides incentive for invention. Murphy makes the Marxian point that increased dexterity is attained with regard to only one detailed task. The individual learns his new task quickly, but he is not allowed to move on to other tasks that would further increase his dexterity. Smith's contention that the division of labor saves time in that laborers do not have to switch from one task to another neglects, Murphy claims, the impact that constant labor at a narrow task can have on

worker *morale*. For Murphy, worker morale is the nexus at which the division of labor and its moral ramifications for worker personality meet. Toiling at highly specialized tasks erodes morale, in turn cutting into productivity. “Because the productivity of the social division of labor is inseparable from the question of worker morale,” Murphy argues, “and because the morale of workers is inseparable from the moral significance of work, the social division of labor cannot be reduced to the technical division of tasks.”⁵⁸ Finally, Murphy downplays the incentive that specialized workers have for invention on the job. Murphy claims that workers have little if any incentive to invent easier (and often technological) methods for doing their work, since they run the risk of thereby replacing themselves with machines. Murphy’s criticism here stops short of a further and more important moral question: if Smith is right that specialized workers have an incentive to invent better methods for doing their jobs, *why* do they have such an incentive? Is it boredom? Disdain for one’s work? Oddly enough, Smith himself refers to a (possibly mythical) case in which a boy invented a valve for early steam engines because he would rather have played with his fellows than work at his job!⁵⁹

Additionally, even if one were to assume that the technical and social divisions of labor generally correspond with one another, Murphy notes that an increasing social division of labor gives rise to the “problem of coordination”—which may be taken to include increasing costs of coordination and other externalities.⁶⁰ The expert pin-maker must house only himself and his operation; with 18 workers, however, he may need to hire overseers, rent a larger facility, and pay for effective methods for coordinating workers’ efforts toward the ends of production. The point, simply put, is that an

increasing division of labor does not always serve the goal of productivity without significant attending costs.

The assumption that the social division of labor is reducible to the technical division of labor is central to influential philosophical accounts of the division of labor. But there is reason—if Murphy, Ruskin, and others are correct—to question this assumption. Is a one-to-one correspondence of the technical and social divisions of labor necessary in order to reap the benefits of the division of labor? Does such a strict correspondence actually result in morally deplorable outcomes for worker morale and development? Murphy and others have posed a significant challenge for those who defend the division of labor by appealing only to its positive effects, and they have opened the door to further work on the relationship between the social and technical divisions of labor, whether in terms of its effects on productivity, personality, or the coordination of workers.

b. What (or who) dictates the division of labor?

There is some confusion in the history of philosophy over what (or who) dictates the division of labor. Is the division of labor wholly determined by nature? To what degree can (and should) the division of labor be deliberately, consciously directed? Plato, Aristotle, and Smith (for example) suggest that the division of labor fits individuals' natural aptitudes and/or natural limitations (Plato and Aristotle), or that the division of labor arises from the exercise of natural faculties in ways that generate certain propensities (Smith). Yet the appeal to a natural foundation invites the conclusion that the division of labor itself is some natural, inevitable phenomenon. Is it? Plato and

Aristotle discuss divisions of labor in their treatises on the ideal political order in order that, it seems, conscientious individuals (e.g., philosopher-kings) could realize the ideal. While an individual's abilities (whether natural or acquired) may affect how work is divided and either spontaneously taken up or deliberately assigned, it seems clear that the division of labor—particularly in modern industrial-technological societies—is as much or more a matter of deliberate action as it is a matter of workers' suitability for their occupations.

It is one of Marx's central assumptions that the division of labor, although rooted in natural divisions of labor such as the sexual division of labor in the family, is now something to be appropriated and conscientiously implemented or restrained. The essence of alienated labor is that man's labor appears to him as an activity that is forced upon him, not one that is voluntarily chosen.⁶¹ Marx envisions a situation where work is no longer seen as a biblical curse; instead, labor is to become "free conscious activity."⁶²

The critique of the division of labor—if, in fact, it affects (for better or worse) everything from productivity to the personality and character of the laborer—is effectively pointless if there is little room for conscious intervention. That is not to say, however, that the division of labor is not (or ought not to be) delineated along the lines drawn by individuals' natural aptitudes and limitations. At the very least, the dichotomy between nature and nurture/convention/deliberate action underlies the debate about the division of labor. Murphy suggests that this is a false dichotomy due to its simplicity. Drawing inspiration from Aristotle, he claims that the contemporary division of labor is better understood as the result of the complex interaction of the trichotomy of nature, habit, and reason.⁶³ Whatever the proper schema, the practical and moral expediency of

the division of labor invokes questions about the degree to which nature and deliberate action can (and should) affect how labor is divided.

c. The value of efficiency

‘Efficiency’ refers to the “the optimum means to a given end.”⁶⁴ The supposed efficiency of the division of labor in attaining certain practical and moral ends has long been considered a mark in its favor. Yet it is not clear how far efficiency goes in justifying the division of labor. In fact, the concept of efficiency itself—particularly as it applies to specialization—is not clear. Although it deserves a much more extensive philosophical treatment than that which can be provided here, the notion of efficiency is likely to come up in an examination of the effects of the division of labor—and because of this, I wish to offer some remarks about the subject.

Because ‘efficiency’ is just “the optimum means to a given end,” problems with its application arise when a supposedly efficient system like the division of labor is oriented to serve a variety of different ends (e.g., practical and moral) at the same time. As the ends multiply, so do the standards of efficiency. This makes the very notion of efficiency become blurry. Murphy notes questions from philosopher Brian Fay that highlight the fact that efficiency may be defined in terms of multiple values: “Efficient in terms of what—monetary cost? human labor? suffering? the consumption of natural fuels? time? or what?”⁶⁵ Even more problematic than this conceptual blurriness is the possibility that these various values are incommensurable in certain contexts. The division of labor may at the same time be efficient in one sense (e.g., it is productively efficient), but *inefficient* in another (e.g., it impedes the development of a wide range of

individuals' capacities). In other words, a division of labor may be the optimum means to the end of increased productivity, but it may not be the optimum means to the end of individual actualization. In order to evaluate the division of labor in this context, one must rank the ends to be achieved. Once the appropriate end has been determined, one can evaluate the efficiency of the division of labor as a means to that end. This, of course, is not a question of efficiency itself; indeed, as psychologist Herbert Simon suggests in *Administrative Behavior*, efficiency is a characteristic of the practical means by which ends are achieved, but the selection of ends themselves is a matter for a more "pure" kind of science capable of dealing with human values.⁶⁶ Murphy somewhat echoes Simon's view but in his own terms. For Murphy, efficiency is a function only of the technical division of labor; the social division of labor, however, may be as much a matter of *power* and control as it is a matter of efficiency. Exercising power over workers through the social arrangement of labor, he claims, has at various times enhanced efficiency, left efficiency unaffected, and even hindered efficiency.⁶⁷ Evaluating the exercise of power over individuals is much more a matter of *morality* than economic efficiency.

Even if efficiency of some kind is worthy of pursuit, it is not clear how far it is to be pursued. If productive processes were to be purely efficient—with no waste of resources, time, effort or money—the result might be a perfect but sterile product. Ruskin sees imperfection as a mark of life—where life involves some decay, renewal, and change. Perfectly efficient labor, in Ruskin's eyes, may be a "misunderstanding of the ends of art"—again, the issue of the ends to be pursued efficiently is called into question. For his part, Ruskin claims that it is a "universal law" that "neither architecture

nor any other noble work of man can be good unless it be imperfect,” since the imperfection of a work of art mirrors the imperfect but aspiring humanity of its creator.⁶⁸ Regardless of whether or not Ruskin is correct in his aesthetics, his concern about the results of a perfect efficiency suggest that there may be some limit to the extent that efficiency is an acceptable goal for the division of labor. Apart from Ruskin’s aesthetic concerns, there are also some concerns about whether or not the division of labor actually is productively efficient. Murphy, as we noted in the last section, argues that productive efficiency is lost when the division of labor seriously and negatively affects worker morale. Moghaddam also cites studies suggesting that extensive divisions of labor actually *reduce* rather than increase productivity. In response, he urges “job enrichment” and interdisciplinary cross-fertilization in research in order to remedy the stultification and stagnation that often attend increased specialization.⁶⁹

Recent research suggests that the pursuit of productive efficiency—already shown to pose a potential threat to the attainment of other ends (including moral ones)—stultifies workers’ moral sensibilities themselves. Smith recognizes this threat late in the *Wealth of Nations* when he expresses concern that efficiency-improving dexterity is gained through the division of labor “at the expense of [the laborer’s] intellectual, social, and martial virtues.”⁷⁰ Confined to simple operations, the laborer is “not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment.” The work of Melvin Kohn and Carmi Schooler suggests that Smith’s concern has been borne out to a disturbing degree. Examining alienation in occupations, Kohn and Schooler characterize one kind of alienation as ‘normlessness,’ which they measure on a continuum from one’s belief that one can do

whatever one can “get away with” to holding oneself accountable to moral standards.⁷¹ They found that “working at jobs of little substantive complexity is conducive to normlessness; it is also true that persons who do not take responsibility for their actions are more likely to be recruited into jobs of little substantive complexity.”⁷² In short, the division of labor as a means for attaining productive efficiency can also be a means of inhibiting laborer’s moral sensitivities. If productive efficiency is an advantage of the division of labor (and the *Wealth of Nations* is built on the assumption that it is), one may want to consider afresh the various costs at which this advantage is gained. In this vein, one would do well to consider just *how* efficiency—particularly productive efficiency—is attained. Apart from the technological advances that enhance productivity, efficiency is also attained in part by matching workers’ abilities to the requirements of their jobs. Commenting on Plato’s political philosophy, political scientist Ernest Barker argues that Plato desires the realization of his “doctrine of specialization”—with each worker doing that to which he is naturally adapted—for the sake of efficiency.⁷³ Plato’s view, then, ties efficiency to human capacities—the subject of the next chapter.

The foregoing comments have been offered to flesh out some considerations relevant to the invocation of efficiency as a virtue (or vice) of the division of labor. To summarize briefly: when considering the efficiency of some division of labor, one must be prepared to answer to what ends the division of labor is oriented, the extent to which efficiency can and should be attained toward those ends, and what should be done when inconsistent values are at stake.

d. The game has changed: The division of labor in a service economy

A vastly underexplored issue is the place of the division of labor in a service economy—a significant portion of the total American economy. What are the effects of a division of labor in a service economy? Murphy hits on this point when observing that Aristotle and Smith tend to assume that productive labor involves the production of *things*, not services—an assumption that he claims is motivated by the fact that “most exchangeable commodities in the past were physical objects.”⁷⁴ He remarks that things are different in the “information economy” and an American economy in which most production is the production of services. He passes over this point, however, with little commentary on how the standards for assessing the division of labor may need to adjust when applied to a service economy.

The differences between the effects of worker specialization in an industrial versus an information economy are not necessarily differences in kind, but differences in degree relative to the specific conditions of work in each economy. Although it is typically thought that industrial workers engage in heavily manual labor while those in a service economy work with their minds, workers in both conditions can suffer from various kinds of physical and mental atrophy. Industrial labor might require the use of only a few physical abilities and relatively little thought, but so might computerized labor that requires only the stroke of the fingers and the routine entry of data. Even so, while much has been said about the plight of the industrial laborer, relatively little is being said about the plight of the information laborer. Perhaps this is because the conditions of work in an information economy (e.g., air-conditioned facilities, ergonomic computer designs, etc.) seem more comfortable. But there is some growing criticism about work in

an information society. Consider Moghaddam's concerns about academia: while Smith thought that academics—like philosophers—benefit from a division of intellectual labor, Moghaddam claims that contemporary academia tends to produce only “specialist-experts” who often mark and defend their specialty with a territorial ferocity that keeps them from profitable cross-disciplinary interactions and a truly collegial life.⁷⁵ Moghaddam's salvo signals the opening of a fruitful field of investigation for those interested in considering the place of the division of labor in an information economy.

Concluding remarks on the effects of the division of labor

The division of labor has been defended and criticized in the history of philosophy in terms of its effects. In general, one can appeal to either (or both) *practical* or *moral* effects in order to justify or criticize specialization. In this chapter, we have explored how philosophers from Plato to Marx invoke practical and moral considerations in assessing the division of labor. But there is a deeper issue that has come to the surface here: the practical and moral expediency of the division of labor rests in no small part on the suitability of laborers (in terms of their capacities) to their occupations. Plato, for example, thinks that the practical and moral expediency of the civic division of labor is simply a matter of capitalizing on natural differences of aptitudes between individuals. On the other side, critics like Rousseau and Marx complain that the division of labor confines workers by engaging only a few of their abilities. Our interests, therefore, lead us onward into the issue of human capacities and the role played by the division of labor in their development and exercise.

Notes:

¹ James B. Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor: Aristotelian Themes in Economic Theory* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 19.

² *Ibid.*, 22.

³ Karl Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *Selected Writings*, 2nd ed., ed. David McLellan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 185.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 206.

⁵ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*, ed. Frederic L. Bender (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1988), 61.

⁶ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1094b13.

⁷ Plato, *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 368e.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 369b-c.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 369d-370b.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 370c.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 435b.

¹² *Ibid.*, 433a. At 443c, Socrates calls this the “original principle” and asserts its centrality to a “type of justice.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, 433d.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 434d-435e. Socrates explicitly claims, at 441e, that “each of us also in whom the several parts within him perform his own task—he will be a just man and one who minds his own affair.”

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, 1278b23-24. Later in the *Politics* (Bk. VII, Ch. 2), Aristotle again holds that the happiness of the individual and of the state are the same, that form of government being best in which “every man, whoever he is, can act best and live happily.”

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1097a27-b8.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *Politics*, 1253a26.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 1281a40-b8.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 1253a2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 1252b13.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 1252b28-30.

²² C.C.W. Taylor, “Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Aristotle*, ed. Jonathan Barnes (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 236.

²³ *Ibid.*, 1253a1.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 1253a19-20.

²⁵ John Locke, *The Second Treatise of Government and a Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Tom Crawford (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 2002), §1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, §4 and §7.

²⁷ *Ibid.* The rights to preserve oneself and mankind are found in §11; the right to execute the law of nature is found in §7 and §89; and the right of one’s freedom is recognized in §17.

²⁸ A. John Simmons, *The Lockean Theory of Rights* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 85.

²⁹ Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, §132 and §135. Locke, focusing on the “supreme power” encased in the legislative body in civil society, claims that governmental power is simply “the joint power of every member of the society given up to that person, or assembly, which is legislator” as well as that entity assigned to execute its laws.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, §123 and §127.

³¹ *Ibid.*, §123-124.

³² *Ibid.*, §6.

³³ *Ibid.*, §143-144.

³⁴ Plato’s account of the well-ordered city differs importantly from Locke’s account of legitimate political power in that Plato prefers to minimize the place of private property within the city: “That city, then, is best ordered in which the greatest number use the expression ‘mine’ and ‘not mine’ of the same things in the same way” (462c).

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- ³⁵ Adam Smith, *An Inquiry Into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. Edwin Cannan (New York: Random House, 1937), 3.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5. According to Smith: “The division of labour, however, so far as it can be introduced, occasions, in every art, a proportional increase of the productive powers of labour.”
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7-9.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.
- ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 13.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 423. Smith argues that selfish individual aggrandizement actually increases social wealth, especially since the latter is (for Smith) just the sum of individuals’ increases in capital. Thus every individual is “led by an invisible hand to promote an end [social welfare] which was no part of his intention.”
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 15-16.
- ⁴³ Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin and the Foundations of Inequality Among Men*, in *The First and Second Discourses and Essay on the Origin of Languages*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (New York: Harper and Row, 1986), 131:2.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 164:1.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 171:19.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 162:50-51 and 171:18.
- ⁴⁷ Marx, *The German Ideology*, 177. Marx writes: “As individuals express their life, so they are. What they are, therefore, coincides with their production, both with *what* they produce and with *how* they produce.”
- ⁴⁸ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 1.
- ⁴⁹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, in *Selected Writings*, 514-15. [Note that these claims echo a position expressed in the *Manifesto*, quoted earlier in this chapter.]
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, “On James Mill”, *Selected Writings*, 128.
- ⁵¹ *Ibid.*, *German Ideology*, 207.
- ⁵² Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 4-5.
- ⁵³ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 19.
- ⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.
- ⁵⁵ John Ruskin, *Sea Stories*, vol. 2, *The Stones of Venice* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co, 1907), Ch. VI, §XXI.
- ⁵⁶ Melvin Kohn and Carmi Schooler, *Work and Personality: An Inquiry Into the Impact of Social Stratification* (Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation, 1983), 81.
- ⁵⁷ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 20.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 150.
- ⁵⁹ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 9.
- ⁶⁰ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 163.
- ⁶¹ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in *Selected Writings*, 85-95. See also *German Ideology*, in *Selected Writings*, 185-86.
- ⁶² *Ibid.*, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, 90.
- ⁶³ See the Epilogue in Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*.
- ⁶⁴ George Ritzer, *The McDonalozation of Society*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: Pine Forge Press, 2008), 57.
- ⁶⁵ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor.*, 37-8. Fay’s original comment appears in *Social Theory and Political Practice* (London: George Allan and Unwin, 1975), 50.
- ⁶⁶ Herbert Simon, *Administrative Behavior* (New York: Macmillan, 1947).
- ⁶⁷ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 23.
- ⁶⁸ Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, Ch. VI, §XXIV-XXVI.
- ⁶⁹ Moghaddam, *The Specialized Society*, 69-79 and 131-33.
- ⁷⁰ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 734-736.
- ⁷¹ Kohn and Schooler, *Work and Personality*, 87.
- ⁷² *Ibid.*, 95-6.
- ⁷³ Ernest Barker, *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1959), 105.
- ⁷⁴ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 110-12.

⁷⁵ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 10: “In the progress of society, philosophy or speculation becomes, like every other employment, the principal or sole trade and occupation of a particular class of citizens. Like every other employment too, it is subdivided into a great number of different branches, each of which affords occupation to a peculiar tribe or class of philosophers; and this subdivision of employment in philosophy, as well as in every other business, improves dexterity and saves time. Each individual becomes more expert in his own peculiar branch, more work is done upon the whole, and the quantity of science is considerably increased by it.” For Moghaddam’s full account of specialization’s effects on academia, see *The Specialized Society*, Ch. 3.

Chapter 3: Everyone Doing the Task for which One is Suited: Human Capacities and the Division of Labor

In the previous chapter, I looked at how the effects of the division of labor—whether actual or only supposed—influence its philosophical assessment. In general, these effects can be divided into two kinds: 1) *practical* (e.g., efficiency or productivity); and 2) *moral* (e.g., justice or “universal opulence”). Although an appeal to the effects of the division of labor is often a starting point for its evaluation, another—and more fundamental—matter quickly comes to the fore: the issue of human abilities. Gary Dessler, an expert in the field of human resource management, suggests that worker performance is a function of the product of the worker’s *ability* and motivation.¹ Dessler’s insight is simple: a well-performing worker is one who, among other things, makes effective use of one’s relevant abilities. By extension, a well-performing division of labor—involving the collective efforts of numerous workers—may be seen as a function of its effective use of workers’ abilities.

Dessler intends his comments for managers seeking to maximize worker performance in the factory or office; however, philosophical evaluations of the division of labor also rest on accounts of human capacities.² Indeed, underlying the philosophical accounts reviewed in the last chapter—those of Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Rousseau, Smith, and Marx—are notions of human nature that focus on human abilities and the degree to which they are engaged by some division of labor. Some philosophers have praised the division of labor as an effective use of human abilities. John Stuart Mill, noting the contributions of 19th-century political economist Charles Babbage, praises the division of labor within a tradition that can be traced through Adam Smith back to Plato when he

claims that the “greatest advantage of the minute division of labor” is “the more economical distribution of labor, by classing the work-people according to their capacity.”³ Other philosophers and commentators, however, have held that such “economical” distributions of labor are achieved at the cost of a stultified development of worker abilities. Socialist critic Harry Braverman criticizes the division of labor in the tradition of Ruskin, Marx, and Rousseau when he asserts that “while the subdivision of society [through the division of labor] may enhance the individual and the species, the subdivision of the individual, when carried on without regard to human capabilities and needs, is a crime against the person and against humanity.”⁴ Despite the confident assertions of Mill and Braverman, the issue of human capacities cannot be passed over without philosophical pause. Is the division of labor advantageous as a “more economical distribution of labor,” or is it carried on with an almost criminal disregard of human capabilities? Settling the score between Mill, Braverman, and the traditions they represent depends on achieving greater clarity about the issue of human capacities and their place in the evaluative process. To that end, a key component of the framework that I am developing is the theme of human abilities—a theme on which there can be numerous variations.

In this chapter, I explore four key aspects of the issue of human capacities. The hope is that philosophers and other commentators can clarify their assumptions about human capacities by addressing these aspects. These four aspects—treated respectively in the following four sections of this chapter—are as follows:

1. *Kinds of capacities*: Human capacities can be classified according to their various kinds. I will look at two distinctions in kind: a) between *physical* and *intellectual* (or *mental*) capacities; and b) between *general* and *specific* capacities. How does the

division of labor effectively use—or abuse—a physical capacity like arm strength or a mental capacity like attentiveness? How does the division of labor exercise—or wither—general capacities like physical coordination, or specific capacities like dexterity in the intricate details of diamond cutting? Answers to questions such as these shape one’s evaluation of the division of labor.

2. *The source of capacities:* Some capacities seem to be inherent, while others are acquired with effort. Do workers’ natural abilities determine the division of labor, or can workers be trained to perform specific jobs? The *malleability* of human capacities is a central issue here. In what sense does human nature, in terms of human abilities, provide a standard for implementing or assessing the division of labor? Various answers to these questions yield a variety of evaluations of divided labor.
3. *The distribution of capacities:* A division of labor seems pragmatic if individuals—or classes of individuals—have limited or different abilities relative to the satisfaction of their needs. Various needs are met through the mutual interdependence of individuals or classes. But just how differently-abled are individuals? What is one to make of such notions as “all men are created equal” or the preference for individual self-sufficiency over dependency? Matters of difference and equality with respect to capacities crucially affect evaluations of the division of labor.
4. *Capacities and personality/personal development:* We are often defined by the ways in which we use our abilities: “He is an excellent basketball player” or “She is an amazing artist—she can draw such intricate designs!” The effects of work and specialization on personality and personal development—in short, the effects of work upon the worker—were notable effects of the division of labor in the last chapter. Here, I will further explore the connection between work, personal development, and the evaluation of the division of labor in terms of its effects on human abilities.

In the final section of the chapter, I suggest that the issue of human capacities stands at the crux of the issues of the effects of the division of labor and the relationship of the individual to others. This chapter is pivotal in my overall project; in some sense, the success (or failure) of the division of labor, as well as the account one gives of the proper relationship of the individual to others, hinges on the positions one takes regarding human capacities.

The primary philosophers noted earlier will be central to the exploration of the topic of human capacities; however, their work will be supplemented by a number of commentators and contemporary viewpoints in order to stress the importance and contentiousness of these issues. To that end, not every philosophical viewpoint will be reviewed; a few exemplary positions must suffice. This is a chapter that requires some philosophical anthropology insofar as it attempts to identify key aspects of human nature—particularly human capacities—that are relevant to the evaluation of the division of labor.

What are one's capacities? Issues of kind

If an account of human capacities is to play a role in assessing the division of labor, it should provide an inventory of at least some of the relevant capacities that are part of the assessment. Such inventories, however, are not always provided. As a move toward providing such an inventory, I begin by observing that human capabilities can be divided into various kinds. One important classification, central to evaluations of the division of labor, recognizes *physical* and *intellectual* kinds of capacities.

Labor engages the laborer's body and mind to various degrees. The laborer might use his hands to fit parts together, to manipulate tools or machinery, or to carry materials. He might use his mind to plan a project, to remember the order of assembly, or to solve a problem. Researchers Norman G. Peterson and David A. Bownas have recently summarized the work of various researchers in order to develop a taxonomy of thirty-one human physical and cognitive abilities.⁵ Physical proficiencies include finger and hand dexterity, speed of limb movement, reaction time, stamina, and muscular strength. Cognitive abilities include verbal comprehension, perceptual speed, and memory.

Although they have generally not provided such explicit taxonomies, it is clear that philosophers have an inkling of the kinds of human abilities at work in their assessments of the division of labor. Adam Smith, for example, cites both physical and intellectual advantages of the division of labor. Consider his bold assertion that the division of labor can be credited with the "greater part" of the improvement in human "skill, dexterity and judgment."⁶ By 'dexterity,' Smith usually has in mind certain *physical* abilities. He offers the example of a nail-maker who divides up the task of nail-making into various component operations such as heating the iron, forging the head of the nail, and so on. The dexterity of workers is improved by repeating the small task to which each is assigned as his "sole business."⁷ By 'judgment,' Smith has in mind certain *intellectual* abilities. Smith contends that worker inventiveness, like physical dexterity, is enhanced by the worker's focus on a simple operation. This, he supposes, is the natural consequence of "the whole of every man's attention"—an intellectual capacity—being "directed towards some one very simple object."⁸ The physical and intellectual improvements afforded by the division of labor allow Smith to liken (some might say

“degrade”) the status of philosophy to that of other trades and businesses. Although philosophers are engaged in the “peculiar [i.e., unique or distinct] trade” of “observing every thing” and speculating upon it (another intellectual activity), Smith claims that philosophy is like “every other business” in that the intellectual work of philosophy progresses by each philosopher becoming “more expert in his own peculiar branch [of philosophy],” so that “more work is done upon the whole, and the quality of science [i.e., philosophy] is considerably increased” by its own intellectual division of labor.⁹ Just as physical dexterity is improved by the division of labor in the nail-making operation, so intellectual judgment is sharpened by the division of labor in philosophy—in fact, Smith even calls it intellectual “dexterity.”

Smith’s positive evaluation of the division of labor in Book I of *The Wealth of Nations* rests on his conviction that specialization enhances both the physical and the intellectual capacities of the workman. But this conviction is not thoroughgoing. Late in *The Wealth of Nations*, Smith recognizes that the division of labor confines the development of laborers’ other capabilities, particularly intellectual ones. Observing that “the understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed by their ordinary employments,” Smith worries that the man whose “whole life is spent in performing a few simple employments” will “become as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.”¹⁰ Although Smith had earlier claimed that the division of labor facilitated judgment, he now claims that under the division of labor the worker may suffer from such “torpor” of mind that he is rendered “not only incapable of relishing or bearing a part in any rational conversation, but of conceiving any generous, noble, or tender sentiment, and consequently of forming any just judgment concerning many even

of the ordinary duties of private life.” Smith extends his concern to the effects of the division of labor upon physical and intellectual capacities, suggesting that dexterity comes at a high cost to both:

It [one’s employment under the division of labor] corrupts even the activity of his body, and renders him incapable of exerting his strength with vigour and perseverance, in any other employment. . . . His dexterity at his own particular trade seems, in this manner, to be acquired at the expense of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues.

Smith’s response to this problem is brief and simple: government must take pains to educate the laboring masses and make up what is lost under the division of labor.

Although Smith prefers to keep the division of labor while using education to remedy its stultifying effects, concerns over these stultifying effects have also led to outright criticism of the division of labor. Marx, in a passage representative of his extensive criticism, complains that the division of labor requires “an abortion of [the worker’s] intellectual and physical capacities.”¹¹ More recently, in a paper entitled “Meaningful Work,” philosopher Adina Schwartz adopts the view that contemporary industrial labor threatens personal autonomy, which she defines as the ability for “rationally framing, pursuing, and adjusting one’s own plans.”¹² Modern industrial work hampers “intellectual flexibility” and “purposeful striving,” Schwartz claims, by dictating that workers perform narrow, repetitive tasks over which they have little intellectual and physical control.¹³ Autonomy-respecting work, however, *integrates* the worker’s intellectual and physical efforts by allowing for the rational governance of his own activities.¹⁴

Schwartz's advocacy of *integrating* physical and intellectual activities through autonomous action suggests that they can be *separated* under the division of labor. Indeed, Smith's account of the "business" of philosophy exploits this separability: the division of labor allows philosophers to ply their trade more effectively by freeing their intellectual efforts from an assortment of physical labors. Similarly, manual laborers cannot be encumbered with thoughts about the planning of their work if they are to be maximally efficient. In fact, the separation of intellectual from physical work is a key feature of more extensive divisions of labor. Intellectual and physical capacities are most efficiently engaged, it is thought, when they are directed toward their specific ends without other distractions. The "divorce of conception from execution," as James Murphy calls it, is not only characteristic of the contemporary division of labor, but it is also a "profound obstacle to human flourishing."¹⁵ Not only are work processes being divided into their conception and execution components, but workers themselves are assigned to one or the other of these components. The primary task of some workers is to think (e.g., to invent, plan, or organize), while others execute the resulting designs and plans. Hierarchical divisions of labor enter when managers, planners, and bosses rule over those who execute the work. Murphy contends that truly meaningful work unifies conception and execution *in the worker and his activities*—a position not all that dissimilar to Schwartz's appeal for integrated, autonomy-respecting work. Murphy suggests that the principles of classical political economy, descending primarily from Smith, raise a pressing "moral question" about human abilities: "[D]oes productive efficiency require the divorce of conception from execution?"¹⁶ Smith affirms that it does, but not without a few reservations. Murphy's question stands as an invitation to

further dialogue about the division of labor and its use of—and effect on—human capacities.

Accounts of the division of labor need to be clear, among other things, about just *what* human capacities are exercised (or not) by specialized laborers. One related issue (that we have just reviewed) is the relationship between the division of labor and the worker's physical and intellectual capacities. A second but related issue deals with the scope of a capacity. Human abilities, whether physical or intellectual, can also be classified according to their generality or specificity. One might possess a general physical coordination, but one may not be able to perform the more specific feat of successfully striking a golf ball hundreds of yards down a fairway. Peterson and Bownas, in their taxonomies of human abilities, distinguish between specific and general abilities.¹⁷ Although their remarks about this kind of classification are brief, their assumptions about the trainability of these different kinds of abilities raise important questions. They characterize specific abilities as those typically acquired by training and experience; general abilities are considered more “basic” and often “untrainable.” But questions about their characterizations remain. Is the acquisition of more specific abilities dependent upon the possession of more basic general abilities? What is the relationship between specific and general abilities? These questions also apply to philosophers and other commentators who, in their justifications or criticisms of the division of labor, appeal to various human capacities—some general, others quite specific. Let us consider a few examples in which one's account of human capacities—as either general or specific abilities—can affect one's attitude toward the division of labor.

Historian Jeffrey Sklansky, in tracing the explosive development of the American economy from 1820-1920, characterizes the American political economy of the time as a “science of human nature and society” that sought to provide a new basis for social order in an age of revolutions against previous social orders.¹⁸ According to Sklansky, American political economy was built on a very general conception of human nature. Human nature, it was thought, is comprised of two basic capacities: a *rational will* and the ability for *productive labor*. This very general account fits nicely into the above-mentioned distinction between intellectual and physical capacities. In fact, Sklansky calls these two general capacities the “mental and material sides of human nature,” respectively.¹⁹ The increasing divisions of industrial labor in America from 1820-1920 can be traced, Sklansky suggests, to these two basic capacities and the application of one (rational will) to the other (productive labor). In fact, American political economists of the time could defend industrialization and specialization by claiming that these were natural outgrowths of the “mental and material sides of human nature.” But how solid is this defense?

A general capacity—like the capacity for productive labor—is such that it can be exercised in a variety of particular ways. But this does *not* guarantee that a particular exercise of that capacity is practically—or better yet, morally—justified. Simply put: the fact that one *can* do something does not entail that one *should* do that. For example, the fact that I can grasp things with my hands does not justify my use of that capacity in order to strangle someone. Looked at from another angle, one may reasonably ask whether or not some general capacity (or set of capacities) might be better exercised in ways alternative to the manner in question. So although the industrial division of labor

may be a particular instance of an application of the rational will to productive labor, there may be other (and perhaps better) ways in which the capacity for productive labor can be rationally ordered and engaged. Instead of assigning each laborer a highly specific and repetitive task, the laborer could be trained for a number of different tasks and allowed to rotate through those tasks during the workday. There is nothing about the general capacities for rational willing and productive labor that dictate the character of one specific work process or division of labor. As it stands, it seems clear that the rational will could order productive labor in any number of ways depending upon the ends sought, the resources available, the content of the work, and so on. Supposing Sklansky's account of the foundations of American political and economic thought from 1820-1920 is correct, American political economists erred if they judged the industrial order of their day to be the single inevitable outcome of the interplay of two very general features of human nature.

Confusion about the difference between general and specific abilities creates problems for Smith's account of the division of labor as well. Recall, for example, his claim that the division of labor improves worker dexterity—a key claim in support of his advocacy of the division of labor. Furthermore, recall his concern at the end of *The Wealth of Nations* for the worker whose exposure to the conditions of divided labor weakens, among other things, those abilities not exercised in his specific occupation. Is Smith guilty of self-contradiction in these passages? Not exactly (though I will revisit this question in the latter part of Chapter 4); but Smith's rhetoric could benefit from clarification along the lines of a distinction between general and specific abilities. What Smith does not seem to realize fully is that the dexterous advantages provided by the

division of labor amount only to dexterity in a specific, detailed operation—not dexterity generally, or even dexterity in a variety of activities. Smith seems to see this late in *The Wealth of Nations* when he observes that the worker’s “dexterity at his own *particular trade*” (emphasis added) appears to be acquired “at the expense of his intellectual, social, and martial virtues.” The worker gains dexterity in a specific employment while sacrificing dexterity in other activities, such as soldiering. Is an improvement in detail dexterity a laudable feature of the division of labor? It appears so for Smith; Marx, on the other hand, finds this deplorable. Marx’s criticism that the division of labor makes the laborer a “crippled monstrosity” rests on the notion—seemingly expressive of Smith’s view late in *The Wealth of Nations*—that the division of labor forces “detail dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities.”²⁰ But for Marx, this is not a problem that can be resolved simply by education as Smith suggests. Instead, it is a fatal flaw of capitalist industrial production. Harry Braverman argues that the conversion of the worker into the “lifelong detail worker” not only restricts the worker’s development of his capacities, but in so doing the division of labor reduces workers for the sake of control and management—i.e., allowing for that divorce of conception from execution (instituted in the division between management and workers) that Murphy and Schwartz fear.²¹ By claiming that the dexterity developed by the division of labor is merely a specific dexterity (rather than dexterity generally), critics like Marx and Braverman gain a footing for their position that the increasing division of labor is to be rejected for restricting the development of a broader range of human capacities.

The examples of Sklansky, Smith, and Marx show that the characterization of capacities as either general or specific can have profound implications on one’s account

of the division of labor. The issues of general and specific capabilities, along with that of physical and intellectual capabilities, have been identified here as key components of an answer to the question, “What *are* our capacities?” Clarity about these issues can lend a degree of clarity to the debate about the division of labor as a whole. In the next section, I explore another issue about human capacities—their origin—and the various ways that this issue influences one’s evaluation of the division of labor.

What is the source of one’s capacities? Issues of nature and training

An account of the *source* of human capacities can play an important role in one’s evaluation of the division of labor. Just as capacities can be classified as physical/intellectual or general/specific, they also can be classified as *inherent* or *acquired*—depending upon whether one thinks the capacity in question is a ‘natural’ ability (an ‘inherent’ capacity—what I will call a ‘talent’) or gained through training (an ‘acquired’ capacity—what I will call a ‘skill’). Furthermore, the classification of capacities under one or the other of these headings does not fully determine one’s evaluation of the division of labor—e.g., an appeal to natural abilities may be used to justify or criticize the division of labor. In this section, I will explore the ramifications of positions taken on the source of human capacities, including the issue of the rigidity or malleability of human nature in defining—or being defined by—the division of labor.

The history of philosophy is rife with appeals to a “state of nature” or a natural condition of man, especially in accounts of the origin of the state or civil society. Similar appeals can be found in some accounts of the division of labor. One motivation for such appeals is that by tracing some feature of human life (e.g., the division of labor) to its

foundation in human nature, one effectively insulates that feature from further criticism. If an institution is a natural outgrowth of some propensity in human nature, it is as inevitable as the growth of the hair on one's head. This, in fact, was the move made by many American political economists, according to Sklansky. If the division of labor is inevitable, what is the point of criticizing it? It cannot be helped; it is a fact of the matter. Sociologist Emile Durkheim also attributes this move to economists who assert that the division of labor is necessary because it is what Durkheim calls "the supreme law of human societies and the condition of their progress."²² Durkheim himself agrees with this view and claims that the division of labor has a biological foundation. It originates at "the coming of life into the world"—which, for humans, is the result of a sexual division of labor between male and female in the reproductive process—and it is *not* the result of the "intelligence and will of men."²³

In the last chapter, we saw that Plato grounds the city's division of labor (in Book II of the *Republic*) in individuals' natural endowments. In the first place, Socrates identifies some basic human needs—such as food, housing, and raiment—and determines that these are most effectively met by each worker engaging in one task only, with one cultivating food, another building housing, and a third weaving raiment. But why is this division of labor so effective at meeting these needs? What justifies this division of labor? The answer strikes Socrates suddenly: "[I]t occurs to me myself that, to begin with, our several natures are not all alike but different. One man is naturally fitted for one task, and another for another."²⁴ This "natural fitness" of the worker to his work is the justification for Plato's division of labor within the city. This is the city's "original principle," the principle that "each one man must perform one social service in the state

for which his nature [is] best adapted.”²⁵ From this principle springs not only the practical benefits of the division of labor—improvements in the quantity and quality of output and the ease of work²⁶—but the moral virtue of *justice*: the just city is one in which “each perform[s] his one task as one man and [is] not a versatile busybody.”²⁷ For Plato, then, the practical and moral justification of the division of labor rests squarely on the notion that the division of labor fits workers’ natural abilities.

Smith briefly explores the issue of the origin of the division of labor in Book I, Chapter II of *The Wealth of Nations*. Claiming—as Durkheim would later claim—that the division of labor is “not originally the effect of any human wisdom,” Smith instead sees it as the “necessary, though very slow and gradual, consequence of a certain propensity in human nature...the propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another.”²⁸ Although Smith locates this propensity in “human nature,” he is not willing to identify it as one of the “original principles in human nature, of which no further account can be given.” Nevertheless, Smith’s position is only one step away from this: the propensity to truck, barter and exchange is likely the “necessary consequence” of the natural abilities of “reason and speech.” Thus Smith, like Plato, justifies the division of labor by tracing its origins to certain natural capacities.

There is a noteworthy difference, however, between the accounts of Plato and Smith with respect to the relationship between capacities and the division of labor. James Murphy points out this difference, calling it a question of “direction of causation.”²⁹ For Plato, natural endowments of ability help *determine* the division of labor; for Smith, however, the different abilities correlated with different occupations are very much the *effects* of the division of labor. Smith seems willing to claim that individuals *acquire*

many, if not most, of the skills necessary to work in specialized occupations. Apart from its supposed origin in the natural faculties of reason and speech, the division of labor (according to Smith) “encourages every man to apply himself to a particular occupation, and to cultivate and bring to perfection whatever talent or genius he may possess for that particular species of business.”³⁰ A worker’s *trainability* is indispensable for Smith; given the right education and the development of the right habits, a man may become almost anything, from an exceptional philosopher to an ordinary street porter.

A new question presents itself here: how *malleable* is human nature to the requirements of the division of labor? For Plato, human nature—in terms of natural human abilities—is a determining factor in the division of labor. Natural human abilities provide an outline for a certain social division of labor. Smith, however, seems to discount the role of natural abilities, claiming only that very general capacities for reason and speech give rise to a propensity for truck, barter and exchange. In an exchange economy, people take up different tasks and exchange products with one another. As this market of exchange expands, the division of labor becomes increasingly minute. The development of the division of labor advances the acquisition and development of new abilities by the workers. Smith’s emphasis on adaptability to specific tasks lessens the role that natural abilities play in shaping a certain division of labor. The modern tendency (inherited from Smith and others) to see human nature as extensively—if not entirely—malleable through education, training, and habit was a serious concern for Jean-Jacques Rousseau. In Rousseau’s eyes, civilization—including the division of labor—had a corrupting influence on man by spoiling or stifling his naturally endowed abilities and instincts.

If human nature is too malleable, then according to Rousseau it loses one of its crucial functions: standing as a limit to human political and social possibility. If man is entirely adaptable to civil institutions, then human nature provides no ground from which such institutions may be attacked. Alan Ryan, commenting on the role of human nature in Rousseau's philosophy, puts Rousseau's concern nicely: "Unless something substantial, basic and important survives the process of socialization, and remains intact behind the social appearances, we are unable to say anything very profound about how well or how ill social arrangements satisfy human needs and aspirations."³¹ Rousseau holds that human nature provides us with something substantial: a kernel of truths about human needs and abilities that stands as a testimony against the corrupting influence of much of civil society. This is not to say that Rousseau does not see a value for education; *Emile*, for example, is a work on education dedicated to identifying and cultivating human nature. He advocates becoming "nature's pupil," using what nature teaches as a guide for the education provided by men and "things" (i.e., the education provided by experience).³²

What does nature, for Rousseau, have to teach us about the division of labor? In the *Discourse on Inequality*, as we saw in the last chapter, Rousseau locates the origin of the division of labor in the enclosure of property—a move that takes man out of the natural state in which he meets his needs through his own efforts. As soon as individuals begin to distinguish "mine" from "thine," they provincialize not only land but labor. My land is capable of growing wheat, but yours is filled with herds of animals. I can provide you with grains; you can provide me with skins and meats. I become a farmer; you become a herdsman. We become dependent upon one another for the satisfaction of

certain needs, and it is this dependency that Rousseau finds so deplorable about the division of labor. Man is essentially independent in his natural state; the delegation of property and labor, however, reduces man to a state of dependency upon others that employs relatively few capacities—leaving his human nature and potential unfulfilled.

In spite of Rousseau's insistence upon human nature as a core that stands as a test of the propriety of any civil institution, the malleability of human nature has also been a weapon against the division of labor in the hands of some critics. Fathali Moghaddam, for example, thinks that cross-cultural comparisons of skill sets, social structures, and cultural values show our malleability and, as a consequence, the different individuals we can become.³³ For Moghaddam, the variety of human abilities stands as a witness against highly specialized occupations that confine an individual's development to the use of just a few abilities. Moghaddam's criticism is not novel; Karl Marx's fascination with anthropological studies, especially in his later years, provided him with various cross-cultural data that he used to attack the capitalist division of labor. Anthropologist Maurice Bloch suggests that Marx used discoveries in anthropology for both *historical* and *rhetorical* purposes.³⁴ Marx looked to anthropological history in order to show that there is nothing historically inevitable about labor; instead, particular modes of production arise from the particular historical development of the relations of production. Insofar as anthropology provided examples of societies in which capitalist modes of production did not exist in lieu of other successful modes for meeting human needs, Marx thought that this showed that capitalism is but a particular mode of production dependent upon unique social circumstances—as such, it is not an inevitable, unalterable end of human development. The existence and success of non-capitalist modes of production—

whether in Marx's day or in pre-capitalist historical eras—gave Marx the rhetorical fodder he needed to attack the capitalist division of labor.

In this exploration of the role that an account of the source of human capacities can play in one's evaluation of the division of labor, we have seen that one might appeal: 1) to human nature as a determining factor of the division of labor (Plato); 2) to the relative malleability of human nature and its extensive development as a laudable advantage of the division of labor (Smith); 3) to the place that a core human nature has in the criticism of the division of labor (Rousseau); or 4) to the view that the malleability of human nature shows that there are viable alternatives to particularly exploitative divisions of labor (Marx). This does not exhaust all possibilities; however, the point here has been to examine some ways in which accounts of the source of human capacities may affect evaluations of the division of labor in order to establish the importance of such accounts. Let us now turn to a new issue: how does the distribution of human capacities affect the assessment of the division of labor?

What is the distribution of capacities among individuals? Issues of class and equality

One of the thorniest issues to disentangle in an account of human capacities is their distribution among individuals. This is because distribution involves two related issues: 1) *to whom* the capacities are distributed; and 2) the *equality* of the distribution among individuals. Before exploring these topics, it must be noted that by 'distribution' I do not wish to imply that someone consciously distributes human abilities. I simply wish to refer to the instantiation of abilities in the members of a population.

Plato's account of the distribution of capacities among the citizenry is intriguing in that he initially suggests that "each man" is naturally fitted for his particular occupation; men can also be classified, however, in three general classes within the just city—workers, soldiers, and guardians—according to their basic abilities. This classification suits Plato's tripartite division of the soul nicely, such that he can argue for an analogical relationship between the just city and the just man.³⁵ Indeed, some classification of individuals according to ability or social status is critical to numerous accounts of society: an individual may be classed as free or bond, craftsman or apprentice, manager or laborer, bourgeois or proletarian, and so on.

Classification according to ability presents some challenges for accounts of the division of labor. For one thing, classification rarely values all classes equally—allowing for problematic forms of hierarchical classification. Karl Popper criticizes Plato's account as reducible to the hierarchical dominance of ruler over ruled, of the wise over the ignorant.³⁶ The classifications noted at the end of the last paragraph connote hierarchical rankings of individuals that allow for the domination of members of the lower classes by members of the higher. Awareness of this connotation motivates much of sociologist Andrew Sayer and economic geographer Richard Walker's *The New Social Economy: Reworking the Division of Labor*. In this work, Sayer and Walker advocate a rethinking of, and "refamiliarization" with, the division of labor by focusing on its role in various forms of social power and domination.³⁷ The division of labor, they claim, has exacerbated or even created distinctions of class, gender, and other forms of social domination.³⁸ The idea behind their intriguing claim is that the technical division of labor all-too-often invites a social division of labor that consistently relegates members of

certain social groups (classes, races, genders, etc.) to specific—and usually inferior—occupations, allowing for their domination by other social groups.

A second challenge to accounts that connect ability classifications to the division of labor is the multiplication of occupations under an extensive division of labor. Although Plato claims that the city initially only has “four or five” members, with each meeting one of the city’s basic necessities, Glaucon’s insistence that various comforts and conveniences be provided to the citizens requires an expansion of the city’s division of labor to include such occupations as hunter, poet, doctor, and various manufacturers of luxuries.³⁹ Socrates diagnoses this as a “fevered” city, with much activity that requires effective management; nonetheless, it more closely represents the division of labor in the contemporary economy with its numerous occupations. The multiplication of occupations poses a challenge to Plato’s initial account of the civic division of labor because it is not clear just how specifically individuals are naturally fitted to their respective occupations under a more extensive division of labor. The increasing proliferation of occupations seems less likely to fall neatly under Plato’s tripartite division of classes suited to the basic needs of the city. The working class, in particular, admits persons of a wide variety of talents and skills—such a variety, in fact, that it suggests that the class of ‘workers’ is defined by little more than its name and the social position of its members, not the distribution of capacities among the classes. For example, certain jobs assigned to the workers may require the exceptional degree of intellectual or physical abilities—or both—that is also typically found in members of the soldier or guardian classes. Furthermore, if the members of the working class possess general abilities for certain kinds of work, it would be difficult to justify their assignment

to a particular job, since the worker's general capacities could be developed for application to work of various kinds. A rigid division of labor, where "each one man must perform one social service in the state for which his nature [is] best adapted," seems unduly restrictive of the individual and the development of his abilities.

Plato's classification of individuals according to ability has not always met with acceptance. In fact, the modern tendency is to consider each individual's unique talents and abilities when attempting to match them to a job. Murphy thinks this indicates an important departure from traditional divisions of labor: whereas traditional societies have based the social division of labor on such classifications as gender, age, and race, modern societies base the social division of labor "increasingly on natural differences between individuals."⁴⁰ On one hand, this shift seems to epitomize the modern emphasis on efficiency. Highly efficient work matches the requirements of a job with the specific abilities of a specific worker, minimizing waste by minimizing the mismatch between the worker and his work. Yet a problem remains. Breaking down classes in order to select individuals for their specific abilities does not remove the problem of hierarchy and domination. In fact, by not classifying workers according to abilities, managers effectively engage in what I call a "fine-grained" form of discrimination. It is not efficient to discriminate against whole classes of people on the presumption that each cannot perform a given task; but it *is* efficient to select one individual over another on the basis of the suitability of one's capacities to job requirements.

The traditional response to discrimination—whether against individuals or classes—has been a push for *equality*. The central idea of the *Declaration of*

Independence—that “all men are created equal”—drives the attack on rigid hierarchies and divisions of labor. But just how equal are we?

According to psychologist David Wechsler, in his work entitled *The Range of Human Capacities*, the notion that all are created equal—at least in regards to their capacities—is “in disrepute.”⁴¹ Reasons for this disrepute include the rather obvious differences of physical and mental ability between individuals. Of course, some of these differences are the effects of differences in training, availability of opportunities, and so on. Even so, it is not long after birth that young children begin to exhibit degrees of ability related to eyesight, hearing, physical size and strength, and memory. Even if individuals are created (i.e., born into the world) roughly equal, they quickly differentiate in ways that may have implications for the division of labor.

Durkheim suggests that the “first condition” of the division of labor is the “diversity of natures” among individuals, beginning with the biologically-based sexual division of labor.⁴² But ‘diversity of natures’ deserves some unpacking. Just how diverse are individuals with respect to their natures? Is the diversity of natures extensive enough to justify a complex division of labor? Or are the variations slight enough to allow for individuals to develop a wide variety of abilities such that a rigid and highly specific division of labor would prove confining? Plato builds the city at least in part on substantive differences between natural kinds of individuals: one is naturally well-suited to the tasks of farming; another to the (quite different) tasks of weaving; a third to the (still quite different) tasks of construction. Plato’s account has some appeal when considering only a handful of occupations within the state; however, as we have seen above, Plato’s account faces difficulty when we consider the modern state and its highly

diversified range of occupations. It seems unfeasible to claim that each worker's nature is specifically suited to the job that he performs, especially in an economy where workers can radically change careers. Individuals appear generally equipped for all sorts of specific tasks within an extensive division of labor. Additionally, perhaps natural differences of ability are not as great between individuals as one might suppose. The modern roots of the view that individuals are roughly equal in their natural endowments can be traced at least to Locke's challenge to the supposed divine or paternal rights of monarchies to rule over their subjects.

To be sure, Locke's intent to show the origins of legitimate political power keeps him from saying much about individuals' basic physical and mental abilities; what he does say, however, inspired Jefferson's assertion in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal." Locke claims that the state of nature is a state of perfect *equality*, with "no one having more than another" and each being born "to the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties."⁴³ Being equal with respect to these naturally-endowed rights and abilities, each individual in the state of nature is also afforded the ability to appropriate to himself the means of his sustenance.⁴⁴ Given this basic natural equality of rights and abilities, whence the differentiation of ability and the division of labor? Men may be *created* equal, but they come to differentiate themselves and divide labor accordingly. As Locke does not appear willing to accept Plato's claim that individuals have politically and economically significant differences of inherent ability, how can he account for the apparently significant differences of ability that we see around us today?

C.B. MacPherson suggests that while Locke needed to assert natural equality of *rights* in order to undermine the supposed divine and paternal rights of monarchs to rule over their subjects, Locke could not help providing an implicit excuse for the class differences of his day.⁴⁵ Although individuals may have insignificant natural differences of ability, the differences that exist among them later on are primarily the result of differential accumulations of *property*. One familiar with Locke might initially find such a claim astonishing, since Locke places what appear to be definite limits on property acquisition. For one thing, Locke claims that one can acquire property in a thing only so far as “enough and as good” of the thing is left in common for the appropriation of others.⁴⁶ Locke also insists that one must not acquire more property than is necessary for sustenance; one may acquire “as much as [one] can make use of to any advantage of life before it spoils.”⁴⁷ MacPherson calls these two limitations on property the *sufficiency* and *spoilage* conditions, respectively. MacPherson adds a third, practical limitation: one’s ability to labor is temporally and physically limited, so one’s ability to acquire property is limited. In spite of Locke’s explicit limitations on property acquisition, MacPherson claims that Locke’s *Second Treatise* implicitly allows for significant differentiation of property—and an associated differentiation of capacities.

According to MacPherson, Locke’s account of money late in his chapter on property provides Locke with a tool for transcending the three limits that he appears to set on property acquisition. First, MacPherson suggests that the accumulation and cultivation of property in land through monetary purchase may actually increase the land’s productivity. While the appropriation of once-common lands does not leave enough and as good of *land* for the use of others, the *products* of the land (by which man

gains his sustenance) can be improved to the benefit of others. Hence, the sufficiency condition as a limitation on property accumulation is transcended via money and the increased productivity of land. Second, money does not spoil—at least not at the rate of fruits, vegetables, or dairy products. So its accumulation is not subject to the limits of the spoilage condition. Finally, money—as capital—effectively extends one’s ability to labor. By employing wage-laborers, for example, a money-holder extends his ability to work on various materials by buying each laborer’s right to the work of his hands. If MacPherson is correct, Locke’s account of money allows for the transcendence of the limits placed on property accumulation, further allowing for the differentiation of individuals beyond their fundamental natural equality. Increased access to resources allows some to develop physical and mental abilities that others may not thanks to their hand-to-mouth laboring existence. For Locke, although natural differences of ability between individuals are roughly (if not expressly) equal, the foundation is laid for their differentiation through money, its effects on property acquisition, and the effects of property in facilitating the development and acquisition of abilities (e.g., through the purchase of education, etc.). It is a position on equality and difference echoed more explicitly by Rousseau and Smith in the following century.

As we saw in the last chapter, Rousseau identifies two sorts of inequality: 1) “natural” (or “physical”) inequalities, such as those of “age, health, strengths of body, and qualities of mind or soul”; and 2) “moral” (or “political”) inequalities that include differences of wealth, honor, and power.⁴⁸ Rousseau claims that inequalities of the latter sort are far greater than those of the former. In *Emile*, Rousseau characterizes individuals in the state of nature as having an “actual and indestructible equality.”⁴⁹ The greater

proportion of differences between individuals is the product of differences in property, education, and training. We have seen that Adam Smith, too, accepts the basic idea that differences in natural ability among individuals are not as great as those that arise from education and the division of labor. Smith's philosopher/street porter example illustrates how most differences of this sort arise: the philosopher and street porter have roughly the same abilities through the "first six or eight years of their existence," but employment in different occupations develops and widens what differences there are until the philosopher and street porter are quite different indeed.⁵⁰ Rousseau tells an intriguingly similar story in *Emile*:

[O]ur starting point, the birth of man, is the same for all; but the further we go...the further apart we find ourselves. At six years old my pupil [Emile] was not so very unlike yours, whom you had not yet had time to disfigure; now there is nothing in common between them; and they will show themselves utterly different from each other....There may not be so very great a difference in the amount of knowledge they possess, but there is all the difference in the world in the kind of knowledge. You are amazed to find that the one has noble sentiments of which the others have not the smallest germ, but remember that the latter are already philosophers and theologians while Emile does not even know what is meant by a philosopher and has scarcely heard the name of God.⁵¹

But in another instance of the difficulty in finding uniformity in the effects of a position on one's evaluation of the division of labor, Smith and Rousseau's accounts of the education of philosophers are parts of two opposing evaluations. Whereas Smith sees the diversification of occupations—and the attendant diversification and development of human abilities—as a progressive, positive result of the division of labor, Rousseau on

the contrary sees the diverse distribution of abilities (especially as a result of differences in wealth and education) as part and parcel of the “decrepitude” of the species, the perfection of the individual at the expense of his natural instincts and sociality to the point that the supposedly wise philosopher can ignore the murder of a fellow human being simply covering his ears and arguing with himself!⁵²

In addition to philosophers’ interest in the matter, the issue of capacity distribution has become a matter of empirical investigation. Although not bothering to distinguish between inherent and acquired abilities, focusing instead simply on workers’ suitability for their work, David Wechsler argues (in the spirit of Smith and Rousseau) that differences of ability are *smaller* than supposed. Wechsler agrees that what differences there are arise primarily from differences in education and training, but he goes on to suggest that training actually *narrows* the range of variation in abilities between the most and the least efficient workers.⁵³ According to Wechsler, the typical ratio of variation between the most and the least efficient workers trained in a given industry is 2:1.⁵⁴ In other words, differences of ability translate into the most efficient workers being merely twice as productive as the least efficient workers—a degree of variation that might initially appear a low-ball estimate. Wechsler’s work suggests, at least in part, that workers are not easily separable into distinct kinds; instead, differences in ability among individuals are differences primarily in their *degree* of development.

Differences in degree of ability—and the suggestion that training can narrow these differences and enable even the least-abled individuals—can be employed either in justifying or criticizing the division of labor. Aristotle considers the individual fundamentally unable to provide for all of his needs. His justification for the state’s

priority to the individual is that the individual, being “not self-sufficing,” is given a natural “social instinct” for the sake of cooperation.⁵⁵ Social interaction pools the different degrees of ability possessed by “ordinary” individuals in a manner that far exceeds their ability when left to their own devices.⁵⁶ Thus Aristotle seems to advocate—in very basic outline—a division of labor according to individuals’ differing degrees of ability. But do individuals’ degrees of ability really differ so significantly that collective life within the state is *necessary* for self-sufficiency? An individual’s possession of various abilities in different degrees need not entail that he cannot suffice his needs through the use of those abilities. He may not do the job as easily or as quickly; nonetheless, he gets the job done. Cooperation through a division of labor may be *practical* without being *necessary*; and insofar as some division of labor is not necessary, it can be adjusted to suit human needs, capacities, and interests.

If the ‘diversity of natures’ is a possible first condition of the division of labor, as Durkheim claimed, it is worth explicating just how diverse individuals’ natures can be. This requires an examination of issues of *distribution*—and these were the focus of this section. Are individuals enabled in unique ways, or are abilities so distributed that individuals can be classed with others of similar ability? Are abilities differentially or equally distributed? We have looked at some possible answers to these questions and their varying effects on the evaluations of the division of labor. We must now change gears and explore the relationship between capacities and personality. The kinds, sources, and distribution of capacities affect the division of labor, but how those capacities shape one’s personality has also been an especially contentious matter.

What I do is what I am—Issues of personality

One's capacities provide the potential for not only what one can do, but *who one can be*. There appears to be a reciprocal relationship between work and personality; as James Murphy diplomatically observes, our work both *reflects* and *defines* our character.⁵⁷ How one accounts for the relationship between work and personality—specifically in terms of the manner in which work engages one's capacities—may crucially inform one's evaluation of the division of labor.

The degree to which work reflects a worker's personality by "fitting" his abilities is often considered a key aspect of productivity. Psychologist Marvin Dunnette suggests that matching worker characteristics to the requirements of a job is part of *all* modern methods of increasing productivity.⁵⁸ The idea is simple: a worker will be more productive if his work makes use of his more-developed talents and skills. It is an idea reminiscent of Plato's claim in the *Republic* that more, better, and easier work is done by one who is naturally fitted to the work. Accounts such as those of Plato and Dunnette generally take the worker's characteristics as *given*, to be dealt with either in the assignment of the worker to an appropriate job (that suits the given characteristics) or in the adaptation of work to the worker's abilities.

Yet work not only reflects the worker's character—work also *defines* the worker's character in various ways. The effects of work upon personality, including its effects upon the development of one's capacities, have been the subject of much philosophical and empirical interest, especially recently. In particular, the degree to which work engages the spectrum of an individual's capacities has been a point of concern. At one end, critics are concerned that work under an extensive division of labor engages but a

few of the wide range of a worker's abilities, stunting the development of the worker's character. Flexible employment—in which workers are trained for a variety of jobs and allowed to rotate between them—has been recently offered as an alternative to more restrictive divisions of labor. Rather surprisingly, critics at the other end of the spectrum express concern that an extensive and varied development of abilities puts the worker at risk of an unhealthy fragmentation of personality. Without some kind of integrating, unifying purpose or understanding, the “jack of all trades but master of none” has little by which to define himself. Let us explore these concerns in greater detail.

If the division of labor is carried out, as Smith puts it, “by reducing every man's business to some one simple operation, and by making this operation the sole employment of his life,”⁵⁹ then it is difficult to see how the division of labor could not have *some* effect on the worker's personality by narrowing the scope of his capacity development. Smith, as we have noted, is not entirely calloused toward this; he expresses some concern about the underdevelopment of the worker's physical and intellectual abilities as a result of the division of labor, making him “stupid,” “ignorant,” and incapable of conversing rationally, conceiving moral sentiments, making judgments, and so on. What Smith passes over as a mere symptom to be remedied, Marx takes up as a significant problem. The deficiency of worker personality under the division of labor is, for Marx, a sign that something is wrong with the system that fostered him. For Marx, the capitalist division of labor makes a monster of the laborer, crippling him by forcing him to develop one narrow capacity at the expense of “a world of productive capabilities.”⁶⁰ In Marx's mind, the worker under the division of labor is capable of so much more; confining him to a narrow task *defines* him as a simpleton. Marx argues for

the “all-round” development of worker abilities—directly pushing back against the capitalist division of labor and its relegation of workers to simple occupations.⁶¹ Harry Braverman echoes Marx’s complaints nearly a century later, claiming that “work has become increasingly subdivided into petty operations that fail to sustain the interest or engage the capacities of humans with current levels of education.”⁶² Adina Schwartz quotes Arthur Kornhauser who, in a study of automobile assembly line workers, concludes that the “most influential attribute” of the mental health of the workers is “the opportunity the work offers—or fails to offer—for the use of the worker’s abilities.”⁶³ Chris Argyris, of the Harvard Business School, argues that even if Smith and others are right about the increases in productivity resulting from the division of labor, this must not choke off “self actualization.”⁶⁴ Argyris seems to presage Moghaddam’s argument that specialization is problematic for its impact upon individual actualization.

Concerns about the negative effects of work on worker personality have led to the recent push for what is variously called “flexible employment” or “job enrichment.” The idea underlying this push is that the development and exercise of a broad range of a worker’s abilities benefits not only the worker’s personality, mental health, and job satisfaction, but productivity as well. Yet flexible employment is not without its own share of critics. One of these critics, sociologist Richard Sennett, expresses concern that flexible employment and job rotation disrupts personal habits that help to define one’s character.⁶⁵ In Sennett’s eyes, being too diversely engaged prevents one from finding a few habitual employments at which one can truly excel. While Sennett certainly does not approve of the effects that a narrow, restrictive job can have upon the development of one’s capacities, his point illustrates a problem at the opposite end of the developmental

spectrum: engaging too many of one's capacities and rotating through their exercise too quickly or too often may prevent one from developing the habits and capacities that define one's character. Even Schwartz, whose primary concern is the restrictive effect of the division of labor on personal autonomy, commits herself to a limit on personal capacity development with her claim that becoming autonomous involves "a process of integrating one's personality: of coming to see all one's pursuits as subject to one's activity of planning and to view all one's experiences as providing a basis for evaluating and adjusting one's beliefs, methods, and aims."⁶⁶ If the development of one's capacities is extensive but haphazard, then one runs the risk of arriving by another way at a kind of "schizophrenia" that Schwartz fears. Perhaps not *all* of one's capacities can—or should—be developed through work; Argyris admits as much, claiming that work should foster *optimal* rather than complete personal development.⁶⁷

What then? The division of labor threatens to restrict the development of worker personality by narrowing the range of capacities employed in work. Yet responses to this threat, such as flexible employment, seem also to threaten one's physical and psychological unity. How might the division of labor be tempered to appropriately develop workers' abilities and personalities? Charles Walker and Robert Guest, in their benchmark survey entitled *The Man on the Assembly Line*, state the problem beautifully with respect to our modern mechanized economy: "To what degree can—or should—men be adjusted to the new environment of machines and to what degree is it possible to adjust or rebuild that environment to fit the needs and personalities of men?"⁶⁸ Argyris calls the balance between worker capacities and personality on one hand, and the structure of the job on the other, *integration*.⁶⁹ [Let us not confuse this with Schwartz's

press for integrity as it relates to the rational self-governance of autonomous individuals.] As sensible as the attempt to integrate worker and work seems to be, it is not without problems. Perhaps the most significant problem, as stated by Harvard sociologist Daniel Bell, is that “the ends of production are taken as ‘given’ and the worker is to be ‘adjusted’ to his job so that the human equation matches the industrial equation.”⁷⁰ In short, the problem is that the “job” is so institutionalized in the nature of its machinery, the work floor layout, and its relation to other jobs that molding the worker to his job is far more cost-effective than the other way around.⁷¹ The standardization of job content makes the *worker* the variable—he is the one to be adjusted (to the point of replacement) when job and worker are incompatible. This is essentially the reason for Marx’s concern that the work controls the worker rather than the worker controlling his work.⁷² The entrenchment of job conditions in the various institutions of work stands as a significant obstacle for the push for greater integration of workers with their work.⁷³

Insofar as work engages—or fails to engage—a worker’s capacities, it affects the worker’s personality in ways that may influence one’s evaluation of the division of labor. This increasingly recognized fact has fostered a wide-ranging discussion about the division of labor and its effect on worker personality. This brings our exploration of key issues regarding human abilities to a close. Let us now consider where the matter of human abilities lies in the context of our search for a viable framework for exploring and assessing the division of labor.

Capacities: The crux of elements in the framework

Although it has not always been fully recognized historically, contemporary thought and research suggest that there is a complex reciprocal relationship between worker capacities and work. Work variously employs and develops worker capacities; worker capacities variously determine the character, organization, and success of work. Because of this reciprocal relationship, accounts of the division of labor often include explicit or implicit assumptions about relevant human abilities. Yet the complexity of the subject of human capacities makes it a challenge to account for them thoroughly and clearly and to address their effects upon the division of labor. As it is an overarching goal of my project to provide structure to the discussion of the division of labor, I have focused here upon four key issues related to the topic of human capacities: 1) the kinds of capacities (physical or intellectual, general or specific); 2) their origin (inherent or acquired); 3) their distribution (to individuals or classes, differently or equally); and 4) their relationship to personality. I have reviewed key positions on these issues and their effects on the evaluation of the division of labor. It can be particularly frustrating to see that these effects are not always uniform: for example, two individuals may make similar assumptions about the origin of human capacities yet arrive at different conclusions about the propriety of the division of labor. This suggests that if there is to be consensus on the division of labor and its place in society, then these sub-issues need to be hashed-out.

The issue of human capacities is pivotal to my project. It stands at the crux of the issue of the effects of the division of labor (the subject of the previous chapter) and the relationship between the individual and others (the subject of the next chapter). Human capacities affect the results of the division of labor in various ways. For one thing, the

fitness of the laborer to his task is considered by some to be essential to the improvement of productivity. One of Plato's insights—that a proper fit between worker and work benefits productivity—is the guiding light of modern human resource management. Selecting the right worker for the job, or in a few cases tailoring the job to the abilities of the worker, defines human resource management. In addition to its practical benefits, the appropriate matching of worker abilities to job requirements can contribute to the attainment of moral ends like justice or political/social/economic order. But as we saw in the last chapter—and at moments in this chapter—the division of labor yields other results of moral interest, particularly regarding the effects of work upon the worker.

Work affects the worker and his capacities in constructive and destructive ways. Smith emphasizes the role that specialized labor plays in the development of worker dexterity and skill. Adeptness with a tool or a musical instrument, for example, requires the kind of focus and repetition found under an extensive division of labor. However, the price (in terms of human capacities) for this kind of one-track development is a degradation of other important abilities. A highly restrictive division of labor leads to the deterioration of those physical and intellectual capabilities that are not exercised in work. The division of labor, critics claim, develops a few capacities at the price of numerous others, making the worker into a mere fragment of what his capacities enable him to become. But even if the critics are right, the extensive division of labor appears to retain some (if not all) of its productive benefits. The division of labor is successful (to what degree and at what price are obviously controversial issues) at organizing laborers' different abilities for a more effective production of goods and services. How is this accomplished? The answer may be framed in terms of two notions with quite different

connotations: by *cooperation* or *dependency*. ‘Cooperation’ suggests that workers freely and rationally draw together their various abilities in order to meet the needs of production: by working together, they achieve their goals. ‘Dependency’ evokes an image of workers bound together out of necessity: they work together because they cannot get on without one another. Both notions have been evoked in accounts of the division of labor—and both notions deal with the relationship of the individual to others. Do the worker’s capacities well-suit him for cooperative labor, or does cooperative labor keep him from developing other abilities or even attaining self-sufficiency? Whether one sees the individual as an able but nonetheless dependent worker or a versatile Robinson Crusoe will shape one’s attitude towards the division of labor.

The discussion of capacities in this chapter grounds the investigations of the next chapter into the relationship between the individual and others and how an account of this relationship affects the evaluation of the division of labor. A difficult choice lay at the heart of this new topic. It is a choice well-expressed in a question posed by Durkheim: “Is it our duty to seek to become a thorough and complete human being, one quite sufficient unto oneself; or on the contrary, to be only a part of a whole, the organ of an organism?”⁷⁴

Notes:

¹ Gary Dessler, *Human Behavior: Improving Performance at Work* (Reston, VA: Reston Publishing Company, Inc., 1980), 43. Dessler presents the following formula: performance=f(ability x motivation).

² For my purposes here, I shall treat ‘abilities’ and ‘capacities’ as referring to the same features.

³ John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, 5th ed. (New York: Appleton and Company, 1874), I.8.5.

⁴ Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), 51.

⁵ Norman G. Peterson and David A Bownas, “Skill, Task Structure, and Performance Acquisition,” in *Human Performance and Productivity*, ed. Edwin A. Fleishman, Vol. 1: *Human Capability Assessment*, eds. Marvin D. Dunnette and Edwin A. Fleishman (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers, 1982), 66-72.

⁶ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

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- ⁸ Ibid., 9.
- ⁹ Ibid., 10.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., 734-735.
- ¹¹ Marx, "On James Mill," in *Selected Writings*, 128.
- ¹² Adina Schwartz, "Meaningful Work," *Ethics* 92, no. 4 (Jul., 1982): 640.
- ¹³ Ruskin asserts that the industrial division of labor is so exacting on workers as to "smother their souls within them, to blight and hew into rotting pollards the suckling branches of their human intelligence, to make the flesh and skin...into leathern thongs to yoke machinery with—this it is to be slave-masters indeed." See Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, Ch. VI, §XIII.
- ¹⁴ Ibid., 637-638.
- ¹⁵ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 9.
- ¹⁶ Ibid., 11.
- ¹⁷ Peterson and Bownas, "Skill, Task Structure, and Performance Acquisition," 66-67.
- ¹⁸ Jeffrey Sklansky, *The Soul's Economy: Market Society and Selfhood in American Thought, 1820-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 13-14.
- ¹⁹ Ibid., 20.
- ²⁰ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, in *Selected Writings*, 514.
- ²¹ Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 54-55.
- ²² Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, trans. George Simpson (New York: The Free Press, 1964), 34.
- ²³ Ibid., 41.
- ²⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 370a-b.
- ²⁵ Ibid., 443c, 433a.
- ²⁶ Ibid., 370c.
- ²⁷ Ibid., 433d.
- ²⁸ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 13.
- ²⁹ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 201.
- ³⁰ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 15.
- ³¹ Alan Ryan, "The Nature of Human Nature in Hobbes and Rousseau," in *The Limits of Human Nature*, ed. Jonathan Benthall (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974), 13.
- ³² Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emile*, trans. Barbara Foxley (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1943), 83. Earlier, Rousseau characterizes the education of man by nature, by other men, and by experience—stressing that the latter two are properly subordinate to the former:
- This education [by which man's abilities are cultivated] comes to us from nature, from men, or from things. The inner growth of our organs and faculties is the education of nature, the use we learn to make of this growth is the education of men, what we gain by our experience of our surroundings is the education of things.
- Thus we are each taught by three masters. If their teaching conflicts, the scholar is ill-educated and will never be at peace with himself; if their teaching agrees, he goes straight to his goal, he lives at peace with himself, he is well educated.
- Now of these three factors in education nature is wholly beyond our control, things are only partly in our power; the education of men is the only one controlled by us; and even here our power is largely illusory, for who can hope to direct every word and deed of all with whom the child has to do? ...
- What is this [aforementioned] goal? As we have just shown, it is the goal of nature. Since all three modes of education must work together, the two that we can control must follow the lead of that which is beyond our control. (*Emile*, 6)
- ³³ Moghaddam, *The Specialized Society*, 140.
- ³⁴ Maurice Bloch, *Marxism and Anthropology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 1-20.
- ³⁵ Plato, *Republic*, 435 b-c, 441c, and 443c-444a.
- ³⁶ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. 1, *The Spell of Plato*, 5th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), 78.
- ³⁷ Andrew Sayer and Richard Walker, *The New Social Economy: Reworking the Division of Labor* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 2.

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- ³⁸ Ibid., 9.
- ³⁹ Plato, *Republic*, 372e-373d.
- ⁴⁰ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 62.
- ⁴¹ David Wechsler, *The Range of Human Capabilities*, 2nd ed. (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1952), 2-3.
- ⁴² Durkheim, *Division of Labor*, 304.
- ⁴³ Locke, *Second Treatise*, §4.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid., §27.
- ⁴⁵ C. B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962). See Chapter V, “Locke: The Political Theory of Appropriation.”
- ⁴⁶ Locke, *Second Treatise*, §27.
- ⁴⁷ Ibid., §31.
- ⁴⁸ Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 131:2.
- ⁴⁹ Rousseau, *Emile*, 197.
- ⁵⁰ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 15-16.
- ⁵¹ Rousseau, *Emile*, 216.
- ⁵² Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 156:37.
- ⁵³ Wechsler, *The Range of Human Capabilities*, 18, 69.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., 62.
- ⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a27-30.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., 1281a40-b8.
- ⁵⁷ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 1.
- ⁵⁸ Marvin Dunnette, “Critical Concepts in the Assessment of Human Capabilities,” in *Human Performance and Productivity*, ed. Edwin A. Fleishman, Vol. 1, *Human Capability Assessment*, eds. Marvin Dunnette and Edwin A. Fleishman, 1.
- ⁵⁹ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 7.
- ⁶⁰ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, in *Selected Writings*, 514-515.
- ⁶¹ See, for example, Marx’s characterization of the communist organization of society in the same paragraph that he offers the motto of the communist distribution of products: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” Marx claims that “enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor” is overcome, and productivity is increased, with the “all-round development of the individual.” Karl Marx, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*, in *Selected Writings*, 615.
- ⁶² Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 3.
- ⁶³ Schwartz, “Meaningful Work,” 638. Kornhauser’s comment may be found in Arthur Kornhauser, *Mental Health of the Industrial Worker: A Detroit Study* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1964), 263.
- ⁶⁴ Chris Argyris, “The Individual and the Organization: Some Problems of Mutual Adjustment,” in *The Individual and the Organization*, eds. Donald R. Domm et al. (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), 98.
- ⁶⁵ Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1998), 10.
- ⁶⁶ Schwartz, “Meaningful Work,” 638.
- ⁶⁷ Argyris, “The Individual and the Organization,” 96.
- ⁶⁸ Charles R. Walker and Robert H. Guest, *The Man on the Assembly Line* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1952), 3.
- ⁶⁹ Chris Argyris, *Personality and Organization: The Conflict Between System and the Individual* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), 22.
- ⁷⁰ Daniel Bell, *Work and Its Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1956), 24-25.
- ⁷¹ Workers themselves are not unaware of the fact that the character of much modern work is dictated to them as a given that cannot be easily changed. Walker and Guest surveyed workers at an automobile assembly plant and discovered that the “mechanical pacing of work”, the “predetermination in the use of tools and techniques,” and other features of their work were among the dramatic changes that workers faced in transitioning from their previous jobs (on farms, in schools, etc.) to industrial work. See Walker and Guest, *Man on the Assembly Line*, 32-37.
- ⁷² Indeed, the notion of the work controlling the worker is at the heart of Marx’s concept of *alienation*. According to Marx, the product of labor becomes external to the laborer, returning to control the life of the laborer by exacting a toll of his laboring capacity and free time. Marx describes the activity of alienated

production as “activity that is passivity, power that is weakness, procreation that is castration, the worker’s own physical and intellectual energy, his personal life (for what is life except activity?) as an activity directed against himself, independent of him and not belonging to him.” See Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in *Selected Writings*, 89.

⁷³ Melvin Kohn and Carmi Schooler observe that “the structure of most jobs does not permit any considerable variation in the substantive complexity of the work: job conditions are not readily modified to suit the needs or capacities of the individual worker.” See Kohn and Schooler, *Work and Personality*, 123.

⁷⁴ Durkheim, *The Division of Labor*, 41.

Chapter 4: The Individual and Society: Man as a Social or a Solitary Animal

In his commentary on Plato's *Republic*, the Arabic philosopher Averroes suggests that political science is directed toward two ends: 1) the realization of human perfections and virtues; and 2) the satisfaction of the necessities of life (such as food, housing, and clothing).¹ He asserts that few if any individuals are capable of perfecting every virtue or satisfying every necessity. For these reasons, man is "a political being by nature." Because perfection "exists mostly in many individuals <together>," the political organization of Plato's city includes a division of labor that is in the "best interest" (says Averroes) of the city and its individual citizens.

In just a few short paragraphs, Averroes addresses the Platonic division of labor in terms that link the three general issues identified in this dissertation. In the first place, the division of labor may be assessed in terms of its supposed *effects* (e.g., it enables virtuous perfection or the satisfaction of needs). In the second place, the kinds and degrees of effects may be understood at least in part as a function of individuals' *capacities* (or shortcomings). These issues were the subjects of the preceding two chapters. Averroes' commentary also brings us to the third issue: *the relationship of the individual to others*. He succinctly reminds us that Plato's *Republic* is primarily a work about social organization—of ordering a society of variously-abled individuals in order to attain certain results. In Plato's *Republic*, as well as in many other philosophical works, the evaluation of the division of labor is couched within broader discussions about the individual and his relationship to others.

Following some introductory remarks, the second section of this chapter offers an overview of the various "states of nature" to which certain philosophical accounts have appealed in the attempt to define the proper relationship between the individual and others. Some philosophers, from Plato to Rousseau and beyond, have hoped to single out *human nature*—a

condition of man in which he is stripped of the influence of conventions, customs, laws, and other institutions—as a standard for assessing social institutions and creating new ones. Whether man is cast as naturally social or naturally individual will have significant—but not necessarily uniform—effects on the evaluation of the social division of labor. In the third section, I consider the case of Robinson Crusoe as an individual who is supposed to attain self-sufficiency in a relatively Lockean state of nature, and I consider the problem (raised by James Murphy and others) that Marx’s communist man in the *German Ideology*—a supposed alternative vision to Lockean individualism—seems too much like Crusoe to provide an effective contrast. The primary result of these considerations is the recognition of the social nature of man, the facets of which I explore in the fourth section. In particular, the sexual division of labor appears to suggest a natural foundation for the social division of labor—but how much of the social division of labor as presently constituted may be attributable to the sexual division of labor? I discuss an ambiguity about the sexual division of labor, and I review Plato’s claim that sexual differences matter in procreation and little else. Although Plato claims that women are generally weaker, men and women on his account share the same general abilities to perform the occupations within the state. In the fifth section, I explore the notions of *self-sufficiency* and *dependency* as they pertain to the individual’s relationship to others, and I note their various uses in the evaluation of the division of labor. Finally, I review a possible resolution of an apparent inconsistency in Adam Smith’s work to show that in this case—as well as in Moghaddam’s preference for individual actualization to collective actualization—key assumptions about the proper relationship between the individual and society affect evaluations of the division of labor in ways that warrant still more exploration of this topic beyond that which is outlined here.

The relationship between the individual and society: Some introductory remarks

The relationship between the individual and society in the contemporary world is assuredly complex. One can examine the matter-of-fact relationship between an individual and his society, including the variety of ways in which each affects the other. Such empirical investigations may be complemented with claims about the *proper* relationship between the individual and society—that is, one can evaluate conditions *as they are* against a standard of *how they ought to be*. Philosophers, in particular, have contributed significantly to this normative vision of the relationship between the individual and society. These contributions can provide the tools for assessing not only the general relationship between the individual and society, but in particular the division of labor and the relationships it establishes between the two. It is important to note, however, the contextualization of many treatments of the division of labor. The division of labor is not always addressed as a separate matter; rather, it may receive treatment only insofar as it relates to broader issues affecting the relationships that ought to obtain between individuals. Plato, for example, addresses the division of labor within the context of a discussion of justice. Unable to easily find an account of what makes an individual just, Socrates examines justice “writ large” in the city, painting a picture of how the labor within a city *ought* to be organized—given certain claims about human abilities—in order to realize social and individual justice. Similarly, Locke’s concern with abuses of monarchical power leads him to advocate individualism as the source of political legitimacy, while suggesting that an individual enters most (if not all) social relationships only when they are expedient for the preservation of property. These examples suggest that positions on the division of labor must sometimes be distilled from a broader context.

The complexities of the individual/society relationship invite a variety of interpretations. The individual and society may have interests that are inherently in competition, or they may have a multifaceted interrelationship that sometimes benefits, sometimes burdens, one or both sides of the individual/social dichotomy. It is tempting to resolve these complexities by emphasizing one side of the relationship at the expense of the other. Fathali Moghaddam, as we saw in Chapter 1, notes (rather briefly) that there is a “conflict” between the goals of individual actualization and collective actualization. Moghaddam heavily emphasizes individual actualization, suggesting that social institutions (including the division of labor) ought to be reorganized in order to encourage greater individual development. The extensive division of labor, on Moghaddam’s account, has reduced many laborers to a state of such dependency that individual actualization has been sacrificed to meet the demands of the collective. On the other hand, Averroes maintains in his commentary on Plato that human perfection is attainable only through collective action: individuals are practically (even essentially) incapable of attaining perfection and meeting their needs solely on their own. For Averroes, then, a division of labor is essential; it is only through collective action, with individuals contributing their various strengths to the collective whole, that individuals (through their society) can attain human perfection and meet their needs. The examples of Moghaddam and Averroes indicate that where one places emphasis in the individual/societal relationship will have important ramifications for one’s evaluation of the division of labor.

The attempts to find some normative considerations for assessing the proper relationship between the individual and society often rest on appeals to a supposed “natural” condition of man. Is man naturally social or naturally individual? Is cooperation essential to human life, or can one not only survive without cooperation, but even live an idyllic and well-rounded life as an

individual? Whether or not it is identified as such, the notion of a “state of nature”—first encountered in Chapter 3—plays an important role in shaping a position on the proper relationship between the individual and others. We will now consider the place of this notion in the debates surrounding the proper relationship between the individual and society—as well as the division of labor.

The “state of nature”: Is man a social or solitary animal?

Sorting out the proper relationship between the individual and society is difficult, as noted earlier, because of the complexities of contemporary life. An individual is raised by parents or guardians, educated in language and culture, participates in social institutions (including families, governments, corporations, and churches)—yet there is the belief (especially in Western liberal societies) that the individual ought to emerge from this social milieu as a unique, increasingly self-sufficient and self-aware person. Although the complexity of social relationships seems uniquely characteristic of our time, philosophers since Plato have attempted to disentangle the individual from society in order to understand more clearly the nature of the relations that should obtain between them in the course of their proper development. One must get beyond the effects of convention, habit, and culture—or so it is thought—in order to understand man as he truly, naturally is: either as a political animal whose fullest life is in society with others, or as the independent individual whose unique development is to be secured against the pressures for social conformity and control. Setting the individual and society in the proper balance often requires an account of *human nature*, cast either in terms of man *qua* individual or man *qua* species, that delineates the ends of man’s development and the nature of his capacities—each of which were addressed in the past two chapters. Without a solid account of

human nature, we are (recalling the words of Alan Ryan quoted in Chapter 3) “unable to say anything very profound about how well or how ill social arrangements satisfy human needs and aspirations.”² It is precisely to say something “profound” about a social arrangement and its ability to satisfy human needs and aspirations that proponents and critics have appealed to human nature in their various assessments of the division of labor.

Appeals to a state of nature are nothing new in philosophical history. While commonly associated with a thread of thought that traces back to philosophers like Hobbes and Locke, the appeal to a state of nature—i.e., a natural condition of man unencumbered with the weight of customs, habits, and stipulations—can be found as far back as the work of Plato and Aristotle. For Plato, each man is “naturally fitted” for one task among others in the political organization of the city; as commentator Nickolas Pappas has put it, the word ‘nature’—as it is invoked for political purposes in Plato’s *Republic*—simply means “the aptitude for one kind of work rather than another.”³ The principle that nature has endowed each man with an aptitude for one kind of work instead of another is the basis not only for a division of labor but a just social order. In his own right, therefore, Plato justifies the social order of his city by appealing to a natural condition of man. On his own, the individual is essentially unable to wholly suffice his needs and attain justice; he is, instead, fitted by nature for a particular kind of social cooperation that allows him to meet his needs and attain justice through his relationships with others.

Aristotle builds upon Plato’s theme of natural fitness for a division of labor by openly declaring that an isolated individual “is not self-sufficing.”⁴ The fact that an individual man is unable to meet his needs effectively leads Aristotle to assert famously that man is “by nature a political animal.” Aristotle, like Plato, concludes that man in his natural state is best suited for cooperation with his fellows—the man who is without a state, according to Aristotle, is either an

irrational beast or a self-sufficient god. For both Plato and Aristotle, although man may not find himself placed within a state at birth, it is life within the well-ordered and self-sufficient state that is the end to which he is naturally fitted.

Contemporary readers may pause over the accounts of human nature presented by Plato and Aristotle. For one thing, there appears to be little place for individuality or individual self-determination within the Platonic or Aristotelian states. To appeal to natural fitness for rule (or subjection) is undemocratic to say the least. Indeed, a critic may argue that it has been precisely the notion of natural human differences that has led to so much oppression and conflict in the world. It has been very difficult historically to achieve a stable, stratified, yet just state. What happens when the demands of the collective conflict with the conscience of the individual? Should the interests of society override those of the individual? According to commentator Alfredo Ferrarin, G.W.F. Hegel traces individualism and self-consciousness back, ironically enough, to its roots in such a conflict faced by Plato's teacher: Socrates.⁵ Hegel suggests that Socrates' conflict with "contemporary manners" in Athens is a flash of individualism and a commitment to personal principle in the face of contrary social pressures to conform.⁶ Whether or not Hegel is right in seeing Socrates as an early father of political individualism is another matter; however, it is true that the perceived conflict between the individual and the state—of which Socrates' trial and condemnation may be an example—later ushered in the era of political individualism. Locke's resistance to monarchical power gave rise to a new view of political legitimacy that holds that the political power of legitimate government is *constituted by* powers originally possessed by individuals in a state of nature. In Locke, the Aristotelian notion of the state being a "creation of nature" is set aside in favor of the view that the state is created *by men* to serve their pragmatic needs.

Unlike Plato and Aristotle, Locke argues that individuals in the state of nature are essentially *equal*—at least with respect to their natural rights. Locke appears to have no notion of significant differences of ability between individuals; for the most part, each man is endowed by nature with the same rights and powers for securing the means of his own preservation. However, fickleness and competition make the state of nature one of struggle and insecurity for individuals. In order to protect their property, individuals consent to form a civil society, setting up governmental authorities to legislate and execute laws that (ideally) square with the law of nature. Locke suggests that legislators and executors of the laws should be separate individuals in order to protect against the misuse of power. So even though Locke builds political legitimacy on the primacy of the individual rather than society, he too makes an allowance for a division of political labor for the preservation of each individual's property in civil society.

Locke is a crucial figure in the rise of political individualism. His contribution changed the terminology and direction of analysis when applied to social institutions—including the division of labor. Locke appeals to a pre-political state of nature to argue that *individuals* form societies and governments for pragmatic ends. The *individual* becomes the standard against which social institutions may be tested. While Lockean political individualism represents a paradigm shift for discussions of political legitimacy and the relationship between the individual and society, it is not without its problems. In particular, political individualism aggravates issues of distributive justice and seems to reduce legitimate social relations to prudential, contractual relationships. James Murphy claims that Locke's state-of-nature theorizing, insofar as Locke's labor theory of property entitles every man to the fruits of his labor, raises the issue of distributive justice: "[S]ince Locke sees the state of nature as a viable society of free and equal economic agents, each man in the state of nature must have a wife. If so, her labor is a

precondition for his; so already we have a sexual division of labor, social cooperation, and the quandary of distributive justice.”⁷ Murphy’s reasoning is a little unclear (especially the transition in the first line from the vision of a society of “free and equal economic agents” to the conclusion that one must have a wife), but the gist of his argument may be surmised. At the very least, in order for there to be men in the state of nature, there must be a sexual division of labor between men and women. In at least one act—reproduction—there must be social cooperation, and with social cooperation comes the issue of distributive justice as it pertains to the related individuals. For Murphy, the fact that there is a social division of labor—i.e., the assignment of different individuals to different tasks in the labor process—entails the issue of how to distribute resources and products justly. With a social division of labor, a product may be produced upon which a number of different hands have worked. Who owns this product? Who may benefit from its exchange? C.B. MacPherson, as we saw in Chapter 3, suggests that Locke’s account of the advent of money, when attached to his claims about labor and property ownership, opens the door to a stratified society of individuals differentiated in terms of their unequal accumulations of wealth. Issues of distributive justice are only heightened as wealth proliferates.

In raising the issue of distributive justice, Murphy also raises the issue of a sexual division of labor—a division that rests, insofar as it applies to reproduction, on natural/physical differences between individuals. Murphy’s assertion that “each man in the state of nature must have a wife,” suggests that there is a fundamental sexual division of labor that Locke’s individualist account overlooks. In the state of nature, man is born into a family—or at least as a result of a sexual relationship between a man and a woman. No man is born fully endowed with the powers necessary for his self-preservation; hence, man is dependent (at least for a time) on natural, social relationships for his care and provision. Murphy notes that while Adam Smith

generally attacks state-of-nature theorizing, Smith also seems to neglect the sexual division of labor when he accepts Locke's labor theory of property. According to Murphy, both Smith and Locke are susceptible to concerns about distributive justice thanks to their inattention to the fact that man is naturally placed (i.e., born) into certain social relationships.

In his criticism of Smith's account of the division of labor, Marx is careful to avoid some of the pitfalls of asserting either the natural sociality or natural individuality of man; however, he still makes use of appeals to a natural condition of man in his analysis of the division of labor and the social being of man. Regarding the relationship between the individual and society, Marx takes a blended approach. Man creates social institutions that in turn influence the development of man: "As society produces man as man, so it is produced by man."⁸ Social relationships—including the social division of labor, which is at first a "spontaneous" development within the family and is later shaped by the demands of exchange—have as their natural foundation the sexual (or "physiological") division of labor.⁹ For Marx, then, man has a fundamentally social nature. "The individual is the social being," Marx claims in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, noting that such features as language and the material with which one works are significantly social products.¹⁰ Human nature is the product of the interaction between the individual and society, with some emphasis placed on the social nature of man. As Marx puts it in his sixth thesis on Feuerbach, "[T]he human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of social relations."¹¹

Yet in spite of his insistence on the social nature of man, one of Marx's most famous passages in the *German Ideology* suggests that in a communist society, the individual is freed from his long-standing dependence upon exchange and the specialization of others and is allowed to develop more fully the wide range of his capacities:

[I]n a communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, cowherd, or critic.¹²

Marx is suggesting that communist man will be bound no longer by an exclusive sphere of activity that in turn requires him to enter into social relationships based on exchange.

Communist man appears highly individualistic, capable of both enriching himself in terms of broadly developing his capacities and attaining a higher degree of self-sufficiency than that which was available to him under previous economic structures.

James Murphy and other commentators have taken Marx to task for his characterization of communist man in the *German Ideology*. Murphy likens Marx's communist man to Robinson Crusoe—the literary creation of Daniel Defoe who takes up a variety of labors while stranded on an island.¹³ Yet Marx roundly criticized Crusoe as the epitome of individualism run amok; he claims that Crusoe is a “fiction” that corresponds to a definite “conception of human nature” accepted by Smith (and Locke): namely, that the individual is naturally independent.¹⁴ In reality, Marx asserts, man is a *zoon politikon*—“not only a social animal, but an animal which can develop into an individual only in society.” Marx wants to dissociate himself from the idolization of Crusoe; Crusoe, as Murphy puts it, is “the culmination of liberal theorizing about the ‘state of nature.’”¹⁵ Crusoe is Locke's man in the state of nature, providing for himself out of the fruits of his own labor. Indeed, Crusoe's condition entirely avoids the issue of distributive justice; a solitary man faces no problem of distributing resources or products. But this state-of-nature theorizing, which can trace its roots back to the communal leanings of Plato and Aristotle

through the more individualistic bent of Locke, appears to be something from which Marx cannot fully extricate himself. Are not his communist man of the *German Ideology* and the individualist Crusoe inescapably alike?

The case of Crusoe: No man is an island—but on an island, he is truly a man

“No man is an Island, entire of itself,” wrote John Donne in his Meditation XVII, “any man’s death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankind.” Donne’s words express a common sentiment—namely, that no man is entirely self-sufficient and solitary; an individual has some essential connection to society. Such a sentiment certainly was not unfamiliar to Plato and Aristotle. Each had stated, almost matter-of-factly, that the individual cannot survive or thrive without society and the cooperation of others. But when Daniel Defoe published *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719, the philosophical climate had changed. In the late 17th century, only a few decades after Donne’s Meditation XVII, Locke had sought the foundation of political legitimacy in a state of nature in which individuals were equally possessed of certain natural rights that could be alienated by consent in order to enter civil society and endow a government with legitimate political power. For Locke, then, it is the *individual* that precedes society—both chronologically and politically. The reversal in attitudes from Plato and Aristotle to Locke and the literary work of Defoe must not be understated: whereas Plato sought an account of the just man by looking at justice “writ large” in class society, in the solitary Crusoe the various facets of society are embodied in a single man.

Robinson Crusoe falls under the same utopian genre as Plato’s *Republic*, Aristotle’s *Politics*, and Thomas More’s *Utopia*. Yet it was Defoe’s unique contribution, according to commentator Maximillian Novak, to begin with “the single man.”¹⁶ Novak finds in Defoe’s

General History of Trade—a work written six years before *Robinson Crusoe*—an observation that might be taken as a theme for *Crusoe*: God could have created the world in such a way that “every Man should have been his own Labourer, or his own Manufacturer.”¹⁷ Although Defoe’s comments in the *General History* suggest that the world has *not* been created in such a way, Ian Watt contends that Defoe daringly presents Crusoe and his isolated economic condition as “the arduous prelude to the fuller realization of every individual’s potentialities.”¹⁸ Even though the present constitution of the world may not require the individual to fully develop and engage his capacities thanks to social interaction and exchange, solitude forces man to do things he never thought he could do before—and this broader development of capacities is supposed to be the saving grace (or even the allure) of a life of social isolation. It may be that no man is an island; Defoe’s Crusoe, however, more fully realizes his human potential while stranded on an island. Watt sees Crusoe standing at the transition from communal to more individualistic notions of human nature:

Robinson Crusoe has been very appropriately used by many economic theorists as their illustration of *homo economicus*. Just as “the body politic” was the symbol of the communal way of thought typical of previous societies, so “economic man” symbolized the new outlook of individualism in its economic aspect.¹⁹

The tale of Crusoe is indeed a contrast with more communal accounts of human life such as Plato’s *Republic*. But there is an interesting sense in which Crusoe mirrors one of the heroes of the communal tradition. Novak claims that Crusoe is an “extraordinarily capable” man who is at once a merchant, craftsman, and colonizer—among other things.²⁰ But does this not sound familiar? Marx characterizes communist man in the *German Ideology* in a similar fashion, saying that he may be hunter, fisherman, cowherd, or critic—all in one day! Who else could this

be, argues James Murphy, but Robinson Crusoe?²¹ But if Murphy is right, then Marx has a problem. Marx has claimed that man is a social being, but his account of communist man in the *German Ideology* suggests a man much like the individualistic Crusoe. Murphy cites Louis Dupre in his criticism of Marx on this point. Dupre argues that “the social aspect of man”—an essential characteristic of Marx’s philosophy—is at risk when Marx confines basic economic activity to the satisfaction of one’s physical needs.²² Dupre notes that elsewhere in the *German Ideology*, Marx makes economic cooperation essential by asserting that there is “a materialistic connection of men with one another, which is determined by their needs and their mode of production”—men are bound to one another as a result of their separate but related material needs, like food, shelter, and raiment. But Marx’s assertion may be false; although Dupre does not address the character of Crusoe specifically, one might interject him here as an example of one who suffices his material needs (or at least his basic material needs like those of food, shelter, and so on) *without* social cooperation. Insofar as Marx appears to connect man’s economic and social lives, the plausibility of Crusoe’s experience casts doubt on Marx’s claim that economic activity for the satisfaction of needs *necessarily* makes man a social being. Perhaps this idea lies behind Dupre’s subsequent claim that “Marx’s position on the social condition of man comes *dangerously close to the eighteenth-century natural right theory*, according to which man is by nature an individual being—he comes to live in society only to remedy the accidental limitations of his individuality.” [Emphasis added.]

What exactly is missing from Marx’s account that makes him come “dangerously close” to eighteenth-century natural right theories and their connection with Locke’s state-of-nature theorizing? The answer is an issue not only for Marx, but for Defoe’s account of Crusoe as well. Dupre claims that Marx misses the fact that there are some “social needs” that run much

“deeper” than mere economic interaction.²³ What might these “social needs” be? The *family*, of course, is necessary if man is to procreate—i.e., if man is to exist at all. Marx is certainly aware of the place of the family in procreation and the early division of labor; however, in accounting for human *needs* and their satisfaction in economic terms, Durpe and Murphy suggest that Marx opens the door—or comes “dangerously close” to opening the door—to the individualistic state-of-nature theorizing that culminates in the figure of Crusoe, a solitary and self-sufficient man.

The criticism of Marx’s “economism” and seeming unawareness of “deeper” social needs at a crucial point in his philosophy applies all the more forcefully to the case of Crusoe. Watt hammers the “primacy of the economic motive” in *Robinson Crusoe*, observing that a number of Defoe’s heroes (including Crusoe) are starkly individualistic in their pursuit of wealth and adventure.²⁴ In particular, Watt notes that Crusoe leaves home and family to pursue his adventure alone, and even ties of friendship and nationality are reduced to matters of material advantage. Watt offers the example of Xury, a Moorish slave who saves Crusoe from slavery.²⁵ Crusoe promises loyalty to Xury, only to sell him into slavery later; when the price is right, Crusoe acts accordingly. Watt criticizes Defoe for making two errors in his tale of Crusoe’s life and adventures: 1) Defoe ignores the social nature of an economy; and 2) there are actual, negative psychological effects of solitude, to which Crusoe appears surprisingly immune.²⁶ Focusing on the former criticism for the sake of our purposes here, Watt astutely observes that Crusoe is not *entirely* without the assistance of society on his island, even though that assistance is not immediately apparent. Crusoe finds a significant stock of tools in the shipwreck that he uses to his advantage. These tools are *social* products—other minds conceived them and other hands produced them. Furthermore, even though he professes having not been “bred to any Trade,” he admits that his father “had given [him] a competent Share of Learning.”²⁷ Crusoe’s

education is but another social product that serves him well on his island. Indeed, far from being a wholly self-made man, Crusoe's material success on the island is attributable at least in part to these social contributions.

Two important insights may be gleaned from this detour into Crusoe and some criticisms of Marx and Defoe. The first insight deals with specifically with the division of labor. Watt is concerned primarily with *Crusoe* as a novel; he considers *Crusoe* to be the first novel in that it focuses a good deal of attention on daily, ordinary activities.²⁸ Watt notes, for example, that Crusoe spends some time describing the process of making bread. One might think that such a description would be a bore for Defoe's contemporaries. In fact, however, many of Defoe's contemporaries were already so immersed in a division of labor that they had long since been removed from the experience of making something as humble as bread for themselves. Watt attributes the popular success of *Robinson Crusoe* to the fact that the division of labor had already succeeded, by Defoe's time, in stripping variety and stimulation from the ordinary reader's daily life. The appeal of Crusoe's adventures is a "measure of the depth of the deprivations involved in economic specialization."²⁹ Crusoe's adventures and activities are vicarious substitutes for the drudgery and narrowness of the specialized life.

The second insight to be gleaned from this section is a renewed emphasis on the social nature of man. There are at least *some* features of human life that are essentially social; that fact, however, introduces those issues of distributive and social justice that Murphy raises. If man is essentially social, is a social division of labor essential? In the next section, we will look at some of the social features of human life that appear to be missing from Crusoe's fantastic tale and move toward further issues that relate to a social division of labor.

The social aspects of the individual's life

In the previous section, the recognition of the social aspects of human life raised doubts about the plausibility of Robinson Crusoe's individualist adventure on one hand, while drawing attention to a possible inconsistency between Marx's doctrine of social man and his account of communist man in the *German Ideology* on the other. The criticism of the Crusoe tale harkens back to Plato and Aristotle, who claimed that man is essentially social in order to attain various practical and moral ends. A division of labor is necessary because, as Plato puts it positively, individuals are naturally endowed with different abilities that suit them for specific occupations; or as Aristotle puts it negatively, an individual cannot achieve self-sufficiency in solitude. The apparent problem for Marx is that although he accepts the social nature of man, he appears (in the eyes of some) to reduce man's social activity to the effort to satisfy individual needs—a problematic reduction if it is plausible that one *could* meet one's own needs entirely *without* the help of society. This is precisely what Crusoe's tale suggests. As Dupre contends, man's social needs are “deeper” than his economic needs. But what does this mean? Are these “deep” social needs such that, when recognized, Marx's claim about the social nature of man is reinforced but the ancient Greek claim that man fundamentally needs the help of others—thus requiring a social division of labor of *some* kind—is also reinforced? In securing the social nature of man, does one also secure a social division of labor? In this section, I will explore some of the social facets of human life. Language and education, production and exchange, and morality each have essentially social elements. Emile Durkheim, for instance, capitalizes on the social nature of morality to suggest that a social division of labor is morally justified. I will also consider the sexual division of labor and its possible role in grounding an entire structure of socially divided

labor. This discussion will introduce issues of social organization and hierarchy that will be explored in the next section.

Language is both the key to social interaction and a social product. Although a number of philosophers and thinkers have tackled the subject of language, let us attend here to the succinct account offered by Rousseau in his examination of the origin and foundations of human inequality. Rousseau's account serves as a direct predecessor for both Smith and Marx's claims about language and its relation to their overall projects. Rousseau claims that the "first language" was the crude "cry of Nature" that man in the state of nature used almost instinctively.³⁰ This language is preserved, so to speak, insofar as it is the language of the youngest infants who express hunger, illness, and vulnerability with their cries. But human experience involves more than such threats and dangers. There are a variety of other animals to confront (some harmless, others potentially harmful), foods to eat, and shelters to find and build. The variety of human experience, according to Rousseau, gradually leads to the diversification of sounds (and later symbols)—thus language develops. But, Rousseau admits, the first difficulty of his account is that it is difficult to "imagine how languages could have become necessary; for, men having no relationships with one another and no need of any [in a pre-civilized natural state], one cannot conceive the necessity or the possibility of this invention [language] if it was not indispensable."³¹ Rousseau's response to this difficulty signifies his break from the Lockean account of the state of nature. While careful not to hastily presume that "domestic dealings" between fathers, mothers, and children obtain among individuals in the state of nature, Rousseau credits the mother-child relationship as the primary locus for the origin and development of language.³² The relationship is bidirectional: the child learns increasingly articulate ways to convey its needs, and the mother instructs the child in manners of communication. Language,

then, evinces the social nature of man and it is essential to his development. The increasing diversification of linguistic expressions, according to Rousseau, leads to the development of thought and the extension of man's rational and discriminating powers.

Rousseau's insights about language and the social nature of man are echoed in the work of Smith and Marx. In his brief investigation into the origin of the division of labor in the *Wealth of Nations*, Smith suggests first that it originates in a "certain propensity in human nature...to truck, barter, and exchange."³³ But he further suggests that this propensity is the "necessary consequence of the faculties of reason and speech"—since speech enables and facilitates the exchange which gives rise to the division of labor. Marx also appeals to language as evidence in his case against Crusoe and what Marx saw as the classical economists' conception of human nature. Marx follows Rousseau in breaking from the notion that each man is naturally independent and enters society only when self-interest encourages it and contract enforces it. Marx claims that the notion of an isolated yet "civilized" individual like Crusoe is "as great an absurdity as the ideal of the development of language without individuals living together and talking to one another."³⁴ But the invocation of the social nature of language by both Smith and Marx does not, of course, lead them to have similar views about the division of labor. Smith thinks that language facilitates the exchange that in turn fosters a division of labor. Marx, however, criticizes the liberal, natural rights leanings of Smith and his philosophical forefather—Locke—by claiming that language shows that there is no such thing (in a state of nature) as an isolated individual whose society and economy is constructed on self-interest and contractual relationships.

Marx's remark about language occurs within the context of his contention that material production is social. Marx believes that the political economy of classical economists like Smith

had an erroneous starting-point: the solitary individual. Marx accuses Smith and others of failing to recognize the historical development of man. Marx claims that in failing to recognize this, classical political economy overlooks the fundamentally social nature of man and his productive activity. This appeal to the social nature of production has a two-fold purpose (a la Bloch's claims noted in the previous chapter). For one thing, Marx wants to suggest that capitalist forms of production are themselves products of "a certain stage of social development."³⁵ This enables Marx to further claim that capitalism is a form that can (and must) be outgrown by the development of new means of production—means that draw men nearer to their fundamentally social (rather than fragmented, individualized, and alienated) nature. So although Smith accepts exchange as a social phenomenon, Marx argues that this conflicts with Smith's inheritance from Locke—namely, the supposed individuality and self-interest upon which civil society (for Locke) or the economic structure (for Smith) are built. But as we have seen in the commentary of Dupre and Murphy, Marx himself appears susceptible to the charge of accepting an individualist account of man in his account of communist man, who is able to engage in a wide variety of projects much like Crusoe. Having already visited this issue, we will pass it by here; however, we can use Marx's insistence on the social nature of man's language and productive activity as part of his criticism of the division of labor to catapult us into another social aspect of life—morality—and an account that, unlike that of Marx, uses the social nature of man in order to present the increasing division of labor as the moral imperative of contemporary life.

Emile Durkheim addresses *The Division of Labor in Society* to what he perceives as the "crisis" of morality in his day.³⁶ This "crisis," simply put, is the increasing fragmentation of society and the rise of individualism. Durkheim's concern with social fragmentation is, of course, nothing new; Plato, Aristotle, and Adam Smith saw the need for some kind of

governmental or economic structure to link the individual to others in a manner that benefits both. Writing in the wake of Darwin, Durkheim attempts to cast this crisis in evolutionary terms; a la Marx (who dedicated *Capital* to Darwin), Durkheim suggests that in the course of social development, existing institutions become no longer suitable to present conditions. In such cases, a new social order is needed. Durkheim cites the proliferation of activities in society (enabled in part by new technologies and industries) for creating conditions under which “the ties which bind the individual to his family, to his native soil, to traditions which the past has given to him, to collective group usages, become loose.”³⁷ Durkheim reacts to this loosening of ties by suggesting that new ties be established: “[I]n order for morality to remain constant, that is to say, in order for the individual to remain attached to the group with a force equal to that of yesterday, the ties which bind him to it must become stronger and more numerous.” What will provide these new ties? Nationalism? Religion? No—the answer is *the division of labor*. Durkheim agrees with economists in asserting that the division of labor is “the supreme law of human societies and the condition of their progress.”³⁸ The division of labor is the source of social solidarity, of binding individuals to one another—and “everything which is a source of solidarity is moral.”³⁹ Durkheim has exploited the social nature of morality, insofar as morality governs the interactions between individuals, to argue that the division of labor—the “chief source of solidarity”—is inherently moral, indeed the “foundation of the moral order.”⁴⁰

Durkheim appropriates the language of earlier moral philosophers like Kant and Hegel for his own use, claiming that there is a “categorical imperative” for each individual to fulfill a “determinate function”—i.e., a specific place in a social division of labor.⁴¹ At the end of the previous chapter, I initiated the transition from the issue of human capacities to the issue of the individual’s relationship to others by posing a question from Durkheim: “Is it our duty to seek to

become a thorough and complete human being, one quite sufficient unto oneself; or on the contrary, to be only a part of a whole, the organ of an organism?" Durkheim's own answer should not surprise us here: specialization lifts individuals to a more "profound" level of development while binding them to other specialized laborers. "Why would there be more dignity in being complete and mediocre," Durkheim asks rhetorically, "rather than in living a more specialized, but more intense life?" Durkheim claims that the division of labor, even if it diminishes the individual to some degree as the critics suggest, produces the far greater benefits of social complementation and "fraternity."⁴² If Durkheim's interpretation is correct, then one might say that the division of labor completes the realization of the motto of the French Revolution: 'liberty' and 'equality' have been secured in the rights of man, but his true 'fraternity' is found in the social solidarity that is the function of the extensive division of labor.

Durkheim does not base his entire system solely on the need for solidarity in contemporary society. In fact, he extends his claims about evolution to take the position that the division of labor has a biological foundation, with an origin "contemporaneous with the coming of life into the world."⁴³ The coming of human life into the world is, of course, a function of a sexual division of labor (so to speak) between men and women. The sexual division of labor is a crucial issue in the evaluation of the division of labor generally. As a natural division of labor, whatever division can be built justifiably on its basis may claim to be an equally "natural"—i.e., inevitable and morally unassailable—feature of human life. Does a sexual division of labor justify an industrial division of labor (as Durkheim suggests)? Or is a sexual division of labor something to be treated separately from more contemporary (and perhaps artificial) divisions of labor? Because human procreation is sexual (at least to this point in human history!), it seems

that the sexual division of labor is the fundamental fact that establishes not only man's social nature, but some social division of labor as well.

An ambiguity regarding the notion of the sexual division of labor must be clarified before proceeding. 'The sexual division of labor' may refer either to the separate roles performed by male and female in procreation (in which case the division of labor is based on physiological differences between male and female) or to a social division of labor drawn along sexual lines *without necessarily appealing to the physiological/procreative differences between male and female*. An example of the latter use of 'sexual division of labor' would be a society in which men serve primarily as postal workers, bankers, lawyers, and politicians while women serve primarily as housekeepers, bakers, clothiers, teachers, and so on. There is little if anything about each of these occupations that *requires* that they be filled by members of one sex exclusively; nonetheless, it is not difficult to conceive of a society (or identify ones in history or in the contemporary world) in which occupations are divided along sexual lines. For the purpose of our investigation here, I take it for granted that sexual divisions of labor of the second type (those unrelated to some relevant physiological difference between men and women) are inherently unjustifiable—at least by an appeal to natural sexual differences. Our concern is with the sexual division of labor that exists in procreation. How far can this division be carried in order to justify broader divisions of labor within society? This is an important issue in the evaluation of the division of labor—one of the many that are being identified in the course of this investigation that deserve greater attention if there is to be some progress in the evaluation of the division of labor. Not all of the issues may be addressed here; for present purposes, I shall consider Plato's account of the sexual division of labor as it relates to the guardian class. Regarding the supposition I have taken for granted—namely, that a division of labor that separates occupations

along sexual lines is unjustifiable when those occupations have nothing to do with the physiological differences between the sexes—I wish to offer the account of Plato in its support. Plato argues that at least among the guardians (he says little about the other classes in this regard), the sexual division of labor in procreation is not enough to justify the occupational division of labor within the state along sexual lines.

Plato opens his discussion of the sexual division of labor by reminding us of a key principle guiding the division of labor: not just any physical difference between individuals justifies the occupational division of labor, but differences that are “pertinent to the pursuits themselves.”⁴⁴ Now Plato is not a perfect egalitarian when it comes to the sexes: Socrates claims, for example, that women excel at such things as “the watching of pancakes and the boiling pot,” and “broadly speaking,” Socrates’ interlocutor Glaucon notes, “one sex [women] is far surpassed by the other [men] in everything.”⁴⁵ Although Plato thinks the female sex generally weaker than its counterpart, he claims that “the natural capacities [relevant to the occupations within the city] are distributed alike among both creatures, and women naturally share in all pursuits and men in all.”⁴⁶ With respect to procreation, male and female differ in kind; with respect to all other occupations within the city, their differences are a matter of degree only.

Nickolas Pappas is quick to note that Plato’s account of the sexual division of labor in procreation seems confined only to childbirth—it fails to attend sufficiently to matters of *childrearing*.⁴⁷ Insofar as Plato’s account assumes “a divorce between bearing and rearing children,” Pappas claims that Plato can avoid a more complex social division of labor built upon the sexual division of labor in procreation. Suppose, for example, that women are relegated not only to giving birth, but to attending to children’s education, health and welfare. As childrearing

is much more demanding (in terms of time, effort, and resources) than the mere act of childbirth, those relegated to childrearing will depend greatly upon the labor of others at other stations in the city. Childrearing has often been taken (rightly or wrongly) to be the province of the female sex, as a natural extension of their role in childbirth. For his part, Plato seems to recognize the ramifications of extending the sexual division of labor in procreation to matters of childrearing. Plato radically suggests (as Pappas notes) an abolition of the family in the guardian class in order to assure that men and women (particularly women, it seems) are free to take up the other responsibilities in the state to which each sex is equipped (albeit women to a lesser degree).

In spite of his roughly egalitarian stance on the relation between men and women (at least in the guardian class), Plato's insistence that one sex is "weaker" than the other reintroduces a subject for our consideration. In this section, we have been looking at various social aspects of human life: language and education, production and exchange, and the relationship between the sexes. Humans depend on society for their acquisition of language, for production and exchange of goods in order to meet their needs, and for the procreation of their species. The latter, in particular, obviously has its roots in natural, physiological differences between men and women. To the extent that sexual differences initiate some division of labor, Plato suggests a *hierarchical* distinction between the sexes—one is "weaker" than the other. More broadly, the division of labor (sexual or otherwise) may be approached in terms of the hierarchies that it establishes (or tends to establish) between individuals within society. The division of labor, as Durkheim suggests, may be the key to social organization and solidarity; at the same time, however, it may introduce contentious hierarchical distinctions that make the extensive division of labor something to be thrown off rather than maintained.

Social organization, hierarchies, and the division of labor

No man, it seems clear, is an island from birth until death. Human life has an essentially social side: one learns language, acquires many skills, receives care in times of vulnerability, and procures a number of goods to satisfy needs through social interaction. In fact, none of this is possible without the procreative relationship between male and female in the first place. Man is a social animal; but what is the extent of his relationship with society? While it is clear that an individual depends upon a mother and father for the fact of one's existence, at what point does one (or should one) leave off from social dependence and take up an individual, (roughly) independent existence? If the social needs of individuals go beyond those of procreation, what other forms of social interaction may obtain between individuals? And how does this relate to the division of labor? The social division of labor has been treated as a manner of social organization, a fact worthy either of mythological justification, rational defense, or careful examination and criticism. For the social division of labor tends very quickly to devolve from what one might think of as an "association of equals" into a hierarchical system, a social stratification in which some members' lives and interests are considered inferior to the lives and interests of other members.

Beyond his dependence upon the procreative relationship, the individual of our day is thrust into an almost perplexing array of social interactions. A young child begins to interact early with pediatricians, babysitters, teachers, playmates, and others. These social relationships tend only to develop and multiply over time. The fact of man's social existence—a fact true not only of our day, but of all human history—gives rise to a problem of *organization*. For economist Louis Putterman, this problem is essentially an economic one. According to Putterman, contemporary economists agree that there is a *coordination problem* in modern,

complex societies.⁴⁸ The problem is this: what is the most effective social organization for bringing individuals into contact with one another in order to meet their various individual (and social) needs? Andrew Sayer and Richard Walker agree with Putterman in claiming that organization is an economic problem; in their view, “the economic problem” is “not so much the allocation of scarce resources”—typically thought to be the essential problem in economics—but “the orchestration of social labor to achieve and sustain the kind of productivity that overcomes classic scarcities, and to put that enormous productive power to effective and good use by meeting the needs and desires of the largest number of people.”⁴⁹

One way to solve the coordination problem is to appeal to some kind of naturally-endowed or God-ordained social order. Plato seems to have presaged the cold reception that the new social order proposed in the *Republic* would receive, especially among the citizens who were to be arranged in his proposed fashion. To make this social order palatable, Plato famously offers the “noble lie.”⁵⁰ Plato intends this lie to persuade the rulers—or even the city as a whole—of the propriety of the social order. Socrates wishes to persuade the rulers, soldiers, and the rest of the citizens that the education and training that led them into their respective positions within the city was a dream; in reality, he claims, all citizens were first “down within the earth being molded and fostered.” At the appropriate time, their mother earth gave birth to them. They are brothers, and each has a duty to defend the motherland and his brothers. The brothers are not equally precious, however; according to Plato, God has fashioned the members of each class by mingling gold with the rulers, silver with the soldiers, and iron and brass with the workers. Although the elements of the various classes may intermingle to some degree—a child of gold parents, for example, may have some silver in him—most generally breed after their kinds. On the basis of these natural endowments of certain metals, the rulers must order the city

appropriately: “they shall by no means give way to pity in their treatment of them [the members of the various classes], but shall assign to each the status due to his nature.” Socrates admits that this is a tall tale to tell; Glaucon, in fact, believes that it will be believed only by those who succeed the first generation of citizens. This is ultimately well and good for Socrates, however, since the point of the “noble lie” is to persuade the citizenry to accept his new—and openly *hierarchical*—social order. He who is mingled with iron and brass, for example, must not complain about his position because it is given to him by nature in a way that is supposed to bind him to his brothers and his homeland.

Although they do not mention it explicitly, Sayer and Walker see only nefarious purposes in stories such as Plato’s noble lie. In their view, the “magic” of the division of labor is the manner in which it can be used to attain and maintain power over others—power that is all-too-often abused. This can happen, they claim, “with the help of mystifications, denials, and exclusions”—such as those offered in Plato’s noble lie.⁵¹ We must not be “inured to” differentials of power that exist in the division of labor; instead, the division of labor, on their view, deserves a renewed examination. Setting aside the more mystical justifications of the division of labor, Sayer and Walker propose an examination of the division of labor *as it is*—i.e., as it actually structures a differentiated society.

It is one thing for a division of labor to order individuals according to their various talents without imposing a hierarchical structure upon them. Yet hierarchy is a latent feature of Plato’s division of labor. Furthermore, hierarchical order may be seen as either a strength or weakness of the social system. In *The Division of Labor and Welfare*, Louis Putterman observes that Smith intended the division of labor to make citizens of workers while accelerating technological progress. Marx, however, decries the oppressive relationship that the capitalist division of labor

introduces between the bourgeoisie (the capital-owners) and the proletariat (the wage-laborers), as well as the laborer's alienation from the product of his labor.⁵² One way or the other, Putterman suggests, the division of labor affects the welfare of all who live under it. Although anxious to recognize and preserve its advantages, Putterman argues that one of the most serious problems resulting from the extensive division of labor is the increased subjection and vulnerability of the worker.⁵³ The differentiation of workers under a division of labor unfortunately tends toward unequal distributions of wealth: "[the] differentiation of roles and of incomes in modern societies appear to be closely related."⁵⁴ Putterman is modest in noting only the differentiation of wealth distribution that occurs as a result of a division of labor; Sayer and Walker suggest in addition that the division of labor creates and reinforces (at least partially through unequal distributions of wealth) the often-oppressive divisions of class, race, and gender.⁵⁵ While contemporary economists hold out hope that a truly free market will attain a "general economic equilibrium" in which each participant in the economy receives back exactly what he contributed to it, Putterman claims that this exemplifies ignorance of real social inequalities of the present. Furthermore, the social division of labor—thanks to its contemporary complexity—has itself become a tool of mystification that veils widespread exploitation. Under a complex division of labor, workers have no way of knowing what their work contributes to the value of products—hence, they cannot easily tell when their effort is being exploited by profiteering. The social division of labor is no longer in need of a Platonic "noble lie" for its justification, since its existence is now preserved by its role in mystifying the nature of production and profit-making. Putterman cites political scientist John Roemer's remarks on the matter:

Because of the social division of labor, [a worker] has no clear conception of the amount of labor that is necessary to produce the goods he consumes. Thus, the social division of labor—the arrangement by which no worker in modern capitalism produces all the goods that make up his consumption bundle—obscures the relation of exploitation between capitalist and worker.⁵⁶

The social division of labor, from the time of Plato to the present, has been treated as an essential feature of the social order. Whether or not that social order is benevolent or malevolent is another question. While some have held out hope that the social division of labor is the key to realizing justice, universal opulence, or simply holding a society together, there is some legitimate concern that it contributes to—and reinforces—oppression, inequality, and the degradation of workers' mental and physical abilities. Adam Smith appears to have been right: the march of globalization has expanded markets to such a size that the division of labor is becoming exceptionally minute. The difference and interdependence increasingly found between workers, corporations, nations and geographical regions opens the door wide to hierarchies of exploitation—indeed, as Sayer and Walker put it, “[the] division of labor is a prime structuring force” in such a society.⁵⁷ Ideally or actually, the division of labor serves as an all-important link between individuals—indeed, between the individual and society as a whole. The specific character of a division of labor affects the degree of self-sufficiency or dependence for individuals and societies. Self-sufficiency and dependence are central issues when discussing the proper relationship between the individual and society—and they are of all the more concern to the evaluation of the division of labor as a feature that structures the link between the two.

Self-sufficiency and dependency

Labor is the means by which man secures that which satisfies his needs. Simple as this formulation is, some reasonable questions might be asked. What are man's needs? Are there only the needs of the individual, or are there also social needs? How well-suited is the individual for satisfying these needs? Not only do these questions bring us to the key topics of this dissertation—including the effects of labor, the capacities of man, the nature of human nature (whether man is fundamentally individual or social), and so on—but they bring us to two key issues in accounts of the individual's economic relationship to others: the related issues of *self-sufficiency* and *dependency*.

It is difficult to articulate the proper bounds of the individual and society in their relationship to one another. At stake in the process of delineation is a number of individual and social interests. One typically tries to strike a balance between such oft-competing interests as the following: individual autonomy and social cohesion; private and public property; individual and social welfare; and so on. It is tempting to give emphasis to one side of these pairs at the expense of the other. Plato and Aristotle, for example, give priority to the city-state over the individual on the presumption, made explicit in Aristotle, that the solitary individual cannot attain what he can in society. For Plato, individuality is sacrificed for social order; once an individual's naturally-endowed abilities are ascertained, he is to be assigned to his position in society by the guardians, who shall "by no means give way to pity in their treatment" of him! On the other side, the tale of Robinson Crusoe is meant to illustrate individual self-sufficiency in all its glory—the attainment of what Watt calls the "three associated tendencies of modern civilization: absolute economic, social and intellectual freedom for the individual."⁵⁸ For Crusoe, society is sacrificed for individual freedom. The problem with Crusoe's condition, Watt

suggests in turn, is that it neglects the individual's dependence upon society and the actual psychological ill-effects of solitude. In the end, whether the individual is sacrificed to society or vice versa, there seem to be some unsettling outcomes. Returning to the issues of self-sufficiency and dependency, Plato and Aristotle suggest that individual self-sufficiency is impossible; it is attained only within a body politic in which individuals play their part and depend on others for the sake of societal self-sufficiency. Crusoe embodies the modern liberal tendency to favor the individual at the expense of society; the self-sufficient, self-made, independent individual is truly 'economic man' (*homo economicus*)—the hero that suffices his needs entirely through his own labor.

In spite of their prominence in evaluations of the division of labor, the notions of self-sufficiency and dependency are not uniformly clear. Each notion includes an individual and a social sense—i.e., one can talk of individual or social self-sufficiency and individual or social dependency. Furthermore, the individual and social senses of self-sufficiency and dependency each admit of positive and negative interpretations—e.g., one may consider the state of a self-sufficient Crusoe either laudable or pitiable. Because the division of labor may be evaluated in terms of self-sufficiency and dependency, it is worth noting the various ways in which these notions may be understood and some of the questions that need to be answered if their use is to be clarified.

The self-sufficient individual is best exemplified by Crusoe. Crusoe is exceptionally well-rounded; necessity forces him to develop a wide variety of skills that had lain dormant in his earlier life amid society. Crusoe's state epitomizes individual independence in that he relies on practically no one for the satisfaction of his various needs. The appeal of Crusoe's condition is tempered, however, in the light of other considerations. Crusoe's successes are due, at least in

part, to the tools that he seizes from the shipwreck—tools that he neither invented nor built. The quality of Crusoe’s independent life hinges on the use of these tools. Had he been shipwrecked *without* such tools (perhaps even without an awareness of such tools), what might his condition have been then? Perhaps he would have lived a life more like that of another literary and cinematic figure: Tarzan. Tarzan did not have many of the amenities of Crusoe thanks to the fact that Tarzan, even more so than Crusoe, was bereft of the benefits of society—including tools and modern education. Tarzan’s physical abilities are certainly quite keen; but he does not have the “Castle” that Crusoe builds on his island!⁵⁹

Social self-sufficiency is the goal of the polities outlined by Plato and Aristotle. Individuals are thought to be deficient in certain things, so they need society in order to meet their needs. Working together, a society can attain the self-sufficiency that eludes the individual. A well-ordered society has a kind of aesthetic appeal by appearing to be a state of harmony, justice, and well-being for all. Again, however, is the attainment of such a condition plausible—and if it is, is it laudable? Plato is forced to tell a “noble lie” to make his social order palatable; Smith and a number of contemporary economists rely on an “invisible hand” or the power of the market to attain “general economic equilibrium” in order to guarantee the social order they envision. In the meantime, collective self-sufficiency is often attained at the expense of individual development. It is the collective—the state, the city, the factory—that succeeds through the relegation of individuals to certain tasks. Collective entities themselves may be limited by geographical location, number of members, availability of resources, and so on—hampering their ability to achieve an entirely self-sufficient society.

The dependent individual appears as a “crippled monstrosity” who is either at the mercy of exploitative individuals and exposed to the risks and “vicissitudes” of the market (in Marx’s

view) or the epitome of a civic-minded, cooperative citizen (in Plato's or Smith's view). The condition of the dependent individual is pertinent in that it appears to match the genuine plight of the human individual: no matter how well-endowed or practiced one is, no matter how many resources are available, the solitary individual seems unable to meet certain needs—or attain the heights of culture—*by his own effort alone*. The individual faces all sorts of practical (perhaps even some essential) limitations. Does this make him a “crippled monstrosity” or vital role-player in the community? Is the difference between these two only a matter of degree—i.e., the “crippled monstrosity” is somehow more severely dependent than the citizen? How is this to be cashed out? The picture of dependent man appears to be a Gestalt entity that can be evaluated in almost diametrically opposite ways.

Finally, society itself can be dependent upon other individuals and societies for the satisfaction of its needs. This situation is in many ways that of the individual's writ large: a society may be underdeveloped and vulnerable in its state of dependency, or it may be seen as an integral part of an increasingly interlinked world of communities. On one hand, Great Britain's dependence on imported food or the United States' dependence on imported oil signify a potential threat to national security; on the other hand, the increasing globalization of the economy allows interdependent nations to exchange resources, goods, and services with one another in mutually beneficial (though at times exploitative) trades. The exposure to risk that a dependent country faces has long served as a spur for countries to seek the resources necessary for self-sufficiency—projects often attended by wars and other international tensions.

The variegated nature of the notions of self-sufficiency and dependency makes these two terms surprisingly rich sources of confusion and disagreement in evaluations of the division of labor. Labor is divided; is this division proper given the dependent nature of individuals, or is

the height of human development the stage at which each individual most fully realizes his or her potential? Is self-sufficiency (whether of the individual or the state) a proper end to which some division of labor is well-suited? Are individuals suited to fit into a social division of labor, or does a division of labor fetter individual development? The questions could continue; simply put, the notions of self-sufficiency and dependency are often key parts of accounts and evaluations of the division of labor, and they have been noted here insofar as they relate to the issue of the proper relationship between the individual and society.

A final word: Smith's "inconsistency" and the lingering need for a clear position on the relationship between the individual and society

Back in Chapter 1, I noted that Moghaddam makes a significant—albeit brief and modest—point early in *The Specialized Society*. Moghaddam distinguishes two ideas—*individual actualization* and *collective actualization*—and he astutely notes that they are in “conflict,” only to emphasize individual actualization as a response to the collectivizing, anti-individualist tendencies of the extensive division of labor.⁶⁰ He says little more about the conflict, however, and leaves the nature of the proper balance between the two (which is presumably to be attained, since Moghaddam finds some value in collective activity) as a matter to be sorted out elsewhere. At the time, I sided with Moghaddam: when it comes to specialization, the division of labor has some derogatory effects upon individual development. The foregoing sections of this chapter, however, show that much can be said both for and against the division of labor from the standpoint of man's *social* nature. The division of labor is a tremendously complex matter—so complex, in fact, that one can emphasize either side of the individual/collective relationship and rule either in favor of or against a division of labor. At its

heart, the division of labor requires that one make strides toward settling the “conflict” between the individual and society. If one side is to be favored over the other, one must take care to show why this is the case.

In spite of the praise that he heaps upon the division of labor in Book I of the *Wealth of Nations*, Adam Smith appears rather keenly attuned to its attendant problems—even though he delays any mention of these problems until Book V. This has led some (notably E.G. West) to argue that Smith is guilty of inconsistency and two-facedness.⁶¹ What Smith praises in one place, he expresses doubts about in another. Smith seems to recognize without pause that while the division of labor serves society through increased productivity and the advancement toward “universal opulence,” it can have disastrous effects upon individual workers. The supposed inconsistency between Books I and V is at least in part a matter of the conflict between society and the individual: which should come out on top?

In response to West’s accusations, Nathan Rosenberg argues that there is only an “apparent” contradiction between Books I and V. His position hinges on a crucial aspect of Smith’s view in the *Wealth of Nations*: what Rosenberg calls the “determinants of inventive activity.”⁶² One of the circumstances to which Smith attributes the productive success of the division of labor is the facilitation of *invention*. Insofar as the division of labor allows laborers to focus greater attention on more specific tasks, the laborers are in a position to invent new machines or discover new technologies that enhance productivity. But as the division of labor progresses, an individual laborer performs increasingly simple operations, tending to make him “as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become.”⁶³ How can a stupid laborer facilitate invention? Rosenberg’s answer is surprisingly simple and calloused: *he cannot*. Rosenberg claims—not without reason—that although “simpler inventions” may have been

developed by a single individual, many new inventions require complex thought and effort. Rosenberg cites a passage from an early draft of the *Wealth of Nations* in which Smith claims that even some of the basic inventions of agriculture and milling “were probably not all of them the inventions of one man, but the successive discoveries of time and experience, and of the ingenuity of many different artists.”⁶⁴ On Rosenberg’s interpretation of Smith, most new inventions are accumulations of *social* efforts, especially as the requisite knowledge for such inventions becomes increasingly complex and extensive. Even philosophy—in which Smith thinks the highest levels of invention are attained—is the product of the division of labor. According to Smith, the progress of the social division of labor gives rise to an occupation in which one’s “peculiar trade” is “not to do any thing, but to observe every thing; and who, upon that account, [is] often capable of combining together the power of the most distant and dissimilar objects” in the process of invention.⁶⁵ The forces in the developing social division of labor that relegate certain individuals into increasingly narrow occupations are counterbalanced by forces that allow for the advent of philosophy and the development of “the collective intelligence of society.”⁶⁶ Rosenberg bluntly puts the situation as follows:

In an advanced society with an extensive division of labour...the intellectual attainments of the “labouring poor” are *hopelessly stultified and corrupted* by the monotony and uniformity of the work process. On the other hand, such a society is made up of an endlessly variegated number of such activities, and *although the worker’s own personal assignment may be unchallenging and lacking in significant opportunities, the sum total of the occupations in society presents extraordinary opportunities for the detached and contemplative philosophers.* ...The *collective intelligence* of the civilized society...is very great and presents unique and unprecedented opportunities for further technical progress....[A]lthough the division of labour has *potentially disastrous effects upon the*

moral and intellectual qualities of the labour force, and although Smith was seriously concerned with these effects, he did not fear that such developments would constitute a serious impediment to continued technological change.”⁶⁷ [Emphases added.]

If Rosenberg’s interpretation of Smith is correct, then Smith uses the holy grail of technological change and collective intelligence as an excuse to grind the faces of “the great body of the people”—the laboring poor. Is the product worth the price? This is the unasked question in Smith’s analysis. Failing to take care to explain to us *why* collective intelligence is to be bought with the intellectual and physical degradation of a mass of individuals is precisely why Smith’s account of the division of labor has met with virulent criticism in certain quarters. The tension still exists, I believe, between the claims that Smith makes in Books I and V. It is a tension that neither Smith nor Moghaddam effectively resolves: what is the proper relationship between the individual and the collective? Both Smith (on Rosenberg’s reading) and Moghaddam emphasize one side of the relationship over the other, and while there may be something appealing to each of their accounts, not enough has been said to determine *why* one ought to be emphasized over the other or *how* they ought to be balanced more effectively. *These* are the kinds of questions that trouble the various accounts and evaluations of the division of labor. What makes the evaluation of the division of labor so difficult is that in many cases, evaluations appeal to various and occasionally conflicting values and goals. We may want increased productivity, but not at the price of making the laborer a “crippled monstrosity.” We may want individuals to achieve their potential more fully, but we find that putting an end to the division of labor (or integrating it substantially) puts at risk a significant portion of our cultural, intellectual and social accomplishments. The purpose of the work to this point has been to identify some key issues surrounding the division of labor—issues on which some clarification is

needed if there is to be any progress, not only in the evaluation of the division of labor, but in its *redirection* along the lines that we determine to be most important. In the final section of this work, I shall offer my own positions on a number of the issues raised in this new-found framework of examination that draws attention to the effects of the division of labor, the nature of human capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and society. These issues will be key to the evaluation and redirection of the division of labor in the years to come.

Notes:

¹ Averroes. *Averroes' Commentary on Plato's Republic*, ed. and trans. E. I. J. Rosenthal (New York: The Cambridge University Press, 1966), I.i.1-I.ii.5.

² Ryan, "Human Nature in Hobbes and Rousseau," 13. This passage was quoted earlier (on p. 81); Ryan is commenting on Rousseau's search for an account of human nature to be used as a standard against which social institutions may be assessed.

³ Nickolas Pappas. *Plato and the Republic* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 102.

⁴ This quote—and the others that follow in this paragraph—may be found in Aristotle, *Politics*, 1253a1-39.

⁵ Alfredo Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle* (New York: The Cambridge University Press, 2001), 353.

⁶ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), §138.

⁷ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 220-221.

⁸ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in *Selected Writings*, 98.

⁹ Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1, in *Selected Writings*, 513-515.

¹⁰ Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, in *Selected Writings*, 99.

¹¹ Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, in *Selected Writings*, 172.

¹² Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *Selected Writings*, 185.

¹³ Daniel Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Michael Shinagel (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1975).

¹⁴ Marx, *Grundrisse*, in *Selected Writings*, 380-381.

¹⁵ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 220.

¹⁶ Maximillian E. Novak, "The Economic Meaning of *Robinson Crusoe*," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Robinson Crusoe*, ed. Frank H. Ellis (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), 97.

¹⁷ Daniel Defoe, *A General History of Trade* (1713), quoted in Novak, "The Economic Meaning of Robinson Crusoe," 97.

¹⁸ Ian Watt, "*Robinson Crusoe*: Individualism and the Novel," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Crusoe*, 51.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁰ Novak, "The Economic Meaning of *Robinson Crusoe*," 108.

²¹ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 220.

²² Louis Dupre, *The Philosophical Foundations of Marxism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1966), 226-227.

²³ *Ibid.*, 227.

²⁴ Watt, "*Crusoe*: Individualism and the Novel," 40-41.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁶ *Ibid.* 50.

²⁷ Defoe, *Crusoe*, 5.

²⁸ Watt, "*Crusoe*: Individualism and the Novel," 48. Watt notes some other ways in which the division of labor has made the novel possible. The division of labor leads to a proliferation of occupations in a manner that not only increases the number of characters with which the protagonist (and others) may interact, but also diversifies the attitudes and experiences that one may encounter. In terms of the readers of novels, the division of labor improves productivity to the point that workers are afforded some leisure time—they are not constantly at work (presumably,

at least) in order to satisfy their basic needs. As we shall see shortly, the division of labor also degrades the quality of life for its mass audience to the point that certain kinds of adventures and stories appeal to the audience thanks to the drudgery of specialized labor (pp. 45-46).

²⁹ Ibid., 46. Watt quotes T. H. Green: "In the progressive division of labour, while we become more useful as citizens, we seem to lose our completeness as men... the perfect organization of modern society removes the excitement of adventure and the occasion for independent effort. There is less of human interest to touch us within our calling... The alleviation [of this situation] is to be found in the newspaper and the novel."

³⁰ Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 148:27.

³¹ Ibid., 146:25.

³² Ibid., 147:25.

³³ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 13.

³⁴ Marx, *Grundrisse*, in *Selected Writings*, 381.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Durkheim, *The Division of Labor*, 408.

³⁷ Ibid., 400.

³⁸ Ibid., 34.

³⁹ Ibid., 398.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 401.

⁴¹ Ibid., 43. Kant referred to the 'categorical imperative.' In an exemplary passage from the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel criticizes those who refuse to settle into "a particular social position." Hegel is concerned, very broadly speaking, with making the abstract concrete; hence, it is essential that man come down from some of his abstract, lofty aspirations and take up an actual, determinate position in society. Doing so is essential if one is to make real progress towards those abstract goals. See Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, §207.

⁴² Ibid., 402-405.

⁴³ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁴ Plato, *Republic*, 454c.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 455c-d.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 455d-e.

⁴⁷ Pappas, *Plato and the Republic*, 102-103.

⁴⁸ Louis Putterman, *Division of Labor and Welfare* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 30.

⁴⁹ Sayer and Walker, *The New Social Economy*, 6.

⁵⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 414b-415d.

⁵¹ Sayer and Walker, *The New Social Economy*, 5.

⁵² Putterman, *Division of Labor and Welfare*, 28.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 32.

⁵⁵ Sayer and Walker, *The New Social Economy*, 9.

⁵⁶ Putterman, *Division of Labor and Welfare*, 37. Roemer's original remark can be found in John Roemer, *Free to Lose: An Introduction to Marxist Economic Philosophy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 46-47.

⁵⁷ Sayer and Walker, *The New Social Economy*, 10.

⁵⁸ Watt, "Crusoe: Individualism and the Novel," 49.

⁵⁹ Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 152.

⁶⁰ Moghaddam, *The Specialized Society*, 4.

⁶¹ E. G. West, "Adam Smith's Two Views on the Division of Labour," *Economica* 31, no. 121 (February, 1964): 23-32.

⁶² Nathan Rosenberg, "Adam Smith on the Division of Labour: Two Views or One?" *Economica*, New Series 32, no. 126 (May, 1965): 128.

⁶³ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 734.

⁶⁴ Rosenberg, "Adam Smith on the Division of Labour," 132. Smith's original remark may be found in W. R. Scott, *Adam Smith as Student and Professor* (Glasgow: University of Glasgow Press, 1937), 337.

⁶⁵ Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 10.

⁶⁶ Rosenberg, "Adam Smith on the Division of Labour," 135.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 136-137 and 138-139.

Chapter 5: Addressing Issues, Making Changes, and Facing a Dilemma: How the Framework Offers a Powerful Approach to the Division of Labor

We have considered some historical attacks on—and defenses of—the division of labor; but why should contemporary philosophers concern themselves with the subject? The answer is simple in words but complex in meaning: *it affects human life*. It has a hand in shaping our occupations, our communities, our institutions, our character—even our consciousness. This is why, perhaps, some highly influential figures in the history of philosophy address the division of labor in one context or another. Consider two examples: Plato and Adam Smith. In the continuing debates about justice in the philosophical, political, and social realms—regarding its nature, its obligations, and its attainment—Plato’s early and lasting contribution rests on the notion of a division of labor within the polity. In the modern world, the powerful tendencies toward industrialization and commodification are spurred, in a significant way, by Adam Smith’s observations about the productivity of the division of labor and its promise to improve the material well-being of all. For both Plato and Smith, the division of labor is a central feature of their positions on key moral, political, and economic questions that are still relevant today.

Yet in spite of the attention directed toward the division of labor by philosophers and other scholars, the contemporary situation is particularly difficult—if only because the division of labor is so extensive and entrenched. In their recent revisiting of questions surrounding the division of labor, Andrew Sayer and Richard Walker argue that the extent of the division of labor helps to keep its effects (especially the negative ones) hidden from consciousness. Thanks to the division of labor, one often does not know the origins of what one consumes and the destinations of what one produces.¹ Insofar, therefore, as the maltreatment of workers, the misuse of natural resources, and human inequality are important issues of our time, the division of labor is not only

a contributing factor to these problems but it is part of what makes it difficult for one to attain the overarching level of awareness needed to identify and begin to address them. In a sense, Sayer and Walker are challenging the favorable accounts of Plato and Smith—and it is this kind of contraposition, involving both historical and contemporary concerns, that gives life to the contemporary debate about the division of labor.

In the preceding three chapters, I have sought to establish the viability of a framework for examining accounts of the division of labor by using it to explore influential accounts from the history of philosophy. But this was only one goal of my project; the other goal was to use the framework in order to provide helpful structure and guidance to contemporary debates about the division of labor while considering how it might be restructured to better serve human needs and aspirations. Assumptions about the three key elements of the framework—the effects of labor, the nature of human capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and society—are not only pivotal in historical accounts, but they also play important roles in the contemporary debate. For this debate to progress, it is essential that participants hash out their disagreements on these key issues; here, I aim to fire the first volleys in this restructured—and, I believe, much more promising—debate.

In this chapter, I will revisit the subjects of each of the previous three chapters—along with Moghaddam’s work, the subject of the first chapter—in order to offer my contributions to the debate about the division of labor in terms of the framework that I have provided. In the first section, I revisit the distinction—drawn primarily in Chapter 2—between the practical and moral effects of the division of labor. I suggest that this distinction has become blurred, thanks in no small part to Adam Smith, and I add that this tendency to conflate the two kinds of effects (e.g., to see the best economic decision as the best moral decision) undercuts alternative standpoints

from which one can assess the division of labor. Reestablishing the difference between economic and moral values will be crucial to a meaningful critique of the division of labor going forward. In the second section, I renew my rejection (from Chapter 4) of the view that the sexual division of labor in procreation justifies more extensive divisions of labor. I also find—following James Murphy and others—that human nature, explicated in terms of human capacities, does not in itself provide a definitive standard for assessing the division of labor. Human nature shapes—and is shaped by—the division of labor. There is a limit, for example, to the degree to which “natural” human capacities justify a division of labor. Human capacities are wide-ranging and adaptable to various kinds of work. Criticism may be levied against the quantitative and/or qualitative development of ability allowed under the division of labor; in particular, I suggest that the simplification of labor presents a legitimate challenge to human development. I also address—and ultimately dismiss—Hannah Arendt's attempt at distinguishing ‘professional specialization’ from the ‘division of labor,’ claiming that all specialization involves varying degrees of a potentially disconcerting restriction of ability development. The relationship between the collective and the individual is the subject of the third section. There I suggest that what Moghaddam saw as a “conflict” between the two is more fittingly seen as a complementary relationship that, in the case of specialization, occasionally presents the individual with a difficult dilemma: either accept increasing specialization and its benefits or reject increasing specialization and put those benefits at risk. In the fourth section, I explore this dilemma as it pertains to the patient’s precarious position in the face of increasing medical specialization. This section indicates but one of many contemporary situations that call out for the reconsideration of specialization—a project that will be aided significantly, I suggest, by the application of the framework provided in this dissertation. To that end, the fifth section

takes a more prescriptive tone, reviewing some conservative and radical responses to the contemporary division of labor should it be found wanting (as I believe it is) in certain respects. I close this chapter and this dissertation by suggesting that Robinson Crusoe—the supposed epitome of “economic man,” yet highly similar to Marx’s communist man—is not a model of individual actualization for contemporary persons. Not only does the account of Crusoe ignore the social—and therefore moral—situation of man, but it underestimates the advantages of social life, some of which are the products of a social division of labor. The ideal of the “noble savage” may provide the foundation for some criticism of the division of labor in the past, but a richer and more accurate assessment of contemporary specialization must recognize that the social aspect of man allows for the benefits *and* burdens of specialization—and this is the dilemma that specialization presents to contemporary individuals going forward.

Revisiting the issue of effects: Separating economic from moral values

There is, perhaps, no greater obstacle to the honest evaluation of the contemporary division of labor than the assumption that practical success and moral rectitude go hand-in-hand—i.e., if it works, it is right. Practical success is determined, of course, relative to practical goals: if my goal is to increase productivity as measured in units produced per hour and a new division of labor yields a twofold increase in production per hour, then that division of labor is a practical success. But it requires a big step to conclude that this division of labor is *morally* right, especially since our moral ends may not coincide with our practical ends. Yet Adam Smith takes precisely this step in *The Wealth of Nations*, succumbing—I claim—to a problematic tendency to conflate economic and moral values in a manner that effectively inoculates the division of labor against significant criticism so long as it is practically successful. Having a

ground for the effective criticism of the division of labor requires that one carefully separate its practical from its moral effects.

As we have seen (particularly in Chapter 2), Smith opens *The Wealth of Nations* by extolling the productive benefits of the division of labor: it saves time; it improves worker dexterity; it encourages invention; it enables more and better products to be made. Together, these practical benefits contribute to the attainment of an important moral goal: the replacement of poverty with a “universal opulence.” In other words, the practical and moral benefits of the division of labor are part of one and the same economic process: increased division of labor → increased productivity → more (and better) goods available → cheaper prices → greater purchasing power for the poor → the end of material poverty. Thus, an increased division of labor is not only an economic but a *moral* tool. Even the free-market exchange that can attend the division of labor harnesses greed and self-interest—those thorns in the side of humanity—for the social good. On Smith’s account, insofar as the division of labor is practical, it is also moral.

The supposition that economic institutions serve both moral and economic ends is widespread. Consider, for example, the method by which philosopher Alan Goldman justifies the institution of advertising.² In Goldman’s eyes, ethical issues with regard to advertising are settled when it is made clear that advertising is ethically justifiable on both a “free-market” and a “rights” approach. The names of these approaches show that Goldman is appealing both to economic (free-market) and moral (rights) principles in order to justify advertising. But Goldman appropriates moral language to talk about economic principles when he lauds the “virtues of the free market,” asserting that the “first virtue of a market economy is its efficiency in allocating economic resources, capital, and labor to satisfy collective needs and wants for products and services.”³ The goal of this kind of efficiency is the maximization of utility—or, in

the businessman's terms, profit. Goldman adds that a further virtue of the free market is its "maximization of individual freedoms" by allowing for voluntary transactions.⁴ Appropriately enough, Goldman traces his recitation of the virtues of the market economy back to Adam Smith. Why is this appropriate? Because for Smith and Goldman, economic interests are on par with—or are even the same as—moral interests. In Goldman's case, the institution of advertising is ethically justified because it contributes to market efficiency (an economic interest) and—provided that it is truthful—it respects and enhances individual rights to freedom of expression (a moral interest) while facilitating economic efficiency.

A simple rejoinder to the conflation of economic and moral values involves the appeal to cases in which it seems clear that economic and moral values enjoin different courses of action. Consider the decision of Ford Motor Company, in the early 1970s, not to recall vehicles with a flaw in the positioning of the gas tank.⁵ Ford attempted to reduce its moral obligations to ensure the safety of its customers down to a matter of financial cost. Using a figure provided by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, Ford assigned a value to human life—approximately \$200,000 (in 1972)—and generated a cost/benefit analysis showing that it would be cheaper to pay death and injury benefits to those harmed by the poor design of its vehicles than to recall and refit the vehicles. The key question in this case is: *can a dollar value be placed on human life?* If it can, then Ford may have acted correctly (provided that their assigned value was correct); if not, then we begin to see the problem of conflating economic and moral values. The morally right thing may not always be the economically right thing, and vice versa.

What, then, is the relationship between economic and moral values? More specifically: what is the relationship between the practical and moral effects of the division of labor? Both of these questions are difficult and open up significant opportunities for further work; for now,

however, I assert that while it is possible that economic and moral ends may be realized together, this need not entail that one is reducible to the other. Moral and economic interests do not always coincide—in fact, they may conflict at times. The trouble with Smith’s claim about the division of labor giving rise to universal opulence is not so much that this claim is erroneous (in fact, it may be quite true to some degree), but that it neglects or downplays the negative moral effects of an extensive division of labor (like the degradation of mental and physical abilities suffered by workers). By maintaining some difference between economic and moral values, one preserves the possibility that an economic institution like the division of labor can be criticized in terms of its negative moral effects. Of course, the division of labor can also be criticized from the standpoint of its failure to meet certain economic goals; however, if this is the *only* standpoint from which criticism may be levied, this means that the division of labor may avoid criticism so long as it is economically successful—a problem that, I think, has allowed the division of labor to escape much scrutiny in the contemporary world.

In maintaining a distinction between economic and moral values, what are we to do when these values conflict? It is tempting to talk of “balancing” economic and moral interests, but this runs the risk of allowing violations of moral principles when the price is right. Crusoe, for example, betrays Xury when he sells him into slavery for the right price. Regarding the division of labor, perhaps highly specialized occupations (particularly in industry) are a violation of worker autonomy, as Adina Schwartz claims. Although the economic benefits may appear to outweigh this sacrifice of the individual’s autonomy, taking this approach puts us on the verge of fulfilling Marx’s claim in the *Manifesto* that capitalist economic relations—characterized by an extensive division of labor—have “left no other nexus between man and man” than “callous cash payment.”⁶ This is where Marx’s rhetoric is not so much a statement of fact (although Marx

presents it that way) but a word of warning. Insofar as we are willing to place moral interests on a scale with economic interests, there is a chance that our moral interests may be reduced—if not always, at least in a number of cases—to monetary concerns that are often more easily quantifiable (and in some contexts, unfortunately, more persuasive). This is what happened when Ford assigned a monetary value to a human life. The “balancing” of economic and moral interests tends in many cases to reduce the values of the latter to those of the former.

Moral interests are better seen as guide to our economic activities. When Schwartz argued that the industrial division of labor impinged upon worker autonomy, she was using autonomy as a standard against which particular divisions of labor could be assessed in terms of the degree to which they respected (or disrespected) individual autonomy. It is important to remember that moral interests may not always be hostile to economic ones; we have seen, for example, that Plato and Smith think that some division of labor is necessary to achieve justice and universal opulence (respectively). The deepest conflicts and the most challenging difficulties arise when our moral interests themselves conflict with regard to the division of labor. Should we eradicate poverty through an organization of labor that violates individual autonomy? Do we have other options? Even though we might wish to avoid weighing economic interests against moral ones, we still have to sort out how we will weigh moral interests against one another—and this is particularly a problem for discussions about the division of labor, since both its proponents and its critics have invoked moral principles in support of their views. How can we weigh various moral interests against one another?

One solution to this problem has been discussed in various circles for some time. It involves the democratization of the workplace. Schwartz, for her part, urges the democratization of the workplace via a “democratic redesign” of jobs that respects the workers’ right to express

themselves and have a hand in governing their own affairs.⁷ Workers may accept some limitations to their autonomy provided that they have a say in placing those limitations. Schwartz's recommendation is not new; returning to their landmark 1952 study (which we first encountered back in Chapter 3) entitled *The Man on the Assembly Line*, Charles Walker and Robert Guest observed that despite their complaints about job pace and confinement to highly specific jobs, workers did not want (for one reason or another) to dispense entirely with assembly lines, mass production, or capitalism—instead, they simply wished to have a greater say in the content and character of their work.⁸ Walker and Guest characterized this as the desire to be recognized as an individual—in other words, to have one's autonomy respected. Walker and Guest suggested that workers should have greater access to power through a more democratic organization of labor within the factory. By allowing workers and managers—perhaps even consumers and other third-parties interested in the division of labor—to hash out their individual, collective, economic and ultimately moral interests (being careful not to compromise moral values for purely economic reasons) through a kind of democratic process may be the most effective (albeit complex) way to ensure that relevant interests are given their proper place in the process of determining an appropriate organization of labor.

The weighing of moral interests with regard to the division of labor is a promising next step in work that focuses on the effects of the division of labor and their place in its evaluation. In this section, I have suggested that at least from the time of Adam Smith (and possibly before), there has been a tendency to conflate the practical and moral effects of the division of labor. By tying the practical effects of the division of labor to the attainment of certain desirable moral ends, I believe that proponents are able to win some uncritical acceptance of the division of labor. To have effective criticism, however, a distinction between practical and moral

interests—particularly economic and moral values—must be preserved. The relationship between economic and moral values is such that moral values provide the standard against which economic institutions must be judged. Difficulties arise when moral values suggest contradictory evaluations of the division of labor, and one response to these difficulties may be to subject the division of labor to what Schwartz has called a “democratic redesign” that allows for the expressing and weighing of competing moral interests. Part of this work will likely touch on issues related to human capacities and how well or ill they are served by specialization in labor. Having looked at the issue of the effects of the division of labor in this section, therefore, let us now revisit the issue of human capacities in the next section.

Revisiting the issue of human capacities: Nature, education, and the problem of simplistic labor

Suppose one were to complain that the division of labor within a factory is restrictive because it exercises only a few of the individual worker’s capacities—e.g., many workers have jobs that require simple, repetitive, manual effort with little need for additional thought or creativity. Although this criticism may be cast in terms of moral deplorability of the worker’s condition, it is at bottom a concern about an individual’s capacities and the degree to which they are engaged through labor. The issue of human capacities is a rich and multifaceted subject, as we saw in Chapter 3. Here, I will comment further on the role played by “nature” in debates about the division of labor, as well as note a key problem for the contemporary division of labor: its tendency to subjugate individual to collective development.

What role does nature—specifically human nature—play in the assessment of the division of labor? Another way to ask this question is: *what division of labor, if any, is dictated by human nature?* Obviously, the notions of ‘nature’ and ‘human nature’ are quite complex; in

the context of discussions about the division of labor, these terms typically refer to those features that humans have simply by being human. In terms of capacities, humans might be thought to have certain natural abilities (like intellectual or physical abilities) that may or may not be conducive to a division of labor. Plato, as we have seen, thought that individuals were “naturally fitted” to certain tasks, and he proposed a division of labor suitable to that natural distribution of abilities. Smith saw the division of labor as the “necessary consequence” of natural abilities of “reason and speech.” The idea behind these claims, presumably, is that insofar as a division of labor fits capacities that individuals have by nature and not by choice, it is not only successful but irreproachable. Human nature dictates a division of labor that is as challengeable and changeable as one’s skin color or sex—in other words (and with respect to recent technological developments) not at all!

Critics of the division of labor also find some impetus in appealing to human nature. One might claim, as we saw above, that humans are naturally capable of a greater variety of labors than that to which they are relegated under specialization. In Chapter 3, I noted Alan Ryan’s claim that Rousseau’s work is motivated by the desire to find something—human nature—that survives the processes of socialization and civilization in order to serve as a standard against which these later developments can be evaluated. Insofar, then, as the appeal to ‘human nature’ and natural human capacities has served both proponents and critics of the division of labor, can something be said to tip the balance on this important issue?

I question how far the notion of human nature may carry us in either supporting or criticizing the division of labor. Human nature—insofar as this is taken to refer to a pre-cultivated “natural” state of human capacities—is not definite enough to dictate one’s place in a division of labor, whether it be Plato’s rather simple tripartite ordering of the city or the minutely

specialized conditions of a populous industrialized nation. Although some—like Marx—trace the historical roots of the division of labor to the definite sexual division of labor in procreation, it is not clear that this natural division goes far toward justifying later and more extensive divisions of labor.

The sexual division of labor might appear to be usefully analogous to the contemporary division of labor in that both divisions seem to create highly distinct roles that only certain individuals can fill. Physiological differences dictate the distinct roles of male and female in procreation. Similarly, it seems, the differences between rocket science and basket-weaving are so dramatic that it may be well-nigh impossible for one to master the tasks of both. There are, however, two problems with this analogy: one was pointed out by Plato, the other by Adam Smith. For one thing, there is little empirical evidence that human beings differ dramatically with respect to their natural, general abilities (with the exception of their sexual differences); for another, the differences that *are* found between individuals' abilities are more often the *effect*—rather than the cause—of the division of labor.

The degree of natural difference between individuals—at least with respect to the abilities relevant to labor—has been in question at least since Rousseau's suggestion that "natural" inequalities were nowhere near as striking as the "moral" inequalities of wealth, power, and fame. There is a noble aspiration often underlying this skepticism, since the appeal to natural differences has been central to many attempts at racial, sexual, and other forms of discrimination. Even Plato, who thought that individuals did have relevant differences in natural endowments, seems to reject the notion that the sexual division of labor is the basis for his tripartite organization of the city. At least among the guardian class, sexual differences relative to procreation do not translate into the claim that each sex is exclusively suited for distinct

occupations within the city. Women, on his account, may generally be weaker than men—but both sexes have the basic capacities needed for ruling the city. In terms of some of the distinctions drawn in Chapter 3, Plato appears to be claiming that men and women share certain *general* capacities that may be developed to different degrees between the sexes and between individuals. This seems entirely plausible; the trouble that looms over Plato’s account, however, is his suggestion that the natural proclivities of individuals differ enough (though not across sexual lines) to warrant a rather rigid and hierarchical division of labor within the city—especially as the city becomes increasingly multifaceted. If Plato is not willing to assert that the sexes differ in kind with regard to the capacities for governing the city, it is not immediately clear why he is willing to say that individuals have enough differences in kind to warrant the division of labor throughout the city.

Individual human beings have differences of ability, no doubt, but the extent to which these are natural differences, as well as the extent to which these are differences in kind rather than degree, are matters for doubt. The dramatic differences that obtain between developed human beings can give rise to the illusion that these differences result from similarly dramatic natural differences of ability. By recognizing, however, that natural abilities tend to be general abilities, one can see through this illusion in order to attend to the effects of experience, education, and training on the exercise of individuals’ capacities. In turning away from the notion that natural endowments of ability are somehow varied and definite enough to justify a division of labor, the direction of causation thought to exist between human capacities and the division of labor reverses (as Murphy suggests). Instead of seeing the division of labor as dictated by differences in human capacities, one is brought to Smith’s view that differences in human capacities are the *effect* of the division of labor. What we see here—beginning with

Plato's unwillingness to ground the civic division of labor in the sexual division of labor and arriving at Smith's contention that humans are in many ways differentiated by the division of labor—is the slow turn away from the Rousseauian idea that human nature stands as a static standard for assessing various institutions. That is not to say that this idea has been lost; rather, this indicates the recognition that human nature is in part given by nature and in part developed through experience, education, and training. Insofar as an evaluation of the division of labor makes use of claims about human nature and human capacities, it must incorporate this more complex—and, I believe, more accurate—account of human nature.

The suggestion that human nature includes both natural and acquired elements is certainly not new. I follow James Murphy—who himself follows political scientist Ian Shapiro—in arguing that, in Murphy's words, “human beings...are natural beings, but they are also emergent from nature.”⁹ To be fair, Plato and Smith recognized both of these elements. For Plato, natural endowments *and* education both play a role in shaping individuals for their duties within the state. On Smith's account, natural human propensities for reason and speech give rise to trade and the attendant division of labor, yet he famously notes that the difference between the philosopher and street porter is the effect of education and the division of labor—not its cause. Accepting that human beings are natural but also emergent from nature allows for the important realization that human nature shapes—and is shaped by—the division of labor to some degree. The trick is to avoid thinking that the effects are unidirectional—or even overwhelmingly so. The relationship between humans and their labor is thoroughly bidirectional: each affects the other in a plethora of ways. Human capacities are not job-specific enough to dictate a division of labor beyond the sexual division of labor, but they are exercised, developed, and distinguished

by the division of labor—and it is around this latter set of issues that much contemporary debate about specialization is taking place.

The question now is not so much how human capacities dictate a division of labor, but how a division of labor dictates the development of human capacities. Although Plato gives great weight to the natural fitness of individuals for their respective tasks, it must be remembered that Plato *first* draws the civic division of labor along the lines of the occupations required to meet the *needs* of the city and its citizens. In other words, it is *need*—rather than ability—that is the primary force shaping the division of labor. But whereas Plato began with basic human needs for food, shelter, and so on, the contemporary division of labor is geared to meet the much longer list of needs and wants of modern society. Not only that, but many needs are no longer satisfied by one individual in the relevant occupation, but by a number of individuals in a number of interrelated occupations. It is not the farmer alone that provides food for modern individuals; it is the farmer, the grain elevator operator, the trucker, the flour mill operator, the baker, all of their attendant staff and management, and so on. Many of those occupations admit of even smaller subdivisions of labor. Indeed, a potentially powerful complaint about the contemporary division of labor, as expressed in terms of human capacities, is that the jobs it creates require only simplistic activities that minimally engage and develop human capacities. In the words of Marxist scholar G. A. Cohen, the increasing division of labor under capitalism “increases the number of distinct jobs involved in the production of a given product, but at the same time it decreases the specialization of the worker.”¹⁰ Cohen’s choice of words is intriguing in that it suggests an important distinction between ‘the division of labor’ and ‘specialization’—a distinction drawn in more detail by Hannah Arendt.

Throughout this dissertation, I have used ‘the division of labor’ and ‘specialization’ interchangeably. The motivation for this is that in dividing a labor process, the resultant tasks (and the workers who fill them) are specialized relative to the more complex pre-division process. In *The Specialized Society*, Fathali Moghaddam seems to make a similar assumption. But there is a temptation to distinguish these terms. While it may be true that the worker who straightens the wire in Smith’s pin factory has a more specialized job than the pin-maker who performs all of the tasks of pin-making, it is not specialization itself but the *simplicity* of his labor that makes the worker’s condition deplorable. Not all specializations, however, seem to involve such a simplification of labors. A corporate lawyer specializes in a certain part of the law, but corporate law is certainly complex enough to deeply engage a variety of the lawyer’s capacities. If one were to complain that specialization alone is degrading, one would presumably think that the conditions of the worker in the pin factory and the corporate lawyer are similarly deplorable. But are they? Hannah Arendt does not think so. She distinguishes the division of labor from what she calls “professional specialization.”¹¹ It is important to add that she draws this distinction in terms of the results (effects) of each kind of labor, their respective requisite skills (capacities), and the relations that they establish between the individual and others—the three subjects of this dissertation. Arendt argues that professional specialization requires the professional to aggregate and develop the whole set of relevant skills for the sake of producing the finished product. The professional is capable, therefore, of acting independently (or in what Arendt calls “isolation”) in order to produce the finished product. Under the division of labor, however, job content is simplified to such a degree that the end result of a specific task is not the finished product—e.g., the task of straightening the wire in pin-making is so simplistic that its result (the straightened wire) serves no purpose in itself. The simplicity of each task under the

division of labor not only requires no special skill, but it requires the individual worker to be dependent on the efforts of others in order to produce the finished product. Arendt's suggestion is that criticism of the division of labor is appropriate because it creates degraded laboring conditions; professional specialization, however, allows for richer and more holistic individual development and is therefore undeserving of scrutiny.

Arendt's distinction is useful, I think, in illuminating and attempting to resolve a key difficulty for many who take interest in the division of labor. There seems to be a quantitative and qualitative distinction between specializations that needs cashing out. Certain specializations—unlike those that involve repetitive, monotonous, and menial tasks—seem obviously rewarding in both the quantitative exercise and the qualitative development of numerous abilities. There is something aesthetically pleasing—both for the performer and the audience—about the pianist whose specialized training allows him to move beyond mere tinkering to the performance of beautiful masterpieces. Specialists in law, medicine, and even academia are sought after for their expertise in some matter, and their positions are typically lucrative as a result. Does one really want to lump these specialists in with those poor individuals working at a narrow task on an assembly line? Arendt, for her part, criticizes Marx for appearing to confuse professional specialization with the division of labor in a way that leads him to wrongly disparage the former. But it is a mistake, I suggest, to insulate certain kinds of specialization (as Arendt attempts to do) from criticism of the division of labor. Specialization, as we saw in Chapter 1, is a relative notion. All specialization involves focusing on a narrow subject matter or activity relative to a broader body of knowledge or activities. The wire-straightener's job is narrowly specialized relative to that of the pin-maker; but the pin-maker's job is a specialized occupation relative to the work required to meet his other needs. Even

though the pin-maker's job is more complex and involves a more finished product than that of the wire-straightener, his product directly meets only one of his needs (i.e., the need for a pin). He can, of course, meet some of his other needs by exchanging his wares for the products and services of other professionals. The prudence of such exchange aside, it appears that both the division of labor and professional specialization involve admittedly relative but nonetheless problematic qualitative simplifications of labor processes and quantitative limitations on capacity development. Marx does seem critical of both the division of labor and professional specialization (as Arendt casts them): he hammers the former for resulting in the loss of "special skill" and the "charm" of work for the workman, while he criticizes the latter for restricting individuals to one occupation at the expense of a more well-rounded development of one's capacities that comes through engagement in a variety of occupations. Marx may not have been perfectly clear about the kinds of specialization that Arendt's work later helped to distinguish—even so, his apparent confusion may instead be more charitably interpreted as an inkling that there is something wrong with both the qualitative simplification and the quantitative narrowing of the exercise of human capacities brought about by *any* kind of specialization/division of labor.

In the end, 'specialization' and 'division of labor' are still exchangeable terms of debate because they boil down to the same process: the breaking down of a task into component tasks. In breaking down (or focusing upon) specific tasks in this manner, an attendant distribution and organization of labor must take place. We have seen in this section—and in Chapter 3—that human capacities play a role in this distribution and organization of labor. Here, I have revisited the notion of 'human nature' and I have suggested that it is insufficient—insofar as it appeals to natural endowments of ability—for justifying the complex division of labor that we see today. Human nature has both given and acquired elements, and this means that human nature—

understood in terms of human capacities—can both shape and be shaped by the division of labor. Because of this, I have directed attention to concerns about the simplification of labor and the lingering confusion about the qualitative and quantitative differences between specializations. I suggest that these differences do not matter significantly to the criticism of division of labor—all specializations deserve to be critiqued according to the degree to which they engage human capacities. Specializations of all kinds not only engage human capacities in certain ways, but they also require that specialists interact with one another in order to have their needs met. The issue of the proper relationship between the individual and others now deserves revisiting.

Revisiting the issue of the proper relationship between the individual and others: The social nature of man and the dilemma of specialization

Let us briefly pause here to recall a helpful observation about the division of labor. The term ‘division of labor’ may refer to either of two related divisions: 1) the division of a complex labor process into its simpler component processes; and 2) the assignment of individual workers to one or more of these simpler component processes. The former is the ‘technical division of labor,’ and the latter is the ‘social division of labor.’ The technical division of labor is not in itself of moral concern. In fact, as James Murphy observes, even an expert (like a pin-maker) can improve his productivity by breaking down the labor process required to produce the finished product and engaging in “batchwork”—i.e., instead of going through all eighteen steps (or however many there are) in order to produce one pin at a time, the pin-maker heats a batch of wires, straightens the batch, etc., until a batch of pins has been completed.¹² Problems arise, Murphy contends, when the technical and social divisions of labor approach or even attain a 1:1 correspondence—i.e., one laborer is assigned to one specific task. When this happens, the

simplification of tasks under the technical division of labor results in a social division of labor that reduces “every man’s business to some one simple operation,” as Smith puts it, and “making this operation the sole employment of his life.”¹³ The simplification of labor, as I have suggested in the previous section, is a matter of concern for the contemporary division of labor. One could express concern about what such simplification does to the individual—but one could also worry about the *social* aspect of the social division of labor. What kinds of relationships obtain under a given social of labor, and how do they match up with more ideal conditions?

In Chapter 4, I explored the social nature of man in challenging the plausibility of a highly individualistic life like that of Robinson Crusoe. Man’s social life is essential to procreation, the development of language, his education and—at least in many practical respects—the satisfaction of his needs. The degree to which man’s social nature justifies a social division of labor remains an important question over which philosophers like Aristotle and Marx have divided. In this section, however, I would like to look more closely at the contemporary division of labor and a threat that it poses to a common theme in the work of philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Locke, Smith and Marx—namely, that the individual and society stand in some kind of complementary relationship to one another. Although their motivations may differ, each of these philosophers envisions a social order that benefits individuals and societies together (to one degree or another). This notion of a complementary relationship between the individual and society is challenged, however, by the contemporary division of labor that emphasizes the simplification of job content. This simplification of job content creates a situation in which individual and collective interests are at odds with one another.

At times throughout this dissertation, I have noted Fathali Moghaddam’s claim early in *The Specialized Society* that the ideals of collective actualization and individual actualization are

contrasting and even in “conflict.” The ideal of collective actualization generally requires, in order to be realized, that individuals develop specialized talents and skills that can be organized for effective group functioning. In contrast, the ideal of individual actualization generally encourages the development of “complete persons.”¹⁴ What is not clear is whether or not Moghaddam thinks that these ideals are *inherently* or *incidentally* in conflict. The difference lies in the availability of a mutually satisfying resolution to the conflict. The more inherent the conflict, the more difficult it is to satisfy both sides of the conflict. However, if the two ideals are in conflict only under certain circumstances, then perhaps a resolution is available that allows for significant—if not full—satisfaction of both ideals. I believe that we can most charitably and usefully make sense of Moghaddam if we attribute to him the claim that the ideals of collective and individual actualization are only incidentally in conflict. The particular conditions brought about by the contemporary division of labor—especially the simplification of job content through the increasing technical and social divisions of labor—create a conflict related to the ideals of individual and collective actualization.

The civic division of labor envisioned by Plato seems to preserve some degree of Arendtian professional specialization—i.e., Plato’s division of labor creates occupations in which individuals employ rich skill sets in order to produce the finished product or carry out some complex activity. Under such conditions, individuals actualizing their potential in their respective occupations contribute to the satisfaction of social needs and the realization of social goals (e.g., justice). But the industrial division of labor creates dramatically different conditions. The reduction of job content to “one simple operation” means that individuals can neither develop extensive skill sets through their work nor see the product to its finished state. Individual actualization is stymied. Paradoxically, however, society still benefits—at least in

terms of increases in collective efficiency/productivity. In other words, beginning with the increased technical and social divisions of labor that attended the rise of industry, individual development is increasingly subverted in favor of collective development—thus creating the “conflict” that Moghaddam sees between individual and collective actualization. This conflict is nowhere more shocking than in Nathan Rosenberg’s suggestion (noted in the last section of Chapter 4) that individual intellectual development may be sacrificed for the benefit of the “collective intelligence of society.” It is little wonder, then, that Moghaddam emphasizes individual actualization anew!

But it is important that we not stop here with individual and collective actualization in conflict. In seeing this conflict as incidental to conditions created especially by the contemporary division of labor, there remains the possibility that under *other* conditions, the supposed conflict between individual and collective interests dissolves and the two return to a more complementary relationship. Moghaddam, I believe, appreciates the healthy reciprocity that can obtain between the individual and society. His account of the Kitty Genovese incident suggests that the “mind your own business” mentality that is encouraged by increasing specialization only fragments our communities in ways that hamper—rather than advance—our individual development. Although Moghaddam is hostile to collective actualization as a guiding ideal in the workplace, he appears to see some degree of collective actualization (through education, civic participation, and community-building) as essential to individual development. What does not come forth fully in his polemic is the recognition that individual actualization is also necessary for this kind of collective actualization; only in one place, where he is noting the conflict between individual and collective actualization, does Moghaddam admit that “it may be

that the unique qualities of each individual [fully or substantially developed] will fit especially well for forming parts of an effective collectivity.”¹⁵

In recognizing the social nature of man, it must be made clear that individual and social development often go hand-in-hand. Contra Rosenberg, individual genius can and should be fostered to advance the collective intelligence—the latter being imparted through education to other individuals who may contribute further to the collective intelligence. This is not to say that individual achievement alone dictates social achievement or vice versa; instead, an extremely rich relationship exists between the individual and society, one in which individual and collective actualization can be made to be generally complementary to one another. Collective actualization is not in itself a threat to individual actualization; rather, *under certain conditions* individual development can be subjugated to collective development, just as under certain other conditions these can be made complementary. Moghaddam errs if in talking of the “plight” of the individual in the specialized society, he means that specialization is an inherent obstacle to individual actualization. Moghaddam’s wide-ranging criticism of specialization—addressing specialization in the office, in academia, in the factory, in the community, and in the Third World—suggests that specialization *is* such an obstacle. Given the complementary relationship between the individual and society, however, a more appropriate word for the individual’s condition in modern specialized society might be ‘dilemma.’ I believe that increasing specialization presents not a plight but a powerful and complicated dilemma to the contemporary individual: shall I accept the benefits of specialization at the price of my own (or another’s) individual development (insofar as contemporary specialization tends toward the simplification of job content), or shall I clamor for greater individual actualization at a potentially higher price to myself and others through more unified labors? Phrased even more generally, the dilemma

facing individuals in a specialized society pits the benefits of specialization against the quality of life experienced by the various individuals (specialists, consumers, citizens) affected by specialization. As an illustration of this dilemma, let us briefly consider the situation facing the patients of modern medicine.

A dilemma of specialization: The patient's dilemma in medicine

Specialization in medicine, like specialization in other professions and industries, is a pervasive fact of modern life. This division of medical labor is increasingly entrenched in various medical institutions: hospitals are divided into wards and units with distinct staff, resources, and services rendered; academic departments, degrees, and journals proliferate along new lines of research or professional demarcation; and the number of specialties themselves has increased dramatically since the AMA began to recognize specialties as “proper and legitimate fields of practice” in 1869.¹⁶ For their part, medical specialists have reaped the benefits of their expertise, occupying lucrative positions and generally enjoying good repute. Presumably, all of this has happened—and continues to happen—to the benefit of the patient as well. But it is here that the unquestioning attitude toward medical specialization—an attitude that is common, I have suggested, toward many forms of contemporary specialization—must end. Does medical specialization truly benefit the patient?

In Chapter 3, I reviewed Adina Schwartz’ claim that the industrial division of labor threatens the autonomy of the laborer insofar as it hinders him in “rationally framing, pursuing, and adjusting” his own plans. Revisited in the light of what was said in the section on the effects of the division of labor earlier in this chapter, we see in Schwartz’s work how the willingness to maintain a contrast between practical interests (like increasing productivity) and moral interests

(like respecting autonomy) opens the door to criticism of a particular division of labor. But the value of Schwartz's critique is limited by the decline of the industrial economy of the United States and other nations. The issue of medical specialization presents a challenging new field of interest in that unlike the industrial division of labor—in which the bland character of his own labor presents a challenge to the laborer's autonomy—the specialization of medicine yields more obvious benefits for both parties to the physician/patient relationship while forcing us to weigh these benefits against the threats posed to the patient's autonomy. As the *raison d'etre* of the medical professions, the patient provides an important standard against which medical specialization may be examined and evaluated. The patient does not share the plight of the industrial laborer; instead, specialization creates a dilemma for the individual patient in that specialization may significantly enhance the quality of the patient's medical treatment, but at the risk of infringing upon patient autonomy—particularly by complicating the patient's ability to make an informed decision about medical care.

Increasing specialization in medicine, according to R.B. Goldbloom, means that “the provision of optimum diagnosis and treatment requires many physician-specialists and an army of health care personnel with a wide range of expertise.”¹⁷ In other words, the division of medical labor results in the fact that a patient may visit a number of different specialists in order to treat various aspects of an ailment. Provided that the specialists effectively bring their expertise to bear on the situation, this division may result in significant benefits for the patient. Yet insofar as specialization hampers the ability of the patient to understand, coordinate, and participate in his or her treatment at the hands of specialists, then the division of medical labor leads not only to what Goldbloom calls an “unavoidable fragmentation of responsibility” among specialists, but to what I see as a significant challenge to the patient's autonomy. Specialization

fragments the patient's care and assigns pieces of that care to different specialists. The patient is often left to develop an overarching understanding of his treatment regimen in order to have any effective or autonomous control over it. Indeed, the problem with medical specialization centers on the manner in which the patient interacts with the experts who provide the patient with care. Edmund Pellegrino, a renowned bioethicist currently at Georgetown, has characterized this as the "problem of the expert."¹⁸ Both Goldbloom and Pellegrino suggest a reconsideration of medical specialization in terms of how it affects (both positively and negatively) the physician's care for the patient.

If physician specialization is (at least in part) an imperative in the light of increasingly complex medical knowledge, then one must consider how the patient's ability to make an informed decision is challenged as the patient is beset by the counsel of a number of highly specialized physicians. The patient may have difficulty making sense of these various counsels—especially if they are couched in the highly technical terminology of the specialist—and this presents a challenge to the patient's autonomy. This challenge is suggested in George Bernard Shaw's play, *The Doctor's Dilemma*.¹⁹ The condition of a patient named Louis Dubedat is variously diagnosed in the unique terminologies and concepts of various specialists. Dubedat enters the care of one of the specialists and soon passes away. One of the doctors suggests that the failure of the medical treatments is part of the risk that the *patient* bears: "Well, it's always the patient who has to take the chance when an experiment is necessary." The "chance" that the patient has to take is redoubled by the fact that he has relatively little medical knowledge when compared to that of the expert, and the patient's care is entrusted to those who better understand (or so it seems) his treatment regimen. In fact, *The Doctor's Dilemma* is a misnomer when the play is read from the perspective of the patient. It is the *patient* who submits himself to the care

of the specialist physician, trusting that the latter's expertise may be brought to bear in a manner that benefits the patient. In the act of submission to the doctor's specialized knowledge and skill, the patient sacrifices some self-governance. This is the patient's dilemma in the face of medical specialization: the patient desires effective care at the hands of the specialist, but in order to receive such care the patient may have to abandon his autonomy and let others guide his care.

The patient's dilemma is indicative, I believe, of other dilemmas that individuals face in an increasingly specialized society. It is in the patient's dilemma that the implications of specialization (both positive and negative) in many ways become more salient than they are in industry. In addition to the more obviously deplorable plights of laborers who are relegated to simplistic tasks in the name of profit or productivity, the contemporary division of labor creates conditions under which its benefits and burdens are bound together in ways that make it difficult to address one without addressing the other. Even so, dilemmas such as that faced by the modern patient cry out for some kind of solution. Must a radical reversal of trends toward specialization occur, or can there be a more conservative set of changes such that the benefits of specialization are extensively (if not wholly) preserved while the burdens are reduced? In the next section, I take a more prescriptive tone with regard to the contemporary division of labor, noting some radical and conservative options for the realignment of the contemporary division of labor in the event that an evaluation in terms of its effects, its engagement of human capacities, and its structuring of the relationship between the individual and others lead us to find it wanting.

Redrawing the division of labor: Some conservative and radical options

What can be done when a division of labor creates conflicts between certain interests? This is an important prescriptive question to which the investigations of this work have brought

us. In asking it, I assume that something *can* in fact be done about the division of labor. I reject the notion that the contemporary division of labor—in all of its complexity, aided and shaped by technological developments—is as inevitable as something like the natural sexual division of labor. Certainly, there is a rich interrelationship between the individual’s natural and acquired abilities on one hand and the complex division of labor on the other. But apart from Plato’s recognition that a division of labor *might* be well-suited to the satisfaction of the more natural needs for food, shelter, clothing and protection from harm, I find little in the edifice of the modern economy that is immune to realignment in the light of a careful and thorough evaluation of the contemporary division of labor.

It is worth wondering to what extent our modern economic system may be forced to change in order to harmonize competing interests. As a model for the discussion that is likely to occur along these lines, I suggest that one consider the tenor of contemporary debates about the harmonizing of economic and environmental interests. At present, there are definite conflicts between the interests of economic growth and environmental preservation such that emphasis on one set of interests seems to put the other set of interests in jeopardy. In these debates, one can identify two general kinds of adjustment that might take place in response to such conflicts: one is relatively conservative, the other is quite radical.

In their book *Natural Capitalism*, authors Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter Lovins propose changes to traditional business models that they claim will maintain (and even enhance) profitability while preserving natural resources.²⁰ Although they claim that their work promises to begin a new industrial revolution, their prescription is fundamentally conservative: it retains the profit motive as the driving force in business while suggesting that profitability is improved by making environmentally-friendly changes to business models. By way of contrast,

Garrett Hardin, in his account of the “tragedy of the commons” that occurs when self-interested pursuits lead to the ruination of commonly-held resources, argues that many contemporary conflicts between our economic and environmental interests cannot be resolved effectively by new technological developments.²¹ Instead, these “no technical solution” problems require a radical change in our guiding values. In the work of Hawken *et al.* and Garrett Hardin, we see two kinds of solutions—one conservative, the other radical—to the contemporary conflicts between economic and environmental interests. Similarly, the conflicts of interest that characterize debates about the contemporary division of labor lend themselves to conservative and radical solutions. Some seek to harmonize economic and human interests with little change to the ideals and structures of the contemporary economy, while others argue that an effective realignment of the division of labor requires a radical overhaul of existing economic institutions. Furthermore, the impetus for redrawing the division of labor can come from employers, employees, government, consumers, and concerned third-parties.

a. Some conservative adjustments

If one of the most pressing problems with contemporary specialization is its simplification of job content and the relegation of workers to these narrow tasks, then one effective response might be job rotation. This allows workers to engage in a variety of the tasks related to production—even if each task is simple in itself—rather than confining them to just “one simple operation.” Returning to their seminal study of conditions on an assembly line, Walker and Guest use the worker’s satisfaction with his total job situation (which includes immediate job content and other working conditions) as a standard for assessing the industrial division of labor. On the basis of their observations and interviews, Walker and Guest conclude

that worker satisfaction may be improved with the introduction of greater *variety* into job content. They see at least three advantages to this: 1) by engaging workers in more aspects of the productive process, the workers acquire a greater appreciation for the finished product and their role in producing it; 2) more varied work engages a greater variety of a worker's skills; and 3) job rotation allows workers to have greater interaction with others.²² It is important to note that these three elements of worker satisfaction—greater appreciation for the finished product, greater engagement of worker's skills, and greater interaction with others—fit nicely into the framework provided in this dissertation that encourages the examination of accounts of the division of labor, and the division of labor itself, in terms of its effects, its engagement of human capacities, and its role in shaping the relationship between the individual and others. Walker and Guest claim, furthermore, that greater variety in job content can be secured for workers without violating the principles of mass production—thus stressing the relatively conservative nature of their recommendations.

There may be some limits to the advantages of job rotation and its enrichment of job content. Adina Schwartz characterizes job rotation as “horizontal integration” of a variety of tasks (rather than the “vertical integration” required to overcome the hierarchical division of labor between management and manual laborers). Horizontal integration is valuable, Schwartz admits, in that it addresses the narrowing of job content under specialization; however, she does not feel that it grants workers enough autonomous control over their labors and the labor process. As a supplement to job rotation, workers should have some democratic control over the work process and the design of the jobs among which they rotate.²³ It is in this vein that Moghaddam, who also favors job enrichment through rotation, offers criteria for the redesign of jobs so that they engage (among other things) a variety of workers' skills, allow workers to see and

participate in the production of a “meaningful end product,” enable “direct interactions and cooperations” with others, and afford workers some control over the production process.²⁴

Schwartz and Moghaddam recognize that job rotation in itself is not enough to address some of the problems presented by the contemporary division of labor. One of those problems—the lack of worker control over the design and content of their jobs—also needs to be addressed when the division of labor is redrawn for the sake of enriching jobs.

The impetus for job enrichment extends beyond the factory walls. As we have seen in the medical profession, for example, specialization creates the need in some cases for persons with a generalized training who can “put it all together,” as Pellegrino puts it.²⁵ Ironically enough, this means that one way to treat the ill effects of specialization might be with more specialization. In the case of medical treatment, the patient may have a legitimate need for a personal physician who is capable of providing comprehensive care or of synthesizing, coordinating, and interpreting the barrage of information that a patient receives from teams of specialists. The patient’s dilemma is such that he needs both effective treatment and respect for his autonomy—and specialization meets the former but challenges the latter. There is nothing about the patient’s needs—or the patient’s autonomy, for that matter—that require an *end* to medical specialization. They simply require that specialization not hinder the patient’s autonomous governance of his medical care, and this can be achieved by the creation and encouragement of generalists who “specialize,” so to speak, in the effective integration of the medical advice and care that one receives at the hands of specialists. Similarly, generalists in other fields (such as law or academia) may serve to counteract similar challenges presented by specialization while allowing specialists to continue to reap the benefits of their highly specialized studies and activities.

In addition to job rotation/enrichment and the fostering of generalists in certain fields, a third conservative option for addressing the negative effects of the contemporary division of labor is a significant increase in the minimum wage. This option recognizes that a powerful motivation for an increased division of labor arises from Charles Babbage's principle that the division of labor allows an employer to purchase exactly the quantity of skill or force needed.²⁶ In other words, the simplification of labor created by the technical division of labor allows employers to hire a number of relatively unskilled workers at a rate that tends to be much less than what one would have to pay a single expert capable of completing more tasks. Insofar as the division of labor strips down jobs to a matter of simplistic operations worthy of minimal pay, an increase in minimum wages increases the "transaction costs" that attend the employment and coordination of more specialized workers. In fact, contemporary political economists like Taiwan's Monchi Lio argue that transaction cost (including the costs of transportation, information gathering, communication, and the employment of labor) is one factor that determines the optimal division of labor—the other factor being "economies of specialization" (i.e., the extent of the technical division of labor).²⁷ Lio is simply pointing out that given a technical division of labor, the optimal social division of labor is determined to a significant degree by transactional costs that include the cost of employing labor. By raising the cost of employing labor, employers have an incentive to employ one worker to do what two or more workers formerly did for lower wages. Of course, increased wages will cut into profits and may result in the loss of jobs (at least the lower-paying ones) and in the passing-on of higher transaction costs via higher prices for consumers.

This leads to a fourth conservative response the division of labor—one that focuses on the role that consumers can play in redrawing divisions of labor. If consumers want to have

viable businesses that provide quality products and services without extensive and degrading divisions of labor, they can follow John Ruskin's advice and express their concerns in the marketplace by demanding the "products and results of healthy and ennobling labor."²⁸ Ruskin believes that "healthy and ennobling labor" is that which requires not only physical effort but intelligence—that "unity of conception and execution" that James Murphy advocates in *The Moral Economy of Labor*. By purchasing the products of ennobling labor—even if the purchase costs more than it would if the required labor were more degrading—consumers help to pay those increased transaction costs that can attend less extensive divisions of labor. Ruskin's particularly insightful yet conservative contribution recognizes that the "ennobling" and enriching of labor can be effected through the choices of interested consumers in the marketplace—choices that will decide whether a worker is made "a man or a grindstone."²⁹

For those who wish to realign the contemporary division of labor without requiring dramatic upheavals in our economic institutions, this section has offered some plausible avenues of approach. But it may be the case that the contemporary division of labor is so deeply rooted in economic and social institutions that more radical solutions are required. I consider some of these avenues in the next section.

b. Some radical adjustments

Perhaps the most radical proposal for ending the problems of specialization is offered by Marx in the *Manifesto* and elsewhere: the abolition of private property.³⁰ Marx's prescription has its roots in Rousseau's suggestion in the *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality* that civil society—and the division of labor—begins with the delineation of private property.³¹ Just as individuals begin to designate exclusive areas of property control, they also begin to take up

exclusive areas of activity—especially when the enclosure of property necessitates the exchange of goods to make up for the shortcomings of one’s own territory. The advent of wage labor not only facilitates the acquisition of private property (by allowing one to purchase the right to own the work of another’s hands) but, by attaching it to Babbage’s principle about purchasing the exact amount of skill and effort required for a work, wage labor with an extensive division of labor is also the key to significant profits. Thus, Marx contends that the abolition of private property—with its tendencies toward territorialization and exploitation of not only land but labor—must coincide with a more all-round development of individuals through their labor.

The abolition of private property would certainly have extensive consequences for our social institutions, our interrelationships with others, and perhaps even our sense of self insofar as our private property contributes to how we define ourselves. While I do not object to Marx’s interest in a more well-rounded development of individuals, the extremity of his proposal for bringing this about overlooks some of the benefits of specialization. In many cases, the quantity, quality, and efficiency of work are positively affected by *some* degree of division of labor. An outright abolition of private property—including an abolition of exclusive spheres of activity—assumes that the benefits of all-round development surpass those of a more specialized development of an individual’s abilities. Marx seems to think that “individuality”—the highest form of which, for Marx, involves productive labors that are “free manifestations” of one’s life and will—is enabled by the great productive forces available under the industrial capitalism of his day; unfortunately, in Marx’s eyes, private property and the division of labor remain hindrances to the attainment of true individuality.³² But Marx’s strong rhetoric must not lead us to think that *all* divisions of labor are in fact hindrances to individuality. The patient’s dilemma, for example, shows that even a fairly well-rounded person may need to submit himself to the

specialized care of another for the sake of his well-being. Marx may be right in suggesting that the *all-round* development of individuals requires the end of private property; but we must wonder whether or not *some* sacrifice of our individual development is warranted, particularly when the costs of investing in all-round development impinge on our ability to develop certain desirable—though highly specific—abilities like playing the piano.

Setting aside the radical proposal of abolishing private property, another radical change involves a change of *values*. We saw inklings of this change of values in Ruskin's urging that we demand products that require ennobling labor even if it costs us more in terms of money or (in Ruskin's view) the possibility that the thoughtful worker might make mistakes that the monotonous laborer might not. Even Moghaddam's insistence on individual rather than collective actualization suggests a significant if not radical change of values. Instead of seeing laborers as engines of production and profit, one could see them as persons worthy of respect and investment in their own right. The notion of a change in values motivates Walker and Guest's conclusions in *The Man on the Assembly Line*. They observe with some concern the assumption—an apparently central assumption of our modern economic system—that a 'high standard of living' is the same as a 'high standard of consumption.'³³ It is their goal to refocus our interests and values, shifting our primary concern from the products of labor to the conditions of laborers themselves. As I noted in the last section, Walker and Guest think that their proposals for change remain in-line with principles of mass production; in questioning some of the values that motivate the increasing division of labor, however, they are engaged in the quite radical project of evaluating and restructuring the division of labor in the light of a different set of interests and values. In fact, to bring this work to a close, I would like to propose one fairly radical change: that Robinson Crusoe no longer be considered the exemplary

“economic man”—the man whose needs are met through his own labors. Crusoe’s condition is not only unrealistic because of its lack of society, but it is the presence of society—and the social division of labor—that creates the dilemma that specialization poses to the modern individual.

Robinson Crusoe and the romanticism of the “noble savage”

In the concluding section of *The Moral Economy of Labor*, James Murphy likens Marx’s versatile man in a communist society (as characterized in *The German Ideology*) to Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, claiming that the problem with both of these characterizations is that they are firmly in the tradition of political and economic individualism that tends to do little justice to what Louis Dupre calls “the social aspect of man.”³⁴ Although Crusoe is socially isolated, classical economists heroize him as the epitome of *homo oeconomicus*—“economic man”—whose condition conveniently allows for the setting aside of issues of distributive justice that are only exacerbated in a complex social economy. Marx, of course, criticizes the story of Crusoe for its disregard of the social nature of man. But this criticism loses its force, Murphy claims, when Marx’s communist man seems equally bereft of the need for society. Insofar, therefore, as the characterizations of Crusoe and communist man lack an adequate recognition of the social aspect of man—and its attendant *moral* considerations—both classical economists and their Marxist critics lack the tools for providing an adequate critique of the contemporary social division of labor.

Murphy claims from the outset that his *Moral Economy of Labor* is concerned with the fact that “the existing organization of work produces a far-reaching and disturbing squandering of human moral, intellectual and economic potential.”³⁵ His contention is that the contemporary social division of labor separates the tasks of conception and execution and assigns them to

different individuals—and this, he claims, presents “a profound obstacle to human flourishing.”³⁶ There is a sense in which Murphy is right: the contemporary social division of labor relegates some workers to jobs that hinder—rather than promote—human flourishing. But in taking the various observations of philosophers and other commentators as a whole, I believe that we can see the truth of the matter: specialization presents not an obstacle but a *dilemma* for modern man. In certain cases, specialization seems also to promote—rather than hinder—human flourishing. Whether or not they are always desirable ends, specialization serves human interests by improving productivity and enhancing development of certain talents and skills. There is a lingering attraction to the story of Crusoe in that although he is bereft of social interaction, he seems to attain that all-round development of human capacities that is restricted under the contemporary division of labor. To dispense with Crusoe as a relevant example of human flourishing in order to arrive at a more thorough appreciation of the dilemma presented by contemporary specialization, we must go farther than Murphy’s claim that Crusoe represents the “culmination of liberal theorizing about the ‘state of nature’” that appeals to political and economic individualism at the expense of man’s social—and accordingly moral—responsibilities.³⁷ We must also recognize that *Robinson Crusoe* (published in 1719) epitomizes an Enlightenment fascination with the “noble savage” whose condition—while admirable to some degree—lacks not only the moral responsibilities of social life that may *circumscribe* the social division of labor, but the higher achievements of social life that may *inspire* it. It is possible to say that the contemporary division of labor may hinder as well as promote various aspects of human flourishing at the same time. Indeed, it is the tension between the moral responsibilities and the attractive benefits of social life that makes the contemporary social division of labor more dilemmatic than most apologists and critics want to admit.

The concept of the “noble savage” makes its appearance in two seminal works of the 18th century, both of which were crucial to this dissertation: Rousseau’s *Discourse on the Origin and Foundations of Inequality among Men* (published in 1754) and Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* (published in 1776). The condition of the “savage” provides the standard against which Rousseau criticizes the depravity of civilization throughout the *Discourse*. Smith addresses the condition of the “barbarous” man in an apparent attempt to note its initial attractiveness—but ultimate depravity—in relation to the conditions of civilized, industrialized life. It is in Rousseau’s praise that we can see the attractiveness of noble savage’s condition; it is in Smith’s dismissal that we can see the reason why we should forgo it in order to appreciate the advantages of social life.

Both Rousseau and Smith claim that the more natural condition of the noble savage requires that he develop a variety of abilities to a useful degree. Rousseau claims that “necessity obliges [the savage] to acquire” the “strength and agility” to meet his basic needs, defend himself, resist disease and otherwise attain self-sufficiency.³⁸ Smith agrees that the variety of occupations necessary for the barbarous man to survive “oblige every man to exert his capacity, and to invent expedients for removing difficulties which are continually occurring”—to the point that every man is, in some measure, a warrior and a statesman.³⁹ Indeed, Rousseau and Smith agree that natural conditions encourage the savage to possess (in Smith’s words) “a considerable degree of knowledge, ingenuity, and invention; but scarce any man has a great degree.”⁴⁰ Rousseau and Smith even agree that the laboring conditions of their day were not always conducive to such development. Rousseau asserts that the “industry” of his day limits the exercise of a variety of abilities, thereby limiting the laborer’s strength and agility relative to what would happen were he in a more natural condition. Smith—that great proponent of the

industrial division of labor—is in the midst of his brief criticism of the division of labor in Book V of *The Wealth of Nations* when he admits that in the barbarous man’s natural condition, “invention is kept alive, and the mind is not suffered to fall into that drowsy stupidity, which, in a civilized society, seems to benumb the understanding of almost all the inferior ranks of people” whose lot is dictated by the division of labor.⁴¹

Where Rousseau and Smith differ is in their accounts of the increased *variety* that attends life in a civilized society. Rousseau thinks that life in civil society allows man to expand his wants beyond his natural needs, making civilized man more willing to subject himself to the decrepit conditions of labor and interdependence on others in order to satisfy his enlarged demands. For Smith, however, it is the variety of civilized society and its occupations that “present an almost infinite variety of objects to the contemplation of those few [the philosophers]” who, in the process of this contemplation, render their understandings “acute and comprehensive.”⁴² Although in this case the intellectual benefits (unlike the benefits of opulence) are supposed to reach only a select few, Smith sees that the variety presented by social life—including a division of labor—can benefit at least some (but perhaps all) individuals.

I do not believe that Rousseau’s and Smith’s differing accounts of the effects of variety on the noble savage signify incommensurate views of the division of labor. Although I have noted throughout this work that Rousseau criticizes and Smith apologizes for the division of labor, I believe that their accounts of the effects of variety on the noble savage represent two facets of the division of labor. On one hand, Rousseau is right in noting that the division of labor and the attendant variegation of life often require an unhealthy pigeonholing of individual development. On the other hand, however, Smith is right in observing that it is the increased variety of life that presents both mind and body—not just the mind of the philosopher or the

body of laborer—with the stimuli for higher personal development and expansion. Rousseau's failure to appreciate the beneficial aspects of specialization is the shortcoming of his evaluation; Smith's failure to pursue the derogatory effects of specialization is the shortcoming of his evaluation.

Crusoe epitomizes the noble savage insofar as he develops a variety of abilities in response to his needs on the island. But his condition also epitomizes that rude degree of development that attends the noble savage's life devoid of social interaction. The error of Marx's criticism of Crusoe—and what Marx fails to make clear about communist man—is that the social aspect of man enables *a higher quality of life* than that which is attainable by the noble savage. Crusoe's development, like that of Rousseau's savage, extends only so far as his relatively natural and asocial conditions allow. Were he to enter into exchange and interaction with others, as Smith suggests, he would augment his position. Social life presents the individual with a variety of options—knowledge to acquire, skills to develop, wants to satisfy and occupations to hold—that can extend the noble savage's development beyond that which is allowed in his rude and solitary state. But in the pursuit of social benefits, the noble savage may have to take up a particularized occupation that only engages a few of his wide range of abilities. The dilemma that the noble savage faces when he confronts civilization is the dilemma faced by the modern individual when he confronts the contemporary division of labor.

Perhaps Marx's account of communist man deserves a more charitable reading than Murphy affords it. As Joseph Bien suggests, perhaps Marx was carried away by "enthusiasm" when he characterized communist man in *The German Ideology*.⁴³ This enthusiasm prevented Marx from paying due diligence to the social aspect of man that he so adamantly professed to recognize. Bien further suggests that Marx, in characterizing communist man as he does, is

“only calling for a serious degree of choice in the social area and the possibility of sufficient free time to cultivate a broad field of interests rather than being locked into one profession for life for the sake of mere survival.”⁴⁴ Bien’s choice to talk about the *cultivation* of one’s interests beyond what is required for survival is apt; it is the possibility for this cultivation that distinguishes the condition of the contemporary laborer from that of the “noble savage.” What is needed now in the contemporary evaluation and redrawing of the division of labor is an account of man that recognizes the social aspect of man and the fact that this social aspect can serve as both a limitation and a spur to the social division of labor. I hope to have aided both this prospective project and the retrospective project of trying to make sense of past accounts of the division of labor by providing a framework according to which one looks at the effects of the division of labor, its engagement of human capacities, and its shaping of the relationship between the individual and society in order to generate a thorough evaluation. By proceeding along these lines, I believe that we can acquire the thorough appreciation of both man and his labor that is essential to an effective restructuring of that widespread and entrenched feature of contemporary life: the division of labor.

Notes:

¹ Sayer and Walker, *The New Social Economy*, 5.

² Alan Goldman, “Ethical Issues in Advertising,” in *Just Business*, ed. Tom Regan (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 235-270.

³ *Ibid.*, 236.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁵ For more on this issue, see Mark Dowie, “Pinto Madness,” *Mother Jones* 2, no. 8 (Sept./Oct. 1977).

⁶ Marx, “The Communist Manifesto,” in *Selected Writings*, 247.

⁷ Schwartz, “Meaningful Work,” 641.

⁸ Walker and Guest, *The Man on the Assembly Line*, Chapter 13.

⁹ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 60.

¹⁰ G. A. Cohen, “Marx’s Dialectic of Labor,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 3, no. 3 (Spring, 1974): 247.

¹¹ What follows is a reconstruction of Arendt’s position taken from Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 123 and 214n.48.

¹² Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 19-20.

¹³ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 7.

¹⁴ Moghaddam, *The Specialized Society*, 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

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- ¹⁶ Glenn Greenwood and Robert F. Frederickson, *Specialization in the Medical and Legal Professions* (Mundelein, IL: Callaghan & Company, 1964), 12.
- ¹⁷ R.B. Goldbloom, "Increasing Specialization in Medicine," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 118, no. 11 (June, 1978): 1347.
- ¹⁸ Edmund Pellegrino, *Humanism and the Physician* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1979), 187.
- ¹⁹ I am indebted to an article by Antoinette H. Cotton for drawing my attention to this play. See Antoinette H. Cotton, "Power, Knowledge, and the Discourse of Specialization in Nursing," *Clinical Nurse Specialist* 11, no. 1 (January, 1997): 25-29.
- ²⁰ For an excellent summary of the basic changes recommended by the natural capitalists, see Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter Lovins, *Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1999), Chapter 1.
- ²¹ Garrett Hardin, "The Tragedy of the Commons," *Science* 162 (1968): 1243-1248.
- ²² Walker and Guest, *The Man on the Assembly Line*, 142 and 149.
- ²³ Schwartz, "Meaningful Work," 640-642.
- ²⁴ Moghaddam, *The Specialized Society*, 73.
- ²⁵ Edmund Pellegrino, "Can the Generalist Survive the 21st Century?" *Journal of the American Board of Family Practice* 13, no. 4 (2000):312-313.
- ²⁶ Babbage, *Economy of Machinery and Manufactures*, 175-176.
- ²⁷ See Monchi Lio and Meng-Chun Liu, "An Empirical Study on the Division of Labor and Economic Structural Changes" and Monchi Lio, "The Division of Labor and the Allocation of Time," both of which are found in *The Economics of E-Commerce and Networking Decisions: Applications and Extensions of Inframarginal Analysis*, eds. Yew-Kwang Ng, Heling Shi, and Guang-Zhen Sun (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003): 298-310 and 248-262 (respectively).
- ²⁸ Ruskin, *Stones of Venice*, Ch. VI, §XVI.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, §XX.
- ³⁰ As a supplement to Marx's *Manifesto* claims, see *The German Ideology* in *Selected Writings*, 207.
- ³¹ See, for example, Rousseau's *Discourse on Inequality*, 171: 19.
- ³² Marx, *The German Ideology*, in *Selected Writings*, 207.
- ³³ Walker and Guest, *The Man on the Assembly Line*, 3.
- ³⁴ Murphy, *The Moral Economy of Labor*, 220-224.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 220.
- ³⁸ Rousseau, *Discourse on Inequality*, 135:5.
- ³⁹ Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, 735.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*
- ⁴² *Ibid.*, 736.
- ⁴³ Joseph Bien, *History, Revolution and Human Nature* (Amsterdam: B.R. Gruener Publishing Co., 1984), 221.
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

Conclusion: The End of the Beginning: Reviewing the Framework and What Lies Ahead

The division of labor is so ubiquitous and entrenched that it appears to contemporary eyes as the *sine qua non* of modern life. But the degree to which it shapes human lives and institutions is precisely the degree to which the division of labor deserves careful examination and evaluation. Unfortunately, philosophers and their colleagues in other disciplines who touch on the division of labor and its place in the human social order have been hampered by analyses that rest on important—but often unexpressed—assumptions. The purpose of this dissertation was to direct philosophical attention to the identification and exploration of key assumptions at work in most—if not all—accounts of the division of labor. The hope was to generate a philosophically and practically useful framework for the further analysis and study of specialization.

The investigations of the dissertation began with a review of Fathali Moghaddam's *The Specialized Society*—a contemporary critique of the division of labor in terms of its negative effects on individual actualization. Although Moghaddam levied some powerful criticism against the assumptions of proponents of the division of labor, Moghaddam's own view was shown to rest on all-too-important—yet all-too-often-undefended—assumptions about the *effects* of labor, the nature of human *capacities*, and the *proper relationship between the individual and society*. Perhaps Moghaddam thinks that his assumptions about these issues are so attractive as to require little defense; however, it is precisely over these issues that Moghaddam and his opponents *disagree*. Once extracted from Moghaddam's account, these three issues provide a kind of framework in terms of which one can begin to examine other accounts. To see this, I explored each of these issues—in successive chapters—by looking at their place in important accounts of the division of labor in the history of philosophy. Plato, Adam Smith, and others

make crucial assumptions about the effects of labor, the nature of human capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and society—and these assumptions affect their influential evaluations of the division of labor. The value of the framework as a guide for exploring philosophical accounts of the division of labor makes it a matter of philosophical import. But there is more. In the process of these explorations, we encountered a variety of challenging topics that also deserve philosophical attention. One might wonder, for example, about the concept of efficiency—its requirements, the methods by which it may be reached, the degree to which the pursuit of economic efficiency is morally problematic, and so on. One might also ask questions about our “natural fitness” for certain labors, the need for man to develop both socially and individually, or the degree to which the human condition relegates man to some kind of social division of labor in order to meet his needs or enjoy the luxuries of life. These are the kinds of questions that cry out for answers—effective answers that lead to progress and perhaps even convergence in the debates about the division of labor and associated issues.

In addition to its philosophical value, the framework also allows for a more effective approach to the challenges and opportunities presented by the contemporary division of labor. Indeed, the division of labor so extensively influences human life that both significant benefits *and* burdens fall underneath its umbrella. As a complement to Moghaddam’s concern with the “plight” of individuals in a specialized society, I suggest that specialization presents a true *dilemma* for modern man. He must strike a balance—as best he can—between the benefits and burdens of specialization. It is not clear that he can have all of one without some of the other. The temptation is to assert that the division of labor is *either* proper *or* improper relative to some standard of assessment, whether it is productivity, individual actualization, the complexity of one’s work, or any one of a number of other standards. Each of these standards seems to have

some place in the assessment of one's quality of life, but they are not easily met at the same time and in the same manner. So what, then, are we to do when a division of labor pulls us in opposite directions at the same time?

For all that is implausible or fantastic in Crusoe's condition, even he recognizes that certain human conditions—no matter how deplorable—admit of something beneficial. When Crusoe begins to “consider seriously” his condition on the island, he writes down his “state of affairs” by “set[ting] the good against the evil.”¹ He sets, for example, the fact that he is “divided from mankind, a solitaire, one banished from humane society” against the fact that he is “not starv'd and perishing on a barren place, affording no sustenance.” In other words, he sets the fact of his social isolation against the fact that he can meet his practical needs. The human relationship to others and the practical ends of labor are key elements of the framework in this dissertation—and for Crusoe, his sad condition in terms of the former is effectively *counterbalanced* by his acceptable condition with respect to the latter. If anything, the structure of this dissertation is much like Crusoe's accounting of the plusses and minuses of his condition. Here, the subject was the division of labor—and although I have been tempted to heed the grave warnings of Moghaddam and others about specialization in human society, I am now eager to claim that a more comprehensive evaluation of the division of labor in terms of the framework provided herein requires that one recognize the good *and* the bad of the extensive ramifications of the division of labor. Indeed, I am inclined to adopt Crusoe's own words as my own:

Upon the whole, here was an undoubted testimony, that there was scarce any condition in the world so miserable, but there was something *negative* or something *positive* to be thankful for in it; and let this stand as a direction from the experience of the most miserable of all conditions in this world, that we may always find in it something to

comfort ourselves from, and to set in the description of good and evil, on the credit side of the account.²

Indeed, the two-facedness of the division of labor seems to differ little from the nature of the laboring man himself. As the poet Alexander Pope muses in his “Essay on Man,” man himself is multifaceted almost to the point of contradiction:

Know then thyself, presume not God to scan,
The proper study of mankind is Man.
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
A being darkly wise and rudely great...
Created half to rise, and half to fall:
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of truth, in endless error hurl'd;
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

In the end, we are led—as Pope suggested—to study mankind itself when attending to the division of labor and its place in human life. The ideal of the “noble savage” has held sway for both proponents and critics of the division of labor. Although Smith deplores the condition of the noble savage, he admires it enough to argue for an educational system that enriches the lives of those who are condemned to simple occupations under the division of labor. In fact, a noble savage like Crusoe epitomizes the political and economic individualism into which Smith buys with his notion of free-market capitalism; Crusoe is the “economic man” who meets all of his needs through labor—and who conveniently avoids those issues of distributive justice that occasionally dog proponents of free markets. Critics of the division of labor, however, see the noble savage as the well-rounded and heroic precursor of the now specialized and restricted modern man. The problem is that both of these views lack an honest recognition of the benefits

of man's social life—including some social division of labor. Bereft of social life, man as noble savage is free from burdensome social obligations and a dependence upon others to meet his needs. But man as noble savage is also bereft of the benefits that come through social cooperation. Cooperation in some division of labor allows the pianist to spend hours at the piano, the hiker to spend a day on the trail, or the philosopher to spend a lifetime in contemplation without having to attend incessantly to the labors required to meet his other needs. We need a new conception of man that incorporates the well-rounded but hard-working condition of the noble savage with a more appropriate view of the social aspect of human life. There is a place here, perhaps, for a return of the notion of the “Renaissance Man”—the individual who is not only well-rounded in the development of one's abilities, but who actively reaps the benefits of those studious and hard-working predecessors and contemporaries who feed one's own passion for invention and creation. The Renaissance Man resists the restrictive fragmentation of labor while embracing the cooperative labor that allows the freedom and provides the resources for the high-quality development of his abilities in a variety of activities. It will be a challenge to balance the division of labor with individual development—and it is this kind of challenge that gives impetus to further philosophical and interdisciplinary research on the issues that influence how labor is divided: the effects of labor, the nature of human capacities, and the proper relationship between the individual and society. Thus this framework is, in a sense, also the groundwork for promising investigations going forward.

Notes:

¹ Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, 53-54.

² *Ibid.*, 54.

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VITA

Anthony Thomas was born on March 30, 1979, and spent all of his youth in Riverton, Utah. He was a valedictorian and captain of the golf team for Bingham High School in 1997. He attended Utah State University on a Presidential Scholarship, majoring in History for three years before transferring to Philosophy in the wake of reading a passage from John Stuart Mill that warned about the preoccupations of one's occupation and their negative impacts upon one's more tender and noble aspirations. In his one year as a Philosophy major, he was introduced to the personally meaningful study of Ludwig Wittgenstein's life and work, and he was recognized as the Student of the Year for the Department of Languages and Philosophy. He graduated *summa cum laude* in Philosophy in 2001.

He enrolled in Northern Illinois University's MA program in Philosophy in 2001, where he met some of his most influential friends while playing basketball on Friday afternoons. After graduating with an MA in Philosophy in 2003, he returned to Utah intending to be a gardener—instead, he served as an adjunct at Utah Valley State College and Salt Lake Community College (teaching eleven classes in 2003-04), and he married Anne Burgess on May 12, 2004. Anne is his most faithful companion and friend.

He entered the PhD program at the University of Missouri in 2004. His first assignment as a teaching assistant was with Dr. Joseph Bien—a most fortuitous assignment! He began teaching his own courses in his second year, working with great students in a variety of courses.

While at Missouri, he served as the Philosophy Department's representative on the Graduate Professional Council for four years, especially enjoying his service on the Intercollegiate Athletics Committee for three years. He participated in the Preparing Future Faculty program and the Difficult Dialogues Initiative, and he attended the Wakonse Conference on College Teaching in 2008 and 2009. He also moonlighted as an adjunct at State Fair Community College in Sedalia, Missouri, where he developed and taught online courses at the request of the very welcoming Dr. Doug Strauss. In his final year at Missouri, he enjoyed working with Dr. Bill Bondeson—a truly inspirational and jovial teacher and colleague—as his grader for Medical Ethics and his assistant in the Center for Arts and Humanities.

After nearly six months of job hunting during difficult economic times, he accepted a position at Kishwaukee College in Malta, Illinois—not far from his home for two years in DeKalb, Illinois. He is thankful to turn his attention to teaching full time—as teaching is what he often calls the “saving grace” of his academic life. The teaching life is, indeed, the “good life.”