

Ethics of Work and Labour (PHIL10190): Semester 2 (2022-23)**Instructor:** Professor Michael Cholbi **E-mail:** mcholbi@ed.ac.uk**Course secretary:** Peter Cruickshank (philinfo@ed.ac.uk)**Seminar schedule:** Tuesdays 16:10-18:00, 7 George Sq, 7GS-S1**Office hours:** Tuesdays, 2:30-3:45 (40 George Square, 13.13)**Course description**

During their lifetimes, the average person will spend more hours working than engaging in any other waking activity. Work and labour are thus one of the defining features of human life and one of the central institutions or practices with which moral, political, and social philosophy ought to be concerned. Philosophical attention directed at work tends to wax and wane, accelerating in historical epochs when work is undergoing rapid change (e.g., Smith and Marx in the Industrial Revolution). Philosophical interest in work and labour have grown in recent years in response to growing economic inequality, workforce precarity, and the perceived meaninglessness of many jobs. Developments such as the Covid pandemic stimulated awareness of policies and reforms whose adoption would dramatically impact our working lives (working from home, four-day working weeks, universal basic income, the ‘right to disconnect,’ etc.). This course aims to investigate central philosophical questions about work with an eye to leveraging that investigation to critically appraise the present and possible futures of work. We will draw upon both historical and contemporary literature to investigate rival views of the nature of work, the various goods work has been thought to provide, and the place of work in a well-lived, meaningful human existence. We also consider concrete moral questions about work, such as whether there is a right or a duty to work, a right to strike, or an obligation to choose one’s occupation in light of specific ethical considerations. The course then addresses the ‘politics of the workplace,’ interrogating whether workplaces should be more democratically or non-hierarchically organized. We conclude with a consideration of the future of work.

Learning outcomes

This course will provide students many opportunities to practice the fundamental skills of philosophical inquiry, including the extraction, expression, and evaluation of arguments articulated in philosophical texts; the crafting of compelling and convincing philosophical prose; and the development of their own informed point of view on philosophical issues. In addition, by the conclusion of the course, students should be able to

1. Describe and critically assess rival views about the ethical significance of work, couched in terms of well-being, virtue, meaningfulness, etc.
2. Rationally defend philosophically informed views regarding the morality and justice of work and workplace governance
3. Critically appraise competing visions for work’s future in their society
4. Use the knowledge acquired in the course to assess their own professional choices and to more substantively participate in larger societal debates where the nature and value of work are at issue

Assessment

- First midterm essay (25% of course mark) 1,500 words: due via Learn, Thursday Feb 16, by 12 pm. Guidance to be distributed by Monday Feb 1.
- Second midterm essay (25%) 1,500 words: due via Learn, Thursday 16 Mar, by 12 pm. Guidance to be distributed by Monday Feb 24.
- Final revised essay (40%) 2,000 words (Note this is not a freestanding assignment but an expansion and revision of one of the two midterm essays, incorporating and addressing instructor feedback): due via Learn, Thursday 20 April, by 12 pm. Guidance to be distributed by Tuesday March 22.
- Reflective essay on professional choices and importance of work (10%): 1,000 words due via Learn Monday April 24, by 12 pm. Guidance to be distributed by April 1.

Coursework dissertations

I welcome the opportunity to work with you on a coursework dissertation. You are required to notify the Philosophy Teaching Office of your intent to complete a coursework dissertation in this seminar by Monday February 27, 12 pm. Coursework dissertations are due Thursday April 20 by 12 pm. Please note that coursework dissertations are not available to visiting students.

PPLS Skills Centre

PPLS has a Skills Centre that provides assistance to philosophy students with their academic work, including their written assessments. You are encouraged to make appointments with Centre staff to assist you. Y4 students can make up to two appointments per month with Skills Centre staff. More information here: <https://skillscentre.ppls.ed.ac.uk/>

Course readings and schedule

Course readings can be accessed via the Library Resource List on the course Learn page.

As you likely know by now, reading philosophy can often be challenging. Here are some resources students report they've found useful in improving their reading experience (but feel free to contact me for more guidance about reading):

- <https://www.blogs.ppls.ed.ac.uk/2017/02/28/read-philosophy-step-step-guide-confused-students/>
- <https://philosophy.arizona.edu/sites/philosophy.arizona.edu/files/Rosati%2C%20How%20to%20Read%20a%20Philosophical%20Article%20or%20Book.pdf>
- <http://melissajacquart.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/How-to-Read-Philosophy-Handout.pdf>

The readings below are divided into **core** and **secondary**. The core readings lay out the main issues associated with the particular topic and articulate main positions. The secondary readings are usually more difficult, operating at later points in the philosophical dialectic.

I expect each of you to make at least one good faith effort to read the *core* readings for each week. Move on to the secondary readings only if (a) you have good reason to think you've comprehended the core readings fully, and/or (b) you'd be interested in writing on the topic for a course essay or dissertation.

Finally, a very good resource for philosophical, humanistic, social scientific, etc. literature on work and labour is Deranty's For Work/Against Work: <https://onwork.edu.au/>

1 17 Jan

Ethics of work and labour: Core issues and contemporary context

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Morgan, "The Great Resignation" • Horgan, <i>Lost in Work</i>, introduction ("Work's Fantasy") • Malesic, "When Work and Meaning Part Ways" • Cholbi, "Philosophical Approaches to Work and Labour," <i>Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> (skim) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suzman, "The 300,000-year case for the 15-hour week" • Svendsen, <i>Work</i>, pp. 111-125

2 24 Jan

The nature of work and the emergence of the work-centred society

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cholbi, "Philosophical Approaches to Work and Labour," introduction and section 1 • Svendsen, <i>Work</i>, pp. 1-32 • Frayne, <i>The Refusal of Work</i>, pp. 1-29 • Honneth, "'Labour,' A Brief History of a Modern Concept" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pence, "Toward a Theory of Work" • Geuss, <i>A Philosopher Looks at Work</i>, chs. 1-2 • Kanai, "Karoshi (Work to Death) in Japan" • Frayne, <i>The Refusal of Work</i>, pp. 29-44 • Veltman, "Simone de Beauvoir and Hannah Arendt on Labor"

3 31 Jan

The goods of work

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cholbi, "Philosophical Approaches to Work and Labour," section 2-2.1 • Gheaus and Herzog, "The Goods of Work (Other than Money!)" • Clark, "Good Work" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Veltman, <i>Meaningful Work</i>, pp. 4-9, 47-70 • Elster, "Self-realisation in Work and Politics" • Sage, "Unemployment, Wellbeing and the Power of the Work Ethic: Implications for Social Policy" • Schwartz, <i>Why We Work</i> • Hecksher, "Leisure in America"

4 7 Feb

Meaning, dignity, and alienation

Core readings	Secondary readings

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Svendsen, <i>Work</i>, ch. 2 • Sayers, “Why Work? Marx and Human Nature” • Graeber, “Why Capitalism Creates Pointless Jobs” • Gilabert, “Dignity at Work” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marx, “Estranged Labour” • Kandiyali, “The Importance of Others: Marx on Unalienated Production” • Morris, “Useful Work versus Useless Toil” • Schwartz, “Meaningful Work” • Frayne, <i>Refusal of Work</i>, pp. 45-52 • Veltman, <i>Meaningful Work</i>, pp. 105-141 • Michaelson, “A Normative Theory of Meaningful Work” • O’Connor, <i>Idleness: A Philosophical Essay</i>, esp. pp. 89-99 on Marx
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5 14 Feb

Work and distributive justice: The question of time and wages

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cholbi, “Philosophical Approaches to Work and Labour,” section 3.1 • Svendsen, <i>Work</i>, pp. 55-82, 99-110 • Bregman, <i>Utopia for Realists</i>, ch. 6 • Moriarty, “What’s In a Wage?” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schaufeli, “Burnout: A Short Socio-Cultural History” • Stanczyk, “Productive Justice” • Gilabert, “Exploitation, Solidarity, and Dignity”

6 21 Feb (NOTE: flexible learning week – swap for 28 Feb)

Work-life balance, emotional labour, and gendered aspects of work

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Horgan, <i>Lost in Work</i>, ch. 2 (“Contesting ‘Work’”) • Gershon, “The Future is Emotional” • Frayne, <i>Refusal of Work</i>, pp. 67-82 • Beck, “The Concept Creep of ‘Emotional Labor’” • Schouten, “Citizenship, Reciprocity, and the Gendered Division of Labor” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rose, <i>Free Time</i>, especially chs. 2-3 • Rosin, “The End of Men” • Koltsonski, “Vocations, Exploitation, and Professions in a Market Economy” • Gheaus, “The Challenge of Care to Idealizing Theories of Distributive Justice” • Brighouse and Wright, “Strong Gender Egalitarianism” • Hochschild, <i>The Managed Heart</i>

<Feb 28 – No seminar meeting>

7 8 Mar

The ethics of career choice; a right to work?

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Care, “Career Choice” • Cholbi, “The Ethics of Choosing Jobs and Careers” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Casal, “Occupational Choice and the Egalitarian Ethos” • Steinvorth, “A Right to Work and the Right to Develop One’s Capabilities”

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schaff, “A Right to Work and Fair Conditions of Employment” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kavka, “Disability and the Right to Work” • Jecker, “The Dignity of Work: An Ethical Argument Against Mandatory Retirement” • Romeo, “What Happens When Jobs are Guaranteed?”
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8 15 Mar
A duty to work?

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Levine, “From Fairness to Idleness: Is There a Right Not to Work?” • Van Parijs & Vanderborght, <i>Basic Income</i>, pp. 98-113 • Shelby, “Justice, Work, and the Ghetto Poor” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cholbi, “A Duty to Work” • Van Parijs & Vanderborght, <i>Basic Income</i>, pp. 113-132 • Maskivker, “Employment as a Limitation on Self-Ownership” • Perez Munoz, “Essential Services, Workers’ Freedom, and Distributive Justice” • Gourevitch, “A Radical Defense of the Right to Strike”

9 22 Mar
Being managed and the government of the workplace

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Svendsen, <i>Work</i>, pp. 83-98 • Frega, Herzog, and Neuhauser, “Workplace Democracy: The Recent Debate” • Anderson, <i>Private Government</i>, pp. 37-71 • Reiff, “Universal Unions” • Frayne, <i>Refusal of Work</i>, pp. 52-66 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mayer, “Robert Dahl and the Right to Workplace Democracy” • Landemore and Ferreras, “In Defense of Workplace Democracy: Towards a Justification of the Firm-State Analogy” • Breen, “Non-domination, Workplace Republicanism, and the Justification of Worker Voice and Control” • Tusruda, “Working as Equal Moral Agents”

10 29 Mar
Anti-work and post-work critique

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cholbi, “Philosophical Approaches to Work and Labour,” section 2.2 • Russell, “In Praise of Idleness” • Black, “The Abolition of Work” • Danaher, <i>Automation and Utopia</i>, ch. 3 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frayne, <i>Refusal of Work</i>, pp. 95-117 • Cholbi, “The Desire to Work as an Adaptive Preference” • Horgan, <i>Lost in Work</i>, ch. 4 (“What Does Work Do to Us as Individuals?”) • Noonan, “Labor, Luddites, and Meaningful Lives: Would a World Without Work Really Be Best?”

11 5 April
 Imagining work's future

Core readings	Secondary readings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thompson, "A World Without Work" • Deranty, "Post-work Society as an Oxymoron" • Frase, "Four Futures" • James, "Working Less Can Save the World and Other Philosophies of Surfing" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Malesic, "What It Would Take for Us to Love Our Jobs Again" • Suzman, <i>Work: A History of How We Spend our Time</i>, ch 15 ("The New Disease") • Bastani, <i>Fully Automated Luxury Communism</i> • Spencer, <i>Making Light Work: An End to Toil in the Twenty-First Century</i> • Weeks, <i>The Problem with Work</i>