

Ethical and Ontological Foundations for an Alternative Economic Practice

Cosma Orsi
University of Leeds

Moving from the recognition that one of the most urgent challenge of our times concerns the need to repair the social fracture generated by market processes, I will offer theoretically sound arguments supporting alternative ontological and ethical foundations to those informing the libertarian ethos. Such an alternative moral grounding will be then examined for its practical implications. At the centre of my endeavour, thus, is the notion of philosophical justification for economic practices. My intention here is not that of proposing a bold new theory of justice able to solve the problems afflicting our contemporary societies. Rather, the scope is to bring back to the surface some philosophical reflections about present-day market societies, so as to reveal to which extent the idea that since within them human beings can be said to be truly free then only a market order should be assumed as the sole morally just one is flawed.

We live in an era of deep social, political, and economic change that force individuals and institutions to reflect on the models of interaction among social actors. In the last 20 years, have been adopted neo-liberal economic policies favouring the re-emergence of a renewed form of *laissez-faire capitalism*, nowadays referred to as *free market capitalism*. Free-market advocates, in the attempt to impose their powerful ideology, follow the teaching of contemporary libertarian scholars. The libertarian political philosophy justifies the market order providing a set of ethical arguments in its favour, which, in turn, form what has been defined as the libertarian ethos.¹ This article is written

¹ For the purposes of the framework being developed here, the term ethos will be intended as a 'socially inherited normative patrimony' able to condition human conduct. Such a normative patrimony does not describe the way in which human beings live and behave, rather it establishes how they ought to live. It moves from abstract but absolute

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with the conviction that the normative apparatus - the ontological and ethical foundations - informing the system of social cooperation endorsed by libertarians is ill-suited both to the task of understanding our present condition and for envisioning a desirable future.

Before reflecting upon what may be the most appropriate way in which an ideally just community ought to organise its economic activity, however, it is necessary to further specify what it will be meant by the phrase *ideally just community*. In my opinion, an ideally just community is the one within which all its members are enabled to choose independently the course of their life and to develop and exercise their capacities and abilities. For the purpose of the framework being developed here, these two values will be respectively named self-determination and self-development.² Unfortunately, the reality is far from what these two ideals would require.

At present, in fact, the idea that in spite of the emphasis placed by prevailing social and economic theories on the ability of the market to promote individual liberty, its every-day practices constantly fails 'to take sufficiently into account the requirements of social cooperation and social equality',³ is confirmed by the vast majority of social statistics currently available. They show that the imposition of market arrangements as the sole and indisputable reference for development strategies condemned an overwhelming number of ordinary people to be marginalized from the main body of society pushing the humanity into an impasse.

In light of the above, it seems appropriate to say that under market processes, two general conditions of injustice, namely domination and oppression, correspond to the above-mentioned ideals upon which the proposed notion of justice rests.⁴ What are the implications for political philosophy of the predominance of deregulated market processes that constantly fail to meet the requirements of both social equality and social cooperation? What is the role of political philosophy,

principles and values, and then derives, in the most coherent possible way, specific and unconditionally valid commands or prohibitions.

² Young, I. M. *Inclusion and Democracy*, Oxford University Press, 2000, p. 34 So conceived, the notion of justice raises fundamental issues concerning people's well-being, making it a particularly suitable concept for addressing socio-economic issues and problems. Utilised as a tool for socio-economic analysis, this notion of justice will allow us to focus on a broad range of issues that are pivotal to the life of millions of human beings, including the way in which they might organise their economic activities.

³ Gould, C. *Rethinking Democracy. Freedom and Social Cooperation in Politics, Economy, and Society*, Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 3

⁴ Young, I. M. *Op. Cit.*, pp. 34-36 For the purpose of this work domination will be understood as 'institutional constraints on self-determination', that is, a condition under which persons or groups of person 'live within structures of domination if others persons or groups can determine without reciprocation the conditions of their action, either directly or by virtue of the structural consequences of their actions.' Oppression, instead, will be understood as 'institutional constraints on self-development', that is, persons or groups are oppressed as far as they are impeded to develop and exercise their capacities or express their experience.

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and how can it contribute to the task of proposing an alternative frame of reference to the actually existing one?

The departure point of any alternative political philosophy is to recognize that the ontological foundation upon which the libertarian doctrine rests is defective. Furthermore, since our contemporary societies are complex, plural, and densely populated, the proposed political philosophy should be able to provide a robust argument for mutual co-operation for the common good that 'presumes social distance.'⁵

The basis for a political philosophy assuming as its foundation the notion of mutual co-operation 'across social distance' is the acknowledgement that persons live and dwell in common territories, are ruled by common institutions, communicate through common languages, share, to a high degree, customs and norms, history, culture and social practices which, in turn, form persons' collective identity. The fact that persons relate and interact each other generates social bonds that would provide the basis for sharing common interests, values, and ends. Along with the identification of common interests this sharing process potentially enables people, regardless of their social distance, to mutually co-operate for their attainment.

In light of the above, and borrowing an idea from Daly and Cobb, I will assume as its ontological foundation the notion of 'person-in-community'. Lying underneath the notion of 'person-in-community' is the idea that human beings become who\what they are via the social relations occurring within their community. In a relational context as the one earlier described, it is simply not possible that human beings may be said driven only by the maximisation of their utility. The libertarian conception of human nature constitutes the grounds for the celebration of individual's negative freedom, libertarian's fundamental moral and political value.

According to this understanding of freedom, a person may be said to be truly free as long as she is not interfered with in the pursuit of her own goals, interests, and ends. In the economic field, this interpretation of freedom leads libertarians to support a conception of economic justice entailing the very respect of negative property rights with which each individual is endowed. However, if we maintain that people's true freedom consists of having effective opportunities of independently choosing the course of their life and of developing their capacities, then it is easy to see that the libertarian notion of freedom is insufficient to achieve true freedom. In fact, the achievement

⁵ Ibid., p. 222 As Young notes, only in this way it would be possible for 'norms of solidarity [to] hold among strangers and those who in many ways remain strange to one another.' The term 'solidarity' denotes all those actions undertaken by a person or a group of persons entailing a voluntary transfer of goods or services to other persons or group of persons where such a transfer is not subjected to a contract explicitly agreed upon or institutionally due.

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of true freedom⁶ necessarily requires not only the absence of external constraints but also the opportunity to enjoy equal positive rights necessary to the achievement of one's self-determination and self-development.⁷

The normative basis upon which such a set of equal positive rights to self-determination and self-development rests is that since all human beings have equal moral worth, and since self-determination and self development require both opportunities and capacities, then there is no reason for anyone to have more rights than others to such opportunities and conditions. Accordingly, all people should be equally entitled to decide the goals and the rule that will guide their action in the political, social, and economic sphere. By direct consequence, within the envisaged community, an appropriate level of participation should be promoted and implemented in all these domains along with a more equitable redistribution of material resources. In order to achieve such a tall order, the primary task of rule-makers should be, firstly, to enhance a kind of autonomy for which all the members of the community may have a role to play in the social arena, determined by rules that they can freely choose and modify, and, secondly, a more appropriate distribution of resources necessary for the satisfaction of primary needs.

However, in order to attain the envisaged system of social cooperation it is necessary that within it all its members not only may benefit from, but also voluntarily contribute to it. In turn, this requires not only that all its members have positive and negative rights to claim but also responsibilities and moral obligations towards others to fulfil regardless their social distance. As we shall see shortly after, this claim will push us to reflect upon the most appropriate way of organising the economic activity of an ideally just community.

The Economy of Solidarity

At present, the task of elaborating alternative development strategies to those entailed by market processes is of greater importance, since it is increasingly felt that in order to be said morally just, an economic system needs to aim not only at making the economy work but also at making the whole society work. The basis for such a claim is the recognition that in the real world, the majority of people appear to be not merely interested in increasing profits, but more

⁶ Intended as equal freedom to self-determination and self-development -

⁷ Gould, C. C. *Op. Cit.*, 1988, pp. 37-8; See also Held, V. *Rights and Goods. Justifying Social Action*, The Free Press, 1984, pp. 121-38

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fundamentally, in aspects of well-being for which the prevailing economic model of development is totally inefficient.

Given the above, it seems not unreasonable to argue that any economic system is fatally destined to generate the breakdown of social cohesion unless the model of development informing it is socially sustainable. The notion of socially sustainable development stemming from the ideal of justice here defended requires the economic activity to be organised in a way in which it might implement mechanisms and processes aimed at redressing forms of domination and oppression while facilitating social behaviours of mutual solidarity across social distance.

Although market mechanisms should play an important role within our complex societies as they perform many functions well, nonetheless ‘the realisation of human well-being now requires a non-market economic order.’⁸ If this is so, in order to recompose the fracture occurred between the society at large and its economic system, it is required to endorse the richer notion of a ‘plural economy’. A ‘plural economy’ entails the existence of a market economy, within which operate market actors represented by profit-oriented enterprises; a non-market economy, within which, under the aegis of the State, operate institutional actors which guarantee a fair redistribution of resources; and, finally, a no-profit economy, social and associative in kind.

As we shall see, in order to implement a socially sustainable model of economic development, the no-profit economy, on the one hand, allows all those who are actively engaged in economic activities to participate in decision-making processes so as to allow them to establish the conditions and the aims of their cooperation; on the other, it produces and distribute goods and services in order to satisfy their individual and collective needs. Accordingly, from now on my main goal will be that of showing that the path leading toward the envisaged system of social cooperation requires the revitalization of the third sector.

Although at present notions such as solidarity, mutual cooperation, and reciprocity have been assumed by the advocates of the prevailing economic system as old-fashioned and discredited concepts, due to the increase of ‘groups of social vulnerability’, we have assisted to the rebirth of a multitude of social enterprises refusing the pure competitive logic.⁹ These enterprises, assuming the economic sphere as unthinkable without referring to social relations, constantly explore alternative ways of organising the economic activity. In doing so, their primary goal is to bring back the

⁸ O’Neill, J. *The Market: Ethics, Knowledge, and Politics*, Routledge, 1998, p. 63 This necessarily implies assuming a notion of economic development for which concepts such as economic efficiency, profit, and competitiveness would cease to be the sole polar stars orienting the economic activity.

⁹ informal networks, self-help organizations, foundations, cooperatives, associations, etc

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notions of solidarity and mutual reciprocity at the very heart of the economic rationality rather than just accept the logic of correcting markets' failure as the model of welfare proposes.

However, to find a unique term to define the economic typology embodied by the myriads of solidarity-based activities is a very hard task. Such a difficulty is highlighted by the different terminology used within the academic community: social, non-profit, participatory, associative, solidarity economy, etc. are among the most frequently advanced. Since the economic activities undertaken by social enterprises are characterised not merely by altruistic rather by solidaristic purposes in what follows the whole economic activities developed by social enterprises will be referred to as the economy of solidarity. For this reason, I think that the economic interventions promoted by social enterprises may well be defined as *solidarity-based activities*.

Before to proceed any further, it is necessary to explain what motivates people to identify not satisfied needs, and voluntarily conferring productive resources - labour, capital, or entrepreneurial capacities - aimed at their fulfilment. If what has been said till now has meaning, then it would not unreasonable to say that the members of an ideally just society living and dwelling together might perceive to be inexorably linked to the fate of others. For this reason, indeed, they may be aware that in order to ameliorate their standard of life they must privilege the common good rather than satisfy their own self-interested preferences.

The richer approach to economic development informing the economy of solidarity calls for a redefinition of the notion of economic development not just in terms of an ever increased economic growth, but as a process by which all the members of the community would be enabled to develop their potentiality as human being so as to 'achieve sustainable improvements in their quality of life using the resources available to them.'¹⁰ This necessarily implies a re-definition of ordinary people's role in participating to social, political and economic decision-making processes, a strengthening of solidarity networks, and the elaboration of new approaches to work capable of satisfying both individual and collective needs that neither the market nor the state are willing to meet. Once this is said, let now the argument turns on what extent the implementation of solidarity-based activities could help to realise the normative requirements stemming from our notion of justice.

Although an ideally just community required a kind of autonomy which would allow each of its members to have a role to play in the life of the community determined by rules that they can freely choose and modify, within our contemporary societies, the operational criteria for who makes economic decisions is far from meeting such a requirement. Those who have the power make them, while ordinary

¹⁰ Korten, D. Op. Cit., 1995, p. 168

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people, being powerless, have to 'adjust their actions according to decisions from where ... their voice and interests have been excluded.'¹¹ Conversely, the advocate of the economy of solidarity assume as foundational principle the fact that, if it is to take hold, socially sustainable economic strategies must spring out from decisions which take into account, to the maximum possible extent, all community members' interests and needs.

In other words, the participatory model calls for a more direct and widespread participation in the shaping of decisions concerning the well-being of the whole community. At practical level, the economy of solidarity accomplishes such a requirements in that all decisions are to be taken within what Laville defines 'public spaces of proximity'.¹² These are autonomous public spaces within which all those engaged in solidarity-based activities, being considered partners of equal dignity, enjoy effective opportunities to decide collectively on matters such as 'the planning and organization of production or the provision of services, including what to produce or what services to provide, as well as rate of production, allocation of work, working hours, ..., etc.'¹³ By virtue of this fact, we may say that the decision-making process informing public spaces of proximity allows all those affected by a decision to have a say or influence proportionate to the degree that they are affected. This norm is called participatory self-management.¹⁴

Participatory self-management should be seen as an end within itself. Such an end can be identified as the empowerment of ordinary people. With the phrase empowerment of ordinary people we are referring to a process that makes those who do not belong neither to political nor economic elites aware of their potentialities as pro-active actors within the broader community. Within public spaces of proximity, in fact, it may occur 'the ... education of the members with a further view to enabling them to fulfil their roles as active and socially responsible citizens'¹⁵ accomplishing socially useful tasks that they assign to themselves.

As many political theorists have noted, however, decisions taken by a 'net-shaped constellation' of people to whom the maximum amount of autonomy compatible with the attainment of collective ends is ascribed, not always are as just as claimed. To answer this, it may be said that if decisions would reflect and take into consideration all the voices of the community, and if all would be allowed to speak freely, then those who participate in such decisions would be able to 'develop a collective account of the source of the problems they are trying to solve, and will develop the appropriate social knowledge

¹¹ Young, I. M. Op. Cit., 2000, p. 23

¹² Laville, J. - L. Op. Cit., 1998, see especially pp. 18-26 and pp. 64-68

¹³ Gould, C. Op. Cit., 1988, p. 144

¹⁴ It is participatory in that every actor is identically welcomed into the decision-making process. It is self-managing in that every actor has the same amount of control over decisions that may affect their individual and collective lives as any other actor.

¹⁵ Degnbol - Martinussen, J. Op. Cit., 1999, p. 336.

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necessary to predict likely consequences of alternative courses of action meant to address them.¹⁶ Furthermore, the fact that socially sustainable development strategies are collectively planned makes it possible to imagine that they would be undertaken eyeing what is needed and useful for those who make the decisions and not private profit for absentee owners. For the above reasons, the democratic planning entailed by such a model of decision-making seems to be the most likely to arrive at fair, wise and substantively just outcome, rather than when hundreds of autonomous units, public or private, try to maximise what they think to be their own interests.

According to the ideal of social justice here assumed, however, all members of the envisaged community ought to be enabled not only to choose independently the course of their lives, but also to develop and exercise their capacities. Translated into the language of justice, this means that in order to be just, and therefore morally legitimate, the end of the economic activity should not only be the promotion of individual self-determination, but also - and equally important - that of making available the objective conditions of self-development for all.

Conceiving the performance index of the economic activity on the grounds of an *a-posteriori* calculation of social needs satisfaction, the economy of solidarity, promotes economic activities aimed at the fulfilment of individual and collective needs. In doing so, the economy of solidarity become the bearer of a fundamental rule pervading all its practical manifestations: any economic intervention - would it be the production of goods not available on the market, or the provision of services aimed at meeting unmet social needs - is accomplished neither because someone may pay for it, nor because there is a law obliging to do so. Rather, it is carried out simply because someone needs it.¹⁷

Many observers noted that, differentiating itself both from the profit-seeking (markets) and redistributive (state) logics, the normative basis to which the economy of solidarity refers to should be founded on a different principle: that of reciprocity. In the context of the economy of solidarity, people disposition to reciprocity is grounded in the ethical principle of respect for the dignity of other human beings as ends, not as means only. Hence, the notion of reciprocity entailed by the economy of solidarity is grounded on the reciprocal recognition by any individual of every other as free and equal, and therefore possessing not only rights which must not be violated, but also moral obligation and responsibilities toward others which must be fulfilled. Only on these grounds, it is possible to understand why, in the real world, people coming from different social, economic, and

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 30

¹⁷ Not being motivated by material gain, solidarity-based activities become the manifestation of a common sense, that is, the sense of a world shared with others. Laville, J. - B. Op. Cit., 1998, p. 66

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professional backgrounds freely join together in order to undertake common activities - for example the exchange of goods and services - for the benefit of others.

Towards the Economy of Solidarity

At this juncture, one last question remains unanswered. How is it possible to shift from actually prevailing economic rationality to the envisaged one fostering a sense of community and membership based on the values of social equality, solidarity and voluntary co-operation? On this regard, I will argue that if we really want to bring about the desired system of social cooperation, the first step is to reduce the stark inequalities in social and economic power resulting from profit and market-oriented processes. Such a strategy calls for a more equitable redistribution of both social power and material resources along with the implementation of an alternative approach to work distribution.

If this is so, few questions spontaneously arise. What are the structural policies that might facilitate the shift from competitive, market and profit-oriented arrangements to the ones fostering a far more cohesive and inclusive system of social cooperation based on a sense of community and membership grounded on reciprocal solidarity across social distance? How would it be possible to enable all those who are willing to, to undertake solidarity-based economic activities so as to permit them to contribute actively to societal well-being?

In the attempt to answer these questions, I will maintain that the shift toward a system of social cooperation within which the third sector would cease to be a residual economic domain, assuming a strong societal identity requires the implementation of two structural policies. Particularly, in order to shape the course of their life according to their own ends, it is required that, along side the right of each of its member to be entitled to free key public services such as education, health care, social services, training and retraining, and so on, all the members of an ideally just community should be entitled to have what many authors commonly named Universal Basic Income, (henceforth UBI), alongside the introduction of shorter working hours with no loss in earning.

Before proceeding any further, however, it is necessary to provide a solid argument explaining why there should be a commitment on the part of governmental agencies to foster such a kind of redistribution of economic assets and work opportunities. The basis for positive duties to implement structural policies aimed at enhancing ordinary people self-determination and self-development resides in the fact that all people have equal moral worth. As we have seen, this means that all of them should enjoy equal positive rights to opportunities and conditions for self-determination and self-development.

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If all the members of a given community are entitled to *prima facie* equal right to self-determination and self-development, this creates a requirement to institutionalise and allocate corresponding duties and obligations to governmental agencies having the power to elaborate structural policies aimed at the achievement of self-determination and self-development for all.¹⁸

For the framework being developed here, by UBI will be intended the allocation of a regular and perpetual monetary sum to all the members of a given community. It should have the following fundamental characteristic: a) it has to be universal, that is non-discriminatory - it must be given to all human beings regardless of their sex, race, social, economic and marital status, religion, age, and so on; b) unconditioned, that is, it should be paid irrespective of one's income, or her/his willingness to accept a job if offered. c) Cumulative to other forms of income already existing or yet to come. d) Paid on individual basis and not to households.¹⁹

The moral basis for UBI may well be founded in the specific understanding of justice here defended. As Prof. Fumagalli noted elsewhere, given that the purpose of UBI is to provide all the members of a given community with a sum of money expendable on the final market of commodities, it would guarantee although in a limiting way, the resources necessary to the primary subsistence of all its recipients, thereby allowing them to live dignified life. It is fairly apparent that, if implemented, UBI would lead the earlier mentioned 'groups of social vulnerability' to achieve a much greater socio-economic independence, than that enjoyed today.

Further on, by solving, at least partially, the problems related to the material subsistence of a vast number of people it would sensibly increase ordinary people's degree of autonomy. Fundamentally, being provided regardless recipients' willingness to undertake any effective work activity, UBI permits the full enjoyment of economic citizenship without forcing the recipients to enter in the hierarchized process of material production. For example, the positive provision of UBI would make it easier to turn down a meagre salary or a precarious job or to take a break between two jobs. Furthermore, it would allow ordinary people to reduce the amount of working time dedicated to market-oriented activities, making room for more training, take up self-employment, or to opt for voluntary or remunerated work in the third sector, avoiding the social stigma of being on the dole.²⁰

¹⁸ Hence, rule-makers should promote structural - rather than short-term - policies by means of which all the members of the envisaged community may enjoy their equal positive rights to social and economic means necessary for ensuring that their formal freedom would be turned into real freedom for all.

¹⁹ Only in this meaning the allocation of UBI may be thought as a structural policy potentially able to transform the power imbalance generated by the actually existing market system.

²⁰ See Van Parijs, P. Op. Cit., 2002

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On the labour market, ordinary people would be able to negotiate their wages and working conditions. In fact, with subsistence already assured, they would not be forced by hardship into meaningless, unpleasant or hazardous work; rather, they would be in the position to negotiate decent wages, working conditions and contracts. Thus, it is fair to say that if UBI would be institutionalised, ordinary people would see their freedom to choose independently the course of their lives dramatically implemented. On these lines, it is fair to conclude that since UBI overcomes the negative definition of human liberty as simple absence of coercion can be rightly conceived as ‘the emblem of full citizenship.’²¹ Helping to realize the conditions for self-determination for all, I believe that the provision of UBI contributing significantly to the formation of the true liberty.

In light of what we said, however, it is not difficult to understand why such a structural policy has been perceived as a dangerous one by those who control and shape actually existing economic processes - and consequently dismissed as undesirable. In their eyes, the provision of UBI *de facto* represents a *counterpower* measure to the rules imposed by market-oriented processes and to the derived social polarization. Having more bargaining power, ordinary people would be allowed to opt out from unbalanced power relations inherent to the market system. If this would happen, one of the main disciplinary tools of social control would vanished.

However, although necessary, UBI alone would not be sufficient for bringing about the desired shift. In fact, if we conceive social justice not only as self-determination but also as self-development, then it would be reductive to interpret the notion of liberty merely in terms of having guaranteed the resources needed for choosing one’s life according to one’s own values and aims; rather, the meaning of liberty should be enlarged to include the freedom to work and, broadly speaking, to develop and exercise one’s capacities. It follows that in the envisaged system of social cooperation all members must have equal access to both market-oriented and solidarity-based activities.

If people would be provided with an UBI set an appropriate level, but they would be prevented from participating both to market-oriented and solidarity-based activities, they would become too heavily dependent on it. Given the self-evident need for individual self-respect and given that, in all its variants, dependency heavily undermine individuals’ self-respect, it would certainly be advisable to create effective conditions allowing that as many people as possible would be enabled to meet their needs through meaningful work. In this section it will be argued that, in an era in which mass unemployment and underemployment have become an intrinsic feature, to open up almost unlimited

²¹ Pateman, C. Op. Cit., 2002, p. 8

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opportunities to contribute to the envisaged system of social cooperation, a profound rethinking of the way in which work activities are distributed is required.²²

In an era characterised by mass unemployment in order to achieve the twofold goal of assuring to all equal paid employment opportunities in the formal labour market, allowing, at the same time, those who want to undertake autonomous activities to have the time for doing so it is needed a medium and long-term policy embracing a different approach to work distribution. An attempt to clarify why such a different approach should entail a sensible reduction of working time with no loss in earning will be made. All those who find the proposal of shortening people's working life moves from the recognition that they need more time for their families, for education, for leisure, and for more active involvement in the promotion of welfare of their respective communities. In their eyes, the reduction of the average time dedicated to market-oriented activities should be framed as a struggle for enhancing peoples' quality of life and their effective participation in social changes; in a nutshell, for the attainment of a different kind of society.

Although departing from different backgrounds, those who find such a proposal attractive share an identical premise: the reduction of working hours would allow increasing sectors of population to participate in two diverse spheres of social cooperation, based on radically different principles. The first one would be represented by the productive sector as we actually know it, which would allow the production of solvable goods and services, and which gravitates around principles informed by the profit-making rationale and competition; the second sphere, by converse, would be represented by the myriads of individual and collective autonomous economic activities, undertaken within the micro-social universe, gravitating around principles such as reciprocity and mutual solidarity, care, aid and support. In this way, it would be possible to assist to the advent of a bipolar society, which is the opposite of the polarised society resulting from the application of market-oriented arrangements.²³

Among many others, the crucial issue around which much of the debate gravitates is whether the reduction of working time should be accompanied by a reduction of wages or not. In the eyes of those who argue against the reduction of working hours with no loss in earning, this proposal is not viewed as a structural policy, rather as an 'isolated measure' aiming at redistributing a given quantity of work and money among a large number of persons. As the reduction of working time is perceived as a 'sharing out among a greater number of a fixed volume of work and resources' in

²² Gorz, A. Op. Cit., 1999

²³ Aznar, Op. Cit., 1994, p. 201

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their eyes wage cuts seem inevitable.²⁴ However, conceived as a structural policy, the aim of the reduction of working time must not be seen as a way of redistributing jobs and resources among a larger number of subjects, rather it should be seen as a way to ‘manage an ongoing dynamic process which demands less and less work but create more end more wealth.’²⁵

Although it is apparent that the reduction of working hours with no loss in earning implies some costs, it would be unreasonable asking the workers to bear them in full. Firstly, if working less would lead to earning less, the risk of increasing the precariousness and fragmentation of working activities to the advantage of profit and productive flexibility - rather than opening up effective work opportunities - would become sensibly higher.²⁶ Secondly, an economy which, because it uses less and less labour, distributes less and less wages, would inexorably descend ‘the slippery slope of pauperisation.’²⁷

Furthermore, an excessive loss of purchasing power as a result of wage-cutting would have negative macroeconomic effects. In fact, it would sensibly reduce the internal demand of a large number of goods and services weakening the whole productive mechanism. If this is so, it is necessary to hypothesize that the present level of wages should not fall. However, since the costs inherent to the reduction of working time with no loss in earning are high, for reasons of both political and economic realism, it would be wrong to charge them entirely to the productive system. The end result of such a strategy, in fact, would sensibly increase the ‘relative price’ of both goods and services that are ‘very labour intensive and have low rates of productivity growth.’²⁸ Hence, once introduced this structural policy, entrepreneurs should benefit from appropriate schemes of tax relief and other fiscal incentives.

Before to bring m reflections to an end, it should be mentioned that against the introduction of these structural policies, another argument is often utilised by free marketers: they claim that, once operationalised, it would inspire a significant segment of the able population to contribute as little as possible to the envisaged system of social cooperation abjuring work ‘for a life of idle fun.’²⁹ Both at normative and practical level, however, this objection seems to be largely defective. In fact, it runs

²⁴ Gorz, A. Op. Cit. 1989, p. 200

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ See Fumagalli, A. Op. Cit, 2000.

²⁷ Gorz, A. Op. Cit.1989, p. 200

²⁸ Ibid, p. 201

²⁹ Andersen, E. Optional Freedom, in Symposium: Delivering s Basic Income, *Boston Review*, Oct.-Nov. 2000

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counter the fact of life: anthropological, historical, and sociological analyses show that humans are definitively oriented toward an active life rather than to idleness.³⁰

Drawing from the above analyses, many advocates of the reduction of working time point out that if human beings would be free from heavy and alienating working chores, no longer obliged to work exhausting working days it would not be unreasonable to think that they might dispose of their free time undertaking activities aimed to increasing both their own personal quality of life as well as that of others. Under these circumstances, their free time would become the vector for the diffusion of broader and richer social values.³¹

To support these normative statements, in the real world there are little evidences suggesting that people would be happy to spend their life-time without contributing to the desired system of social cooperation. On the contrary, such an outcome is very unlikely since a vast number of people already contribute a great deal to solidarity-based activities.³² Indeed for this reason, we are confident in affirming that the introduction of this structural policy would not result in massive idleness on the part of ordinary people.

To conclude, we can say that the introduction of these two structural policies may be regarded as powerful tools for achieving justice. In fact, their implementation would allow a great number of people - at present excluded from the main body of society - to exercise their lost power to shape their lives according to their own plans express and develop their capacities and experience. If this is so, it is fair to say that the provision of UBI - not predicated upon any past, present, or future work requirement - along with the reduction of working time with no loss in earning can be seen as necessary measures for creating the conditions for implementing economic activities 'that do not have instrumental, material, gain as their primary rationality.'³³ Hence, favouring the emergence of the third sector as a relevant economic domain these two structural policies would enhance both social cooperation and equality strengthening in so doing the whole community, making it that ideally just place where the majority of ordinary people would be pleased to live in.

³⁰ In the Nineteenth century such a position has been upheld by Marx, and in more recent time by Anna Arendt who declared that 'the human condition of labour is life itself.' Arendt, A. *The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, second edition, 1998, p. 7

³¹ The most notable attempt to implement such an approach to work distribution has been made by Rifkin who maintained that if to ordinary people would be offered the possibility to reduce the amount of working hours they would enjoy 'more leisure time ... than in other period of modern history. That free time could be used to renew the bonds of community and rejuvenate the democratic legacy. A new generation might begin to think and act as common members of the human race, with shared commitments to each other, the community and the larger biosphere.' Rifkin, J. Op. Cit., 1995, p. 248

³² Although the third sector is still an embryonic economic domain, its numbers are rather impressive. If we consider that a person can adhere to different social enterprises, it is possible estimating that more than 30 per cent of EU population participate actively to one or more TS organizations.³² A similar situation can be found in the U.S. where the number of organization whose aims is either to provide services or to promote a cause without speculative aims approach 1,7 million.

³³ Little, A. Op. Cit., 2002, p. 149. See also Jordan, B. Basic Income and the common Good', in Van Parjis, P. Op. Cit., 1992