

This is the accepted version of Notes on James A Chamberlain (2018) 'Undoing Work, Rethinking Community: A critique of the social function of work, ILR Press: Ithaca and London. The published version can be found in Organization Studies at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0170840618792160>

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Who wants to work? The usual assumption is that that we all do, or all should do. Both Left and Right see employment as the foundation of economic and social policy, albeit in different ways. Within organizational scholarship, the work organization predominates with its familiar dramatis personae of control, resistance, domination, work identities, managers, strategy and so on. The burgeoning scholarship of 'alternative organizing' looks beyond the world of employment (Parker, Cheney, Fournier, & Land, 2014; Parker, Fournier, & Reedy, 2007), but even here there is an emphasis on co-operatives and self-provisioning; in other words, we still do not altogether escape work. What we rarely do is question the very institution of work itself or its centrality to society. This is where Chamberlain's book provides a useful resource for questioning our own assumptions regarding the close coupling of work and organization and the centrality of work to our understanding of citizenship and community.

Chamberlain's starting point for his book is that 'in the contemporary work society, good citizenship does indeed entail gainful employment but that this requirement substantially undermines freedom, equality, and justice' (p. 2). In what will be a familiar argument for organization scholars, or at least those who have read Peter Anthony's engaging *Ideology of Work* (1977), Chamberlain traces our attitudes to work to the Protestant Reformation (as did Erich Fromm in *Escape from Freedom*). Work is transformed from the curse of Adam to a positive moral project, a demonstration of salvation bestowed, and the avoidance of the vices associated with idleness. This work ideology is intensely individualistic as one pursues one's own self-advancement, self-respect and status in the community. Chamberlain argues that all forms of work consequently rest on a social ontology that sees society as an association of individuals who become integrated into it via work. Work becomes an essential qualification for full citizenship and those not able to work (carers, children, the unemployed, the disabled, the old etc) tend to be excluded or stigmatized. The author's project is to fundamentally critique and undermine this ideology as antithetical to our freedom.

In the book's second chapter 'The Work Society', Chamberlain develops his arguments through a critical account of Andre Gorz's writing on the need to reduce paid work to a minimum as a prerequisite for human flourishing. In an era where technology is increasingly replacing the need for work (Fleming, 2018) Gorz primarily sees the work ethic as a form of social control. On the one hand, under and un-employment creates a reserve army of labour where its members are pitted against each other in competition for dwindling precarious work opportunities. On the other hand, the more privileged professionalized workers who still have full-time jobs are unwilling to countenance reductions in working hours, or their more equal distribution, as their status and income depend on their occupations. Success or failure are seen to be entirely a matter of individual responsibility in this sorry system. Chamberlain concurs with Gorz's diagnosis and much of his proposed cure (i.e., a reduction in paid work to a minimum supported by the wholesale introduction of universal basic income (UBI)). Together, these will facilitate a shift to co-operative, non-commodified, and

communitarian ways of organizing a wide range of needs, wants and desires. However, Chamberlain is also critical of what he sees as Gorz's continuing adherence to a link between work and social inclusion. Gorz maintains that there will always be a residue of necessary work that must simply be shared out according to a democratised and just system. Doing one's share, in this regard, would be a requirement of all citizens in Gorz's proposal. Chamberlain sees this both as a continuation of an individualist social ontology and worries over the potential for exclusion or coercion for those unable or unwilling to fulfil Gorz's minimal work requirement.

Chamberlain goes on to substantiate his ideas regarding the individualization and self-entrepreneurialism at the heart of work society through a discussion of flexibility in Chapter 3. He sees flexibilization as having both employee-friendly and employee-oppressive potential, observing that even more employee friendly forms blur the distinction between work and leisure and so reinforce the primacy of work in our lives. All forms of flexibility, according to Chamberlain, are linked to a subjectivity of the self-entrepreneur who manages their work, leisure and care, a 'business' of the self. Such individualization stands opposed to collective care, or public responsibility for others. His conclusion is that flexibility is a two-edged sword. It offers some the option of reducing working hours and integrating leisure pursuits or care into their working lives as well as conferring a degree of freedom to organise one's own work. Even here, temporary or contract workers may fear to turn down work as they do not know if it will be offered to them in the future. For most, flexibilization is simply a route to membership of the precariat. He proposes UBI as a mechanism to reduce the resulting growing inequality and polarisation between these groups.

Chamberlain sees UBI as an essential strategy to free us from work. However, he sees a real danger in how some of its proponents justify it in terms of increasing employment and enterprise and so reinforcing the role of paid work on social esteem. This version of UBI is essentially a more efficient, fair and humane version of welfarism. Chamberlain explores the development of welfarism from a collective right of citizens to an individualized and increasingly punitive unemployment benefits system that reinforces the moral obligation to work and individualizes the failure not to do so. He is consequently critical of the left's attachment to a return to an idealised era of full-employment and high stable welfare, framing it as a Lacanian 'fantasy'. Whilst acknowledging that a work-focused UBI still has some emancipatory and redistributive potential, he argues that for this to operate in ways that do not stigmatize recipients as undeserving, a "transformation in the meaning and value of paid work is required" (p. 84). He moves on to consider more radical versions of UBI when in Chapter 5, he returns to Gorz's thinking, supplementing it with a discussion of Hardt and Negri's rather similar ideas. Both see UBI as a strategy for a transition to a post-work society and as a way of achieving Chamberlain's desired transformation in how paid work is perceived.

The author goes on to consider how the post-work society might be achieved. Drawing on both Gorz's and Hardt and Negri's complementary conceptions of immaterial labour, he argues that they see it emerging as the hegemonic form of work in late capitalism. Potentially, immaterial labour enables an affluent economy not based on monetary exchange and where coordination and cooperation are immanent in the growing uncommodified common. Essentially, both argue that employers need increasingly autonomous workers for immaterial labour but that this leads to people claiming more of this autonomy for themselves; that is, employers need immaterial workers, but workers will increasingly no longer need the infrastructure and coordination of those employers. Eventually workers will simply disengage from the employment relationship in favour of self-organized cooperation. Chamberlain is positive about many aspects of this immaterial labour thesis and its potential for a reconfiguration of the organization of work. In both Gorz's multiactivity society and Hardt and Negri's self-organizing common, cooperative activities would form the primary social bond. Both envisage the flowering of cooperation freed from the barriers of private

property or the accumulation of capital. Alienated labour is replaced by autonomous activities supported by UBI and so the lack of freedom of the work society is overcome.

Chamberlain is not altogether uncritical of Gorz and Hardt and Negri. He is sceptical of the mechanisms by which the growth of immaterial labour could by itself produce the social and political movements required to overcome capitalism. Indeed, he sees self-organized immaterial labour for some as potentially co-existing with market capitalism and so not leading to a broader cultural and political change favouring social solidarity over individual acquisition. Most importantly, he argues that work is retained as the basis for community risking various forms of exclusion. Can one conceive of a form of social community entirely distinct from work, whether paid or not though? He turns to Nancy's concept of the 'inoperative' or 'unworked community' (p. 103) to answer this. This is, I think, the least persuasive part of the book. Nancy rejects any form of work as a basis of community (and this seems to include all productive activity). But what replaces it? Nancy proposes what he calls the "communionless communism of singular beings". What does this mean? It is very unclear, it seems to involve engagement in a form of 'literary communism' which includes all the creative arts, but membership of the community is always independent of engagement in its activities. Chamberlain acknowledges that Nancy does not give us much help as to how the unworked community could work in practice. I was struck by how much of his analysis hinged on what we mean by work but curiously, for a book about work, there is not much discussion about this. Many of the arguments in this chapter seem to rest on a conflation of work and activity with paid work and employment. Is freely chosen collaborative activity whether for self-provisioning, pleasure, care, community solidarity, conviviality, artistic expression or the cultivation of skill and capacities of various kinds in any way the same as labour? Like Gorz, I find it difficult to imagine an alternative basis to a wide range of shared activities, including those mandated by necessity, to the maintenance of social bonds. Important questions concerning the place and form of co-operation in the postwork society are not fully addressed here. One is left asking 'why cooperate? How does a society balance a desirable interdependence and relationality with an equally desirable autonomy for individuals? Would one wish to live in a world where all necessary work has been automated, which seems to be the implication of Nancy's ideas, or, rather, one in which work is at least partially transformed to art, self-expression and conviviality?

In his final chapter, Chamberlain completes his argument that it is necessary to altogether break the link between work (paid or not) and membership of society as a precondition for freedom. Whilst he argues that taking responsibility for others as a social duty involves some obligation to work if one can, he also proposes that this should not operate as a mechanism for inclusion or exclusion. Such a postwork society requires that capitalism be transcended and so the left-liberal vision of UBI within a reformed capitalism is a non-starter for him because of the retention of employment and the various forms of control and coercion integral to it. That is, eventually there will be incompatibility between the extension of worker autonomy and the generation of profits. Additionally, consumer culture, maintained by the need for compensation for the loss of liberty and free time, relies on the individualised and egotistical social relations integral to capitalism. He finally seems to accept Gorz's argument that there will always be some need for work because of the responsibilities entailed by social solidarity and caring for others. Like Gorz, he concludes that such work could be arranged to maximize choices regarding how it is done and distributed through its full democratisation within co-operative networks.

The book is well worth reading for its clear synthesis of a number of issues and thinkers on topics such as UBI, work, immaterial labour, welfare and flexibility. It could have been enriched by a consideration of a wider range of thinkers. Having said this, the book, despite some faults, is worth reading for several reasons. It raises a whole range of issues about the purposes of organizing and the role and meaning of work in our society that are not considered enough by organization

scholars. Chamberlain's perspective as a political scientist generates some very valuable insights in this regard. The book is a very useful account of ideas that can enable thinking about such issues. In my view, it deserves to be read just for its extended treatment of Andre Gorz's work, which is undeservedly neglected within our discipline. Scholars of alternative organization, in particular, could usefully harness the utopian variant of UBI and the reduction of work without income to consider how organization could develop in the context of voluntary co-operation and in the service of social justice and human flourishing.

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Add Fleming essay here

Fleming, P. (2018). *Robots and Organization Studies: Why Robots Might Not Want to Steal Your Job*. Organization Studies, DOI: 10.1177/0170840618765568.