Aging with Dignity

by

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Abstract

Simone de Beauvoir, in her pioneering book on aging, claimed that our society ages its working population prematurely. She also argued that most labour in our current industrial societies involves what she called ‘immanent’ activities that are devoid of meaning and personal satisfaction. This thesis traces the merit of Beauvoir’s claims to influences by Karl Marx, Martin Heidegger and André Gorz, and to the question of employment. John Rawls’s principles of justice and Martha Nussbaum’s Capability Approach are then examined to see if they can restore justice to old and retired workers suffering from social and economic inadequacies. Upon detailed assessment of the latter, a new capability is recommended to complement Nussbaum’s existing central capabilities.

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The Fool to King Lear: Thou shouldst not have been old till thou hadst been wise.

Shakespeare (*King Lear*) Act 1, Scene 5

Introduction

Hardly a day passes without an alarmist proclamation of some kind by politicians, media, or academics discussing the 'burdens', 'challenges', 'implications' or 'impacts' of an aging population. These 'burdens', 'impacts', etc. leave no areas of the social lives of others – those not as old – unaffected. Government budgets and taxes, healthcare, employment prospects, social security and generally all aspects of the welfare of the younger population are forecast to be adversely influenced. A large class of people, for no reason other than being born within a particular time frame, has been reduced to a bogeyman for the rest of the world's population.

These attitudes, clothed in economic terms and embedded in everyday conversations, are doubly harmful. They denigrate and disparage old people and old age. Even worse, having been accepted as fact, such stereotypes alienate not only old people but equally others not considered old. They alienate us as perpetrators of this prejudice as well. By portraying old people as problems and burdens, these condescending attitudes toward old age and aging separate one generation from another, pitting them against each other, causing rifts, resentment, fear, apprehension and apathy. But old age is more than just another class, race, group, gender, ethnicity or religion. It is an aspect, an eventuality of everyone's life. Denigrating what is inevitable in one's life is alienation from self, the natural self. It gives rise to a host of behaviours and self-regarding attitudes that may be unrealistic, if not self-destructive. If one has denigrated and

belittled one's elders, then when one begins one's own journey towards old age, resentment and depression, if not denial, would appear to be the only natural course or reaction.

This alienation is not just about age. It is not caused by age, or age alone. Its causes originate, on a more fundamental level, elsewhere. The purpose of this thesis is to shed light on the source(s) of this prejudice.

This thesis takes as its central focus Simone de Beauvoir's ground-breaking study of old age published forty-one years ago that remains unsurpassed in terms of breadth and depth.

Studying societies of the past and present, Beauvoir argues that for much of human history, working individuals have been at the mercy of external forces outside their control and, while contemporary western capitalism has somewhat improved the living conditions of people who work to live, on basic levels the situation of those who cease to be productive remains a sham. Old age, Beauvoir declares, is a parody of life.

Beauvoir links the plight of old people, when physically and mentally incapacitated, with the alienating conditions of employment of young workers.

Beauvoir's claim that our contemporary societies continue, however differently from historical societies, to age the working population prematurely may sound initially like an excessive overstatement or worse an exaggeration. But this thesis sets out to examine this claim in the light of her larger philosophical writings. It will be shown that this claim is furthermore inspired by the influence Karl Marx and Martin Heidegger had on Beauvoir's writing. Beauvoir's friend and contemporary thinker André Gorz is also discussed in virtue of his possible influence on her.

Beauvoir's existential as well as socio-economic aspirations for working persons direct her examination on two parallel tracks. It will be shown how these two aspects of the person affect each other and that progress on these two fronts will determine the degree to which the individual can find meaning in his or her life.

Secondly, the role and influence of productive activity in the lives of working people in the light of Marx's theory of alienated labour in capitalist societies will be discussed in more detail. By viewing the life of young workers and the plight of the post-productive (retired) workers as a continuum and not as two unrelated courses of events, this thesis will remain true to the intended ambiguity Beauvoir applied to her own study.

Lastly, in the final chapter, this thesis first examines Rawls's principles of justice as to their capacity to address injustice and inadequacies related to employment and aging, before examining Martha Nussbaum's Capability Approach in detail. Nussbaum's list of capabilities will be examined in the light of problems affecting productive and post-productive life.

Chapter One

There are some questions Beauvoir¹ asks to make a point, and then there are questions that guide her investigation on a fundamental level. Among those of the latter category, one that clearly stands out is whether old age and its physiological and psychological consequences represent a pure and inevitable natural process, or whether it is in fact “an artificial product of a society that rejects the aged”² (OA, 503) and, as a result, denies their existence and shuns them.

Beauvoir does not altogether deny the fact that old age is accompanied by certain physiological and mental decline. She wonders, instead, through approximately 600 pages (in the original French), to what degree “is the society responsible” (OA, 541) for those factors we associate with decline in old age?

For answers, Beauvoir makes use of an approach that initially appears as a rather slow, deliberate and exhaustive multidisciplinary investigation, one that clearly takes, by the end and surprisingly, the form of a philosophical inquiry in the tradition of Socrates. She questions society’s basic assumptions about old age in a way that involves and implicates all age groups, that is to say everyone. And true to this ancient philosophical tradition, Beauvoir demonstrates that her questions are in fact existential questions, fundamental to our philosophical understanding of a good and satisfactory (existential) life.

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¹ In English, Simon de Beauvoir is commonly referred to as Beauvoir. In French her name appears commonly as de Beauvoir.

² Simone de Beauvoir, *The Coming of Age* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996). Hereafter referred to as OA in the text.

Throughout this first chapter, an attempt is made to capture the intellectual core of Beauvoir's arguments. This chapter will not however engage with her evidence.

1.1 An Unexamined Notion worth Contemplating

Is there anything more worth examining than the question of our aging?

Beauvoir thinks not. For her it is old age, "rather than death," that is to be "contrasted with life" (OA, 539). Death freezes, preserves, "transforms life into a destiny," (OA, 539) leaves out time. Death puts an end to life. It is a marker, a point in time. Death does not oppose life. It is rather the denial of life, the absence of freedom, that opposes life. As mysterious as death may appear to humans, at best it resides among other life mysteries such as birth, maturity, our inherent sense of survival facing unexpected adversaries, and so on. To Beauvoir, old age is instead "life's parody" (OA, 539). This is almost always the case, but it does not have to be. It shouldn't be.

1.2 Old Age: What is it?

No doubt, old age denotes "an inescapable process," (OA, 539) one that is marked by an experience of physical and mental decline after a certain number of years. But this may be "the only universal truth about old age" (OA, 539) that one can state with any degree of certainty. The aging process seems instead to be a rather slow and inexact process whose manifestations are the same as or similar to a limited number of ailments that appear, as well, as pathologies and incapacities in most if not all other age groups.

The other complicating factor in defining old age is the often-unacknowledged fact that human aging, viewed purely as a biological or mental process, is neither a

uniform nor an exactly calibrated event. Far from it – some people show some physical signs of aging early on with no indication of mental decline until their death. Still, others may manifest mental decline much earlier with no physical signs.

As inexact and hard to define as old age is, our psychological and communicative and habitual manners of measuring it only add more difficulties. We have at our disposal a rather universally primitive system of measuring age, with which we communicate among ourselves. As such, this system is, by and large, of little practical use. It may in fact be highly discriminatory and unjust. What we have is a limited set consisting of terms such as ‘young’, ‘middle’ and ‘old’ to describe one’s age. This is as useful a system as one that was previously used for reporting temperature (cold, warm and hot), before the advent of the thermometer, a system that also served humankind for a long time before it proved unhelpful for the needs of practical living.

In the case of aging, however, accuracy doesn’t seem to have been an issue. As Beauvoir demonstrates, old age, since the primitive past, has been viewed with revulsion, if not outright repulsion. There are several ambiguous notions involved in the discussion of age that have, until now, benefited from a nearly universal immunity from scrutiny.

Youth, the future and decline top the list of these universally ambiguous concepts. What is decline? “The word decline has no meaning except in relation to a given end – movement towards or farther from a goal,” Beauvoir points out (OA, 86). Decline stands in opposition to progress. These two notions seem to be an anthropocentric simplification of a biological process that is more complex. Instead, they seem to refer to the extent of the future one has in front of oneself. But only a

fabricated future may have an end and hence a beginning. The future is not in anyone's control. Debra Bergoffen clarifies this existentialistic attitude in Beauvoir's writing on old age by adding that, "The essential feature of the future is that it does not belong to anyone. It can neither be possessed nor controlled" (Bergoffen 2008). No one knows what one's future entails or how long it will be. This is at the root of our human condition and is integral to the uncertainty of human existence. Alternatively, one may refer to a point in time between childhood and old age during which one is fit to perform something optimally. And roughly this corresponds to a period widely known as 'youth', beginning certainly sometime after adolescence until one is considered, as if by some form of magic, to reach "midlife", after which one begins the descent into the state of becoming obsolete. Beauvoir uses the words 'misleading' and 'illusion' to describe this way of thinking that first separates and then glorifies or misleadingly "graces youth" (OA, 145, 292).

A short survey of the significance attributed to this aggrandized period of 'youth' in primitive human history and modern history follows. This survey hopes to demonstrate that privileging youthfulness is a single-minded selection strategy in social systems that subject and subsequently reduce human existence based upon a single rationality. This rationality, at times related to fertility, at other times to naked economic exploitation, will be elaborated in due course.

1.3 Old Age throughout History

Beauvoir's ethnological and historical investigation is an attempt to demonstrate that age – more specifically, old age in its crude and unrefined sense – was once an important factor (much like sex and physical ability) affecting the life and fate of

primitive members of human society. In these societies age, very much like sex, exerted a strong and predetermined influence on people's lives, often adversely affecting many aspects of individuals' lives, and constraining the choices and freedom available to them. Where age or sex played important roles, these roles were always related to vital issues such as procreation, child rearing, health, body strength, and division of labour and scarce food sources, in so far as hunting and gathering tasks were concerned.

In hunter-gatherer societies, "The aged might hope to carry on their lives if they retained enough strength to work. But when they have been badly fed, badly looked after and are worn out with labour, they soon grow decrepit" (OA, 88).

As a general rule, in early human societies, old people were mistreated. Where living conditions were harsh and material scarcity threatened the community's survival, old people were deliberately killed, or encouraged to die. These were societies where members owned no possessions, the storage of food had not yet reached anywhere near sustainable levels, domestication of animals was still far in the future, and the tribal community was often forced to migrate, on foot, across great distances in search of food. At this point in history, property ownership, as a means of wealth accumulation and savings, did not yet exist, and possessions, where available, were negligible.

In rare instances, we find communities where old people, no longer able to perform labour, looked after the very young. In return, old people continued to receive food, and sometimes the grandchildren "have the leisure to provide their grandparents with the services they need" (OA, 85).

In more cultured tribal societies, however, such as the Navajo Indian culture, we find more respect for old people. This kind of respect was often rooted in the

contributions old people made to their society. Here, we find old people acting as the repository of knowledge about plants, animals, and medicine, and as impartial judges.

But it is important to note that the reciprocal relationship, where it existed between old people and the rest of the community, is not transparent, nor is it negotiated. Such relationships, characterised by respect for the old, are often shrouded in myth and magic. Here, we would often find myths and beliefs as to “posthumous vengeance of the aged,” “senile decay as good fortune,” or the inherent honesty of old people (OA, 66-7). These beliefs were inherited, or handed down from one generation to another by means of oral history. With the demise of oral traditional history, it was a matter of time before these rarer instances of charitable out-of-the-ordinary practices came to an end.

What is evident from a study of the habits and life of these early tribal societies – at least what Beauvoir hoped perhaps to impart – is that humans at this stage are very much passive instruments of the forces of nature. They are at the mercy of these forces and there is very little that insulates individuals from the constantly changing, non-dependable and harsh environment around them.

In such environments, where human survival is reduced to merely ‘passing on one’s genes’ through one’s offspring, fertility and the ability to feed one’s family is of paramount importance. Therefore, it was under such harsh and unpredictable environments that prioritizing ‘youth’ became the single dominant rationality or fixation.

With the agricultural revolution leading to basic farming technologies, the first city states emerged around 10,000 BCE. From here on, property rights began to be established and we witness the appearance of the working classes “made up primarily of

peasants and craftsmen.” And from here Beauvoir notes, “livelihood” – that is, one’s profession – and existence – that is, one’s family and social life – “coincided precisely,” in so far as “worker lived in the place he worked,” and “productive and domestic work emerged into one another” (OA, 223).

Beauvoir states at the beginning of the chapter titled *Old Age in Historical Societies* that there is very little that we know about the plight of ordinary working people, much less the elderly, over a vast span of time in our written history, because during this period, only the personal stories of the ruling classes and the elites were documented:

What distorts our view of the whole [society] is the fact that the evidence, the opinions and the books concerning the last stage of life have always been a reflection of the state of the upper classes: it is the upper classes alone that speak, and until the nineteenth century they spoke only of themselves. (OA, 213)

Much like the poor, the aged too have until recent times been ignored by historians, a fact leading Beauvoir to believe that the history (or plight) of old people and the history of human poverty are one and the same. In her own words, “it is almost tautological to say ‘old and poor’” (OA, 6).

What becomes known to Beauvoir, however – not by means of history books alone but through the literature of the more recent past – is that, “Agriculture was still archaic in 1815... peasants could hardly make a living. When they were old they no longer had the strength to go on working the land and they had not saved the money needed to pay for outside labour. They were at their children's mercy” (OA, 194). There are reports of “murder of parents by desperate family members” (OA, 195). “... [T]here

was a great temptation to hasten the end of the aged parents who always cost too much” (OA, 196).

Against this background of poverty that affected a vast majority of the world’s population, Beauvoir observes and reports on three different but determining developments that happened all about the same time during the nineteenth century:

1. The occurrence of the industrial revolution, resulting in “a movement away from the countryside and a consequent increase in urban population”;
2. “... [A]pppearance and development of the new class, the proletariat” (OA, 192) resulting from the exodus of farmers from the country and farmlands and from ‘enclosure’ policies whereby small landowners’ property rights were revoked to the benefit of the large landowners. This, in turn, resulted in “the lowering of the income of the farmers and agricultural workers, a lowering that forced them off the land. In France there had been a [significant] flight from the land at the end of the eighteenth century.” Additionally, “technical progress made it harder for the poor to work the land ... what is more, after 1880, the improvement in communication allowed America to export wheat to France; in the resulting the serious economic crisis[,] the flight from the land continued. By 1881 a third of the population was concentrated in the towns” (OA, 192-3); and, finally,
3. A population boom, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, exacerbated the urban as well as the rural poverty levels.

These changes were especially “disastrous for the old... The industrial revolution was carried out ... at the cost of an unbelievable wastage of human material ... Between

1880 and 1900 Taylorism wrought havoc in the US: all workers died before their time. .. England and France saw an immense increase in the number of aged tramps and beggars, destitute old people” (OA, 193).

Continued urbanization, well into the twentieth century, bore still more profound consequences for the aged, such as the “the disappearance of the patriarchal family” and “a progressive dissolution of the family unit” (OA, 209). The loss of family structure, with all that entailed, both good and bad, has never been made up for.³ Furthermore, “the standing of old age has been markedly lowered since the notion of experience has been discredited. Contemporary technocratic society thinks that knowledge does not accumulate with the years, but grows out of date” (OA, 210). Old age is no longer an advantage. It is in fact a disadvantage, when the aged person ceases to earn money and is no longer valued for the experience and skills developed over many decades.

Beauvoir’s survey of historical societies and their treatment of the aged ends by marking the nineteenth century as a watershed era, where the vast majority of the population in Europe and North America becomes, for the first time and more profoundly, instruments of the forces of production, as compared to the previous era, where they were, by and large, instruments of the forces of nature. At the same time, she observes that while prior to the nineteenth century no one spoke of the state of the underprivileged aged, because “there were few of them” that survived, the number of old people saw a considerable rise “from the nineteenth century onwards” (OA, 215).

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³ Beauvoir argues that as a result of this loss of family structure, care of old people is no longer a matter for the families or the community but has become instead the subject of government policies that leave much to be desired.

More importantly, Beauvoir points out that old age, as a term or reference, covers “two profoundly different kinds of reality,” (OA, 213) one being that of the small exploiting class, where old people continued, by and large, to play various social and political roles, when called upon. The other reality is that of the exploited class, where a vast majority of the population lies. In one reality, that of the exploiting wealthy class, old age is the time of freedom from daily routines and the end of most if not all commitments of an expedient nature. In the other, old age marks a much shorter span of a life, one that is plagued by health problems, poverty, loneliness and boredom, and where “the gap between them [the privileged class] and the vast majority of mankind becomes obvious” (OA,541), for many for the very first time.

1.4 Old Age: New Problems

Beauvoir opens the chapter *Old Age in Present-Day Society* by deploring the scandalous state of old people in her time, and to some extent in ours. Indeed, more than forty years after she wrote her book, some of her statements sound surprisingly as relevant and urgent today as they were then. On the difficulties of a rise in the aging population, she quotes a British minister of health saying that it is “the Mount Everest of present-day social problems” (OA, 222). Elsewhere, Beauvoir declares, and this in 1970, that “There are few more controversial questions in France today than that of the retirement age” (OA, 273). All this, a little more than seventy years after Bismarck had envisioned the pension system as a way to counteract “socialist agitations,” (OA,223) and a mere twenty-five years after France, following the lead of several other European countries, instituted its own system of pensions in 1945 (OA, 224). In the greater scheme of things, a serious review of contemporary pension and retirement provisions in

the West is timely, if not outright overdue.

1.5 A Litany of Problems

When we think of old age, or more precisely the old age of others, we think of leisure, a permanent state of vacation, and the freedom to pursue one's interests, sometimes for the first time. For a majority of the population, however, this is not the case. Beauvoir lists a litany of problems afflicting old people in much of the world. These problems affect old people on some very basic levels.

First and foremost, a vast majority of old people are deprived of the material means to enjoy their so-called freedom:

The society of today ... allows old people leisure only when it has removed the material means for them to enjoy it. Those who escape utter poverty ... are forced to take care of a body that has grown frail, easily [tired], often infirm or [crippled] with pain. (OA, 449)⁴

The lack of material means is rooted in the conditions of employment in our societies. Employment, in the post-industrial societies, has stripped individuals of their autonomy and dignity. Where workers work and where they live are two separate and often distant places. One's "specialized task remains the same throughout the whole of his life, and it is not adapted to the capabilities of all ages" (OA, 223). In fact it fails him as he ages.

As a rule, workers' employment is terminated for reasons other than their ability to continue to work, such as making room for a new cohort or generation of workers hired, almost always, at lower wages. Many workers find themselves out of their jobs

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⁴ My modification (in square brackets) of the translation of *La vieillesse*, 473. See also OA 449.

before even reaching retirement age (OA, 228). When and where technical progress is cited, such as to justify the disqualification of existing and older workers, no technical training is provided. Beauvoir gives an example from recent history to demonstrate the fact that when old people are assigned new and unfamiliar tasks, as was the case in the United States, England and Canada during the war, they perform perfectly at their new jobs (OA, 231).

This condition of employment keeps workers at impoverished levels during their productive years and leaves them at even deeper impoverished levels when they are let go. The prolonged impoverishment means that out-of-employment old people are left to their own devices. Beauvoir argues that we wouldn't have this conversation if pensions were anywhere near adequate (OA, 232). In Beauvoir's France, for example, and in the United States, in the 1970s, half of the elderly population live in poverty and are "reduced to beggary" (OA, 237 and 244 respectively).

A prolonged life of poverty combined with an increase in longevity act as a recipe for a major health crisis in the elderly population. Additionally, a life of anxiety combined with inadequate income, deprived of respect, dignity, and autonomy leads to serious psychological problems, increasing isolation, idleness and depression. One loses even one's sense of reality (OA, 266). This situation of despair of the old person is a testimony to Beauvoir's claim that people arrive at their old age, by and large, unprepared and in some ways incapacitated and thus vulnerable. Much of the working population is by this point prematurely aged and lacks resources for the support and care they require.

Is this claim still true today? It is not difficult to see that workers in some

professions, mostly in the traditional economic sector of manufacturing, construction, mining and other labour-intensive sectors, may retire with physical pathologies. It goes without risk of any serious challenge to claim that workers in large numbers in much of the world continue to work and live in situations that resemble those of eighteenth-century Europe. Conditions of Chinese workers in contemporary China (LaFraniere 2011 and Lorenz 2010) or India, where the bulk of global goods are now produced, represent clear examples of the kind of physical labour Beauvoir intended to draw attention to. Perhaps, if still alive, Beauvoir would have responded by pointing out that the productive forces have simply been rearranged, as there are still workers, in large numbers, who work under physically harsh conditions to do the dirty work in our times. While invisible to the inhabitants of the West, these workers raise, nevertheless, ethical challenges for those seemingly comfortable in the West. Beauvoir's ethics in fact do a good job of responding to the challenges globalism poses. Beauvoir, according to Karen Vintages, believes that "man can only find justification for his own existence through the free existence of others" (Vintages 1996, 68). So, in essence, the problems Beauvoir raised that were associated with the aftermath of the Industrial Revolution still persist for the vast majority of the world's working class.

What about the seemingly comfortable workers of the Western hemisphere? Does Beauvoir's assessment exclude the professional workers in today's economy? One example from Beauvoir's investigation is illuminating. She cites a 1967 *Le Monde* report of an investigation into the condition of Parisian workers: In it a Dr. Escoffier-Lambiotti spoke of premature decline in the physical and intellectual state of those under 55 who had "blood pressure that was higher ... heart-rhythm faster, muscular

weakness more marked, cardio-vascular disturbances more frequent and difficulty with sleeping more usual” (OA, 273). Beauvoir adds that, “In modern-day societies, jobs are less arduous than they used to be in so much as they call for less muscular effort; but the faster rhythm of work combines with the extreme subdivision of labour to increase their wearing effect” (OA, 273-4).

This may explain why workers suffer more health problems and arrive at their old age afflicted with more incapacity and poverty, among other disadvantages. But this does not adequately account for the mental state of retired older workers, a subject that will be looked at in depth under the problems associated with employment in capitalist societies.

1.6 Old Age: Retirement or Unemployment

Beauvoir states, according to French gerontologists, that “during the first year of retirement, the death rate is far higher than any other time” (OA, 268). But things only get worse from here.

As the worker’s family has no longer any relation to his or her employment, the private home environment loses much if not all the dynamics of its past, such as the passing on of the workshop or the farm to children in return for continued care and support in old age. The dissolution of family life and the collapse of the family as a durable social unit in the West have had dire consequences: Care of the aged is no longer within the domain of the household and community as it once was. While Beauvoir remarked elsewhere that care by the family too was problematic and sometimes led to abuse of the elderly in eighteenth-century Europe, for example, now that care has become institutionalized, the nature of the problem has changed radically.

Care now has become the subject of government policy, much like the care for mental patients, and people with disabilities. As such, old people have become prey to exploitation and abuse by higher order organizations and big business (McLean and Welsh 2011).

In the France of 1970, Beauvoir declares that old people are “doomed to the slums” (OA, 247-8). Even these slums are not the end of their ordeal. Once they are unable to care for themselves, old people would then be admitted to institutions. Beauvoir shows, through various studies, that more than half of the aged admitted to these institutions die within the first year after arrival. By the end of the second year a total of 64 percent of old people have died. She lists a number of causes for this phenomenal mortality: aside from the importance of habitat to one’s well-being (OA, 252), she cites the loss of agency, privacy and the ability to work in pursuit of a personal project (not a job) as the main causes of the high institutional mortality. All in all, loss of dignity and agency seem to have a fatal consequence.

The inability to pursue one’s personal project, that which would animate one’s life, proves devastating. Firstly, it is often difficult to find new interests so late in life, when one’s intellectual appetite is at its normal ebb (OA, 451-2). There are few people who manage to maintain a multitude of interests throughout their lives. The absence of a personal project leads to inactivity that in turn discourages curiosity and enthusiasm for new learning, resulting in boredom, a feeling of uselessness and depression (OA, 454, 464). Secondly, the insecurity resulting from worries related to poverty, health, mobility and imposed social isolation leads to physiological and mental illnesses. Beauvoir cites numerous studies that report an alarming rise in the incidence of mental illness,

including different kinds of neurosis in the elderly (OA, 494). More recent scientific studies on the physiological effects of poverty, loneliness and social isolation have but reaffirmed Beauvoir's finding in greater detail and with more certainty (Miller 2011 and Frey 2011).

Beauvoir's ultimate verdict, four decades ago, was that while decades of struggles brought to the working class the recognition of their humanity and dignity, however limited, it has done little for those workers when they age.

How does our society fare forty years later, in comparison? While the material condition of retired workers in the twenty-first century has somewhat improved, they still live lives hovering by and large close to, if not under, the poverty line. The prejudice and stigma remain. While work benefits and pensions have improved in limited professional sectors, pensions at present levels do not meet the rising costs of living. Jobs are scarcer, the job market has shrunk, and more and more old workers are without jobs before reaching retirement. Worse, governments of all stripes have been chipping away at pension programs. Those lucky enough to reach retirement find their finances and thus their livelihood are at the mercy of undependable stock markets and the Ponzi economics of transnational financial institutions. It will be discussed later that the expansion of cities and suburbs and a higher degree of dependency in consumer society erode the relatively higher wealth levels of the current generation of the aged.

No less important is the plight of the working population in the emerging economies, such as India and China, where inhuman working conditions similar to, if not worse than, those in Europe and America in Beauvoir's time exist. More significantly, these workers' working environment makes possible the cheap commodity

prices that poor workers, both currently active and retired, rely on to get by. Therefore, capitalist socio-economic injustices in one part of the world feed the same kind of injustices at the other end, and vice versa.

Chapter Two

2.1 Beauvoir and the Question of Employment

In this chapter, Beauvoir's views on employment will be discussed. She finds that employment plays a central role in the mistreatment of old people. Her views on this topic are complex. She has discussed some of her thoughts in her previous works, for example, in *The Second Sex*. But nowhere do they appear formulated in a complete and coherent manner. Where possible her writings other than *The Coming of Age* have been cited. A complete deliberation on this topic, however, could not be accomplished without bringing forward the influence of Martin Heidegger, Karl Marx, in particular, and to some extent, André Gorz, underlying Beauvoir's thinking about labour and what we think of nowadays as employment in general. While Jean-Paul Sartre's influence does not seem relevant to the focus of this thesis, existentialism is omnipresent and forms the backbone of Beauvoir's approach, with which this chapter begins.

2.2 Beauvoir and Existentialist Obligations

For Beauvoir, human beings are not born to be permanently slaves to their biological needs. Because life “does not carry within itself its reason for being, reasons that are more important than the life itself” (Beauvoir 1989, 64), one has to find one's own reason for being through activities that go beyond meeting one's biological and other immediate needs. What individuals do for a living, whether doing a job in the office or raising children at home, does not absolve them of this existential obligation to themselves, that is, to find their own reason for being. One engages in activities that are

future- and self-directed and bear the seeds of one's freedom. Beauvoir names the first category 'immanent activities' and the latter, 'transcendent activities'. The transcendence/immanence dichotomy defines the tension, the struggle that haunts individuals unceasingly in their waking hours and even in their sleep.

Forming a family, raising children and earning a living, or being engaged in passive entertainment, are all activities that sustain and maintain our biological and immediate needs. Everyday labour, be it physical labour or office work (including bureaucratic paper-pushing), according to Andréa Veltman, is considered by Beauvoir to be of the kind that individuals engage in to simply earn a living, and are therefore of immanent nature (Veltman 2006). In comparison, transcendent activities involve creative, artistic and constructive activities that one does of one's free will and are directed toward the future with outcomes that are lasting, either in a material sense or in the sense of development of an idea or talent in a cumulative manner.

In Beauvoir's writing, the question of work or labour is rather complex. For her, what one does for a living, in so far as one chooses a means of income, is not to be taken lightly. In fact, what one does in the public sphere has immense consequences for one's sphere of private life. These consequences are, by and large, unforeseen at the outset, when the worker is young. The public sphere refers to the world outside one's household where individuals normally engage in paid labour or work and where they receive compensation for tasks performed ordinarily for others. What one chooses or, given the competition and rivalry in the job market, what one is forced to select, as one's profession in the public sphere is a matter that is central to Beauvoir's investigation, and

more importantly to the conclusions she reaches at the end of her book on old age. Beauvoir's reader cannot be blamed for being at times somewhat confused as to what these two spheres and their *prima facie* division really imply for individuals in their daily activities. Some clarifications are therefore called for here.

To begin with, when writing on jobs or vocations from a historical perspective, Beauvoir may seem, to the reader unfamiliar with her writing, to lament the loss of some aspects of the working conditions enjoyed by the peasants and craftsman of Europe's pre-Industrial Revolution. However, far from a sense of nostalgia, I think she points out what was positive with vocations in older times. There is an important distinction to be made here. We can examine historical situations for what was good, or the loss of some conditions as a consequence of (or in light of absence of) certain actions or decisions, without a sense of nostalgia or, worse, a fixation with the way of the past. In writing about historical vocations, Beauvoir seems to underline virtues such as agency and dignity that were present in many professions of the pre-industrial period. Then, for example, contrary to what has become the rule, workers did not have to leave their communities and their social and family networks in order to make a living. Often, where they worked and where they lived were the same place, in the same dwelling. One's productive life (profession) and one's domestic life (existence) "coincided precisely" (OA, 223). The craft-workers of this era did not engage in wage-labour. Instead, as members of professional unions and guilds, they were paid a price for their completed work set by their guilds. Moreover, what the workers specialized in, often a series of tasks, remained the same, giving them the possibility to improve and further

develop their skills as time passed, and eventually easing into their old age by leaving some of those tasks for others and choosing some easier ones for themselves to continue to perform (OA, 223).

At the same time, labour performed in the private sphere – household tasks, such as child rearing, cooking, maintenance, personal entertainments, etc. – were largely performed by women and outside of the largely male-dominated public sphere. This was considered domestic work and was not recognized as labour as such, thus unpaid. Even though the privileged class hired others, both men and women, as 'domestics' to perform their household chores, this category of paid labour remained outside of the formality and regulations of the public sphere and still does.

Beauvoir's focus, both in *The Coming of Age* and *The Second Sex*, is on paid modern-day professions: those that are recognized in the public sphere, regardless of whether their performance takes place in the private or public sphere. Both a service provider to an autistic child and a poet work out of home, for example, and earn an income from their professions. For Beauvoir what is at issue is not the nature of jobs but their effect on those performing them. To elaborate on the underlying nuance, Beauvoir made use of the dichotomous twin concepts of immanence/transcendence introduced in *The Second Sex*. Immanent activities are those done:

1. for purely economic reasons,
2. to serve others primarily,
3. in a repetitive and mundane manner, in the sense of not being creative,
4. in perpetuating the present, rather than opening new horizons for

learning skills and personal development.

Beauvoir does not deny the necessity of performing tasks that are required to maintain life, such as earning a living to provide for food, shelter or raising children. Beauvoir is instead critical of a society and economic system that hinders and blocks all other activities aside from immanent activities for a majority of the population. For Beauvoir, the problem is that an immanent activity (or job) leaves us vulnerable and dependent as we spend our lives doing it. Transcendent activity, in comparison, enhances our intelligence, expands our existence and becomes the ground for our content and control in a life that is otherwise devoid of purpose and meaning. For Beauvoir, individuals are not merely biological beings concerned with their survival in nature. They are individuals who are capable of realizing their potential through projects and ends that are uniquely their own. They are capable of “pursuing ends that give ... [their] existence a meaning – devotion to individuals, to groups or to causes, social, political, intellectual or creative” (OA, 540).

For Beauvoir, wealthy people, by virtue of their economic independence, are free to pursue ends that are their very own. And when they age, they do so with little or no indignity. As for those without sufficient economic means, they are forced into labour by others, where they are drained mentally and physically while being profitable for their employers, after which they are left to their own devices. And, when they retire or are laid off, “Society turns away” from them (OA, 542).

In summary, Beauvoir's critique of 'labour' or 'employment' in our times involves two factors: firstly, economic and biological needs are not the only human needs to be

met. There are more important human needs; focusing only on our biological needs, to the detriment of all other traits that distinguish human individuals, has serious consequences for everyone, but even more so for those who come to be perceived as economically unprofitable. Secondly, the condition of employment for the vast majority of the world's population is detrimental to their physical, psychological and social well-being. It can be argued that as far as these two main points are concerned, Heidegger has influenced Beauvoir on the former, while Marx can be traced as the source of influence regarding the latter.

2.3 Heidegger: *Gestell* and Festival

To better understand Beauvoir's transcendent/immanent distinction, one has to first comprehend Heidegger's concept of *Gestell*. *Gestell*, I would argue, explains what Beauvoir means when she emphasizes pursuing ends that are our own and not others' as an existential necessity. This is a fundamental nuance in Beauvoir's conception of transcendent activity.

Heidegger formulated this concept initially to represent what he argued to be the essence of modern technology. Technology, taken from the original Greek *techne*, is here used in its broadly original sense, to include the dominant mode of industrial production, encompassing everything, including sectors such as business, administration, service, education, health, etc. In this sense, technology can be taken to define the culture and nature of employment in our times. Heidegger describes *Gestell* as 'the essence' of our technology or the manifestation of what he considers to be the absolutization of a single horizon of disclosure at the expense of all other alternative

horizons (Young 2002, 37). To take it one step further, *Gestell* represents the fundamental, omnipresent and overriding character of the western culture in western (and now globalized) productive activity. As such, it predetermines the character of human action and, because of it, the external reality to humans reveals itself only in one simple reduced form, only as resource and nothing but resource (Young 2003, 206). In this Heideggerian sense, *Gestell* forces all but the privileged few to become “available for productive activity” as objectified resource beings (Young 2002, 50). Humans hence “disappear into usefulness” in the course of their work activity (Heidegger 2001). For Heidegger this is most alarming because he considers work a central feature of human existence (Young 2002, 50).

It is true that throughout history there have always been a group or class of people who were treated as useful means for others' ends. But only in our times and as a result of *Gestell* has becoming useful for others become a cross-class destiny.

In speaking of the Greeks and their concept of *poiesis* (bringing forth), Heidegger contends that the Greek notion of *techne*, the precursor of our technology, contained both virtues of respect and reverence toward a world order that is fundamentally incomprehensible. In this sense, Greek technology was respecting and conserving of nature (Young 2003, 209-10), in sharp contrast to modern technology that does violence to nature. Furthermore, the Greeks' *techne* provided for a true and genuine break from work by holding 'festival', or what Heidegger calls 'authentic holiday' or holy-day (Young 2003, 209-10). This time of 'leisure', unlike its modern incarnation, was a genuine “stepping out of the 'everydayness' in which things show up as pure

resource” or usefulness (Young 2003, 206-7). In clear recognition of the dehumanizing consequences of becoming a means to others' ends, festival was meant as antidote. This was not merely a break from work, and not a time of self-amusement, distraction or fun to allow one to recover from what work does to one's humanity. Instead, by means of other activities, the individual has the opportunity to experience the world in its boundlessness as a free being and for his ends alone. What modern-day technology or modern-day employment lacks then is “this stepping out of *Gestell*” (Young 2003, 206-7), a 'time out', a stepping out from everydayness in order to restore one to one's essential organic and wholesome state of being.

For Heidegger, poets are examples of those who, by virtue of their creative activity, are “permanently in the festive state” (Young 2002, 59). To be in a festive state of being is the manifestation of the ultimate human freedom. This freedom is not one based on the absence of external constraints. Heidegger understands this freedom as “the positive freedom of being true to one's 'real' self, not merely 'negative freedom of absence of constraints on one's actions” (Young 2002, 61f). This 'freedom of being true to oneself' lies, I believe, at the heart of Beauvoir's transcendent activity. I would argue that, for Beauvoir, transcendence comes from the individual and not from a 'list of activities' that are considered transcendental. Only a poet who has chosen poetry freely by responding to her intrinsic creative interest as an end in itself, is engaged in transcendental activity. If I engage in poetry because it is a profitable profession, because it distracts from seeking a higher meaning, or because I envy the social status of a poet, or to please a parent or a mentor, I am not engaged in transcendent activity.

Transcendence, for Beauvoir, is a distinctively human attribute. It refers to a class of activities that “situate and engage the individual with other human freedoms” (Veltman 2006, 115). Immanence, on the other hand, refers to a domain of activities that are performed to meet and maintain our biological needs and immediate desires. Immanent activities represent those activities in human life that individuals choose to perform passively. Performing labour or work for others, domestic chores, passive consumption, even raising children are considered, for Beauvoir, immanent activities. Transcendent activities are, instead, grounded in Beauvoir's notion of project and individual freedom. A project involves any kind of search for a higher meaning in one's existence as compared to passive submission to one's biological and socially-given destiny. Projects are about ends only the individual comes to freely choose for himself. Freedom to choose one's project is “the source of all significations and all values” (Beauvoir 1948, 24). This freedom “is the original condition of all justification for existence. The man who seeks to justify his life must want freedom itself absolutely,” which “at the same time ... requires the realization of concrete ends, of particular projects” (Beauvoir 1948, 24). A project is always in opposition to and runs counter to the status quo, any distractions or relaxations. A project is an endeavour “that move[s] an individual beyond the present status quo toward an open future” (Veltman 2006, 117). One transcends by way of one's project, engaging in a constructive activity as opposed to an activity that is passive and not chosen as an end by the individual. A transcendent (constructive) activity in this sense does not subject individuals to become the means or even the secondary beneficiaries for serving ends determined by and

primarily benefiting others. This is not to claim that one's calling could not involve a passionate commitment to serve others, like that, for example, of a butler or a nun, given the existence of options with superior pay and working conditions.

Where Beauvoir finds transcendent jobs, they are always those of a self-employed independent nature: artists, writers, scientists, etc. Andréa Veltman notes in discussing *The Second Sex* that Beauvoir considers "the majority of blue-collar and middle-class jobs do not allow for genuine transcendence" (Veltman 2006, 117). Yet, contrary to Veltman's interpretation, a closer scrutiny of Beauvoir's example in *The Coming of Age* reveals that being a scientist or a writer, an academic or a motor builder does not necessarily guarantee one's existential satisfaction either. For Beauvoir, it is a question of finding and fulfilling one's passion or calling: being true to one's self. It is not the case that one can engage in a transcendent activity by becoming a writer, academic or scientist. It is about the goal, or the project, one pursues through these professions and whether these ends are chosen to "situate and engage the individual with other human freedoms" (Veltman 2006, 115-17).

2.4 What is Wrong with Immanent Activities – Marx's Alienation

Marx defines human beings as a whole, a social whole to be more specific, and made up of multiple dimensions. Alienation occurs when this whole – this multitude – is "broken up into its numerous parts whose interrelations [with]in the whole can no longer be ascertained", according to an interpretation of Marx made by Bertell Ollman. "This is the essence of alienation" (Ollman 1971, 135). Human beings, furthermore, interact with the external world of objects, including fellow humans, in order to meet their needs. In

the course of this interaction, they appropriate material objects (and humans) they encounter. Encountering leads to activity (or else remains on the level of perception), which is the medium between human beings and the external world and “the chief means by which man appropriates objects” (Ollman 1971, 138). However, in order to conduct an activity, to realize a need, man requires certain powers to fuel and conduct his activity.

2.5 Man's Powers

Marx speaks of two kinds of power: natural power and species power. Different as they are, together they constitute man's whole power. These two powers correspond to Marx's notion of the dual nature of human beings. This two-dimensional being, on the one hand, is the 'natural' man, by and large controlled by natural forces, rather than the reverse (Ollman 1971, 83). On the other hand, it is the 'species' man, who possesses the qualities that distinguish him from other animals. This is “a being for himself” (Marx 2007, 158),⁵ meaning one who is self-conscious and self-aware – “an individual active in pursuing his own ends” (Ollman 1971, 84).

As natural man, individuals strive to meet their biological ends by securing shelter, food, a mate and offspring. These wants are clearly not ends in themselves, but merely the means for the continuation of repetitive tasks involved with sustenance or the maintenance of life. Here, natural man chooses among available yet limited options:

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⁵ Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, hereafter referred to as EPM 1844 in the text.

where to seek shelter, who to mate with, what to eat each day, etc. Cultural conventions and norms, and social conditioning of all kinds, as well as individual's given social position in his or her society, all belong to this domain.

As a species man, individuals are beings for themselves, that is, they are conscious of their own being. This self-awareness allows individuals to actively pursue ends that are truly their own. Here, choices are not limited and are distinctly about ends. The ends associated with individuals as species beings involve needs of a completely different kind. It is this, according to Marx, that distinguishes human beings from other animals and nowhere is this distinction more evident than in man's relation to his productive activity. As it will be shown subsequently, the needs of species man are related to his mental health, or psychological well-being, and his sense of security and control over his environment, but more importantly to his need for the freedom to do, be and become what he desires.

To summarize, Marx's dual powers are rooted in these two distinct dimensions of man. Natural powers are to acquire what sustains man biologically: food, shelter, sex, a sense of security for an essentially social being, etc. And species power secures him the attainments of ends and goals only he would desire out of his own distinct awareness of self. Ollman (1971) argues that Marx's notion of 'power' while central to Marx's philosophy is a complex concept. He suggests that Marx's usage of 'power' is very much in the sense of "'faculty', 'ability', 'function', and 'capacity', and whenever Marx refers to man's powers some measure of comprehension can be achieved by substituting one or more of these words" (Ollman 1971, 76-7). Ollman next recommends yet another

“major theme in Marx's lexicon of 'power'.” For Marx, Ollman contends, 'power' also implies 'potential' and 'possibility' in the “process of change” and in the sense of “becoming more of whatever it already is,” in relation to “the individual's skills and achievements” (Ollman 1971, 77).

Furthermore, Marx, according to Ollman, uses 'need' sometimes outside its broad definition of, for example, present 'want', 'desire' or 'interest.' Ollman suggests that in Marx's writings, “'Need' is always attached to 'power' ... as the means through which man becomes aware of the latter's existence” (Ollman 1971, 78). He continues that, “likewise, power is whatever is used that 'fulfills' a need” (Ollman 1971, 78). In the light of what was just discussed, I now return to Marx's dual two-dimensional man. It is not difficult to see that in the case of natural man, his needs –food, shelter, sex, security, etc. – must accompany the means or the right kind of 'power' to satisfy them. This 'must' refer to the individual's expectation of where and when social cooperation is to take place. However, what is less acknowledged, and what Marx's philosophy brings forth, is the need associated with species man. Here, need is grounded in Marx's self-conscious and self-aware man. In this case, need means the 'freedom' to pursue ends that are truly one's own, beyond biological and urgent requirements. For species man, in so far as his needs, 'freedom' and 'power' are synonymous and can be substituted for one another. As I will discuss in the next chapter, in the latter case, 'need' very much resembles 'functioning' in the Capability Approach, with power meaning the capability to do, to be, or to become.

2.6 Marx and Human Specificity

For Marx, the productive activity and social activity of species man are directly related. Any limitation and restrictions placed on productive activity also adversely affect one's relations to one's fellow beings. In fact what most distinguishes human beings is their human specificity. This specificity is defined in terms of an individual's relation to, firstly, his work, secondly, the product of that work and finally, his relation to his fellow human beings. Marx's critique of labour in capitalist society involves all of these three aspects. Marx contends that as a condition of labour under capitalism, man is forced to surrender his power in “deciding what to do and how to do it” (Ollman 1971, 133). This indicates “a break between the individual and his activity” (Ollman 1971, 133). This break from work necessarily leads to man's break with the product of his labour, because “he has no control over what he makes and what becomes of it afterward” (Ollman 1971, 134). Furthermore, products as commodities acquire a social power over and above the workers, driving them into unemployment, despair and poverty when markets become glutted as a result of overproduction. All this constitutes “a break between the individual and the material world” (Ollman 1971, 134).

With estrangement from one's labour and the product of that labour comes consequently estrangement from fellow individuals. This sits at the core of Marx's theory of alienation. Capitalism, by virtue of its existence, separates individuals through competition and the class rivalry it inherently generates. Finally, there is a break between individual and individual.

Each of the above-mentioned breaks, in its own way, represents a break in a

relation “that distinguishes the human species,” (Ollman 1971, 134) what human specificity is based upon. As each relation is lost, what is left of it becomes reorganized and disfigured in a way that is hardly recognizable compared to what it was originally. Alienated man is hence transformed into an abstraction, the term Marx uses for instances when a constituent is separated from the original whole. The alienated worker, becomes an abstraction, because “he has lost touch with all human specificity. He has been reduced to performing undifferentiated work on humanly indistinguishable objects among people deprived of their human variety and compassion” (Ollman 1971, 134).

More importantly, while workers of the our own era produce products (or deliver services) that may appeal to refined human senses, what they get in return is only a mere satisfaction of their immediate animal needs. They are not involved in the what and the how of the production process. They are made to work with military discipline and under strict rules in the workplace and live continuously with the anxieties inherent in a competitive, insecure and unstable job market.

The plight of alienated man is therefore about abstraction or break in his activity, product of his labour and in his social relations.

For Marx, as stated earlier, nothing is more important and more vital to an individual's well-being than productive activity. He equates productive activity with life itself, both in the sense that is a means of life (for both natural and species man) for the worker, as well as in terms of what he invests of himself in the object. Productive activity is taken even “as life itself” (EPM 1844, 70-1 and Ollman 1971, 142-3).

But why does productive activity occupy such a central status for the Marxian

individual? To answer this question we need to visit Marx's critique of capitalist society in the light of his definition of the nature of humanity. Firstly, to state that in capitalist society productive activity is the dominant social activity seems like an understatement. Given the general condition of labour and employment in our time even more than in Marx's time, social activity is exclusively determined by productive activity. In our times especially, when single-income earner households are only exceptions, where household buying power has not risen with living costs, where industrial manufacturing working hours have proliferated to all other economic sectors, and where the places workers work and live are far apart, productive activity constitutes, more than ever in the past, the social activity of individuals.

2.7 Activity

Viewed in the context of the Marxian description of the nature of man, Ollman argues that, for the individual, “activity is the medium between him and the outer world and the chief means of appropriation of objects” (Ollman 1971, 137-8). Activity, furthermore, should accomplish three goals.

First, activity should involve the “combined operation of man's power” (Ollman 1971, 138). This means it should engage or involve man's natural as well as species powers. In this sense, productive activity that only sustains the repetitive and immediate biological needs of individuals and is imposed on them through a division of labour they played no role in creating is deficient, as it generally tends to deprive man of the opportunity to pursue ends only they themselves desire. There is no denying that the modern-day division of labour and technological automation have led to fewer jobs and

these jobs allow for far less individual creativity and skill development (Reich 2003 and Gorz 1989, 223 and Heilbroner 1990, 430-431). “Capitalist labor does not belong to man's essential⁶ being as it leaves most of the relations that constitute a human being unaffected [unsatisfied]” (Ollman 1971, 138).⁷

Secondly, activity is for establishing new possibilities (read horizons) for the fulfillment of man's needs by transforming nature and removing the limitations and challenges it imposes. Capitalist labour poses more limitations on the possibilities in nature, rather than helping to realize those possibilities. This is done by virtue of poverty (slums), limits on education and training and danger to health (the existence of detrimental health consequences associated with working environments), and discouraging critical and independent thinking, among other limitations (Ollman 1971, 138).

Thirdly, through activity, individuals replenish their powers and their energy. Capitalist labour, however, only consumes and drains the individual's powers without the possibility of replenishing them, leaving him fatigued, vulnerable, and unable, even in his private time, to maintain or expand on qualities that distinguish him as human being (Ollman 1971, 138).

For Marx, “man's productive activity should engage all his powers and must create ever expanding [growing] opportunities for their fulfillment,” thus affirming human nature and not denying it, “withholding from man what belongs to him as human

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⁶ “... essence and essential refers to the whole bond of real and potential ties linking man and nature” (Ollman 1971, 138).

⁷ My clarification in square brackets.

being” (Ollman 1971, 139). It is this denial of human nature that is the cause of unhappiness hindering the development of his physical and mental energy and what “mortifies his body and ruins his mind” (EPM 1844, 72).

In Marx's envisioned society, under communism, work is the “affirmation of human nature” (EPM 1844, 72). In capitalist society, in comparison, “labor is forced labor” (EPM 1844, 72), the worker is “a mere fragment of his own body” and mind, a “living appendage of the machine” (Marx 2011, 396, 462), or computer, in our own era. “And he looks the part” (Ollman 1971, 139). Capitalist labour is so alienating and so dehumanizing that it causes “idiocy and cretinism” in the worker (EPM 1844, 71).

It is from this Marxian belief that Beauvoir derives her conclusion that many of “the inescapable factors in the individual's decline” (OA, 541) affect individuals of a certain economic class. “The age at which this decline begins has always depended upon the class to which a man belongs. The worker's decline begins earlier; its course is far from rapid” (OA, 541). Worse still, when they are let go because of retirement or lay-off, “they sink into a torpid bewilderment that has physical repercussions: even the mental diseases from which they suffer are to a great extent the product of the system. Even if he keeps his health and clarity of mind, the retired man is nevertheless the victim of that terrible curse, boredom. Deprived of his hold upon the world, he is incapable of finding another because apart from his work his free time was alienated. Rendered sterile ... The injury he has suffered during the course of his life is still more radical. The reason that the retired man is rendered hopeless by the want of meaning in his present life is that the meaning of his existence has been stolen from him from the

very beginning. ... He has not been granted the possibility of committing himself to projects that might have [populated] the world with goals, values, and reasons for existence.” (OA, 541-2, bracket is my clarification)

Following Marx's observation that capitalist work, by its nature, mortifies the body and ruins the mind of workers, thus affecting their intelligence and their common sense, Beauvoir, having studied the plight of the aged in the 'advanced' societies of the present day, declares that as criminal and scandalous as the current old-age policy is,

even more scandalous still is the treatment that it inflicts upon the majority of men during their youth and their maturity. It prefabricates the [mutilated] and the [miserable] state that is theirs when they are old. It is the fault of society that the decline of old age begins too early, that it is rapid, physically painful, and [morally offensive, because they arrive at it empty-handed]. (OA, 542)⁸

After having written just over 600 pages (in the original French), Beauvoir's conclusion leaves the reader, perhaps unexpectedly, perplexed, because she offers no quick remedies of any substance for the plight of old people. In fact, Beauvoir dismisses “all the remedies that have been put forward to lessen the distress of the aged,” ... as ... “such a mockery: not one of them can possibly repair the systematic destruction that has been inflicted upon some men throughout their lives” (OA, 542).

But why does Beauvoir not accept any of the available remedies? In fact, she does not accept anything short of replacing the capitalist economic system. This is

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⁸ My modification (in square brackets) of the translation of *La vieillesse*, 568. See also OA 542.

because it is within this system, as a rule, that individuals are treated as material subjects reduced to a single role of making profit for the privileged few. While consumer society surrounds individuals to soothe their overworked body and mind, it does not reduce the effects of their alienation. Their consumption acts only as a distraction and the fact of their loss in agency remains, both at work and at home; in the former, they produce based on decisions made by engineers who design the plant and the products, and in the latter, they consume products designed by still other engineers, marketed for them by marketers. For Beauvoir, the plight of the poor and old people are one and the same, as she declares in the beginning lines of her book: “it is almost tautological to say 'old' and 'poor'” (OA, 6). “It is the whole [capitalist] system that is at issue,” reads the concluding line in Beauvoir's book (OA, 543).

For Beauvoir, labour or work has, as discussed, two separate aspects: first it is to satisfactorily meet individual's biological needs, and secondly, if one's vocation or calling does not correspond with one's existential striving to find meaning in one's life, the job should, at least, allow for individual time and the possibility of fulfilling the existential quest outside one's profession. And while Beauvoir insists on the former, she is very well aware that the latter cannot be forced. The fact of having freedom to be true to oneself through commitment to one's very own project, causes, and goals, does not imply any obligation (aside from an ethical one) imposed from without. The project, as stipulated in Heidegger's influence on Beauvoir, is entirely internal to the person.

Beauvoir's objection, therefore, is to the manner in which an economic system treats an entire population, an entire class, as the means to earn maximum profit. It is

indeed difficult to envision anything short of a radical change in such a system to help secure and restore the humanity to this vast population. This does not mean that Beauvoir does not accept anything but the violent overthrow of the capitalist system of labour. Her focus is on systemic changes rather than piecemeal tinkering. She states, time and again and throughout her investigative study, that wealthy people do not mortify their bodies or ruin their minds. What Beauvoir would like to see is an economy and production system that is not solely committed to profit maximization, but one that takes into consideration the needs and welfare of all its citizens, a system where workers share in the wealth and comfort they produce for the collective by virtue of their labour. Such a system would not be obsessed with productivity (increasingly producing more at less cost) and profitability. As such, a just economic system does not tire and wear out its workers. Instead, it leaves them with enough health and sufficient means of sustenance to live their post-productive years without anxiety and stress in a caring and supportive environment surrounded by fellow citizens whose relationships to them are not defined on the basis of competition, jealousy or resentment. One among Beauvoir's final statements is most illuminating: "it is the whole relationship between [men] that must be [recreated, to make the condition of old people become acceptable]" (OA, 543).⁹

2.8 Capitalist Labour: An Updated Review

André Gorz, whose name is mentioned more than once in Beauvoir's *The Coming of Age*, argues that social production, only in its recent incarnation, has become

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⁹ My modification (in square brackets) of the translation of *La vieillesse*, 569. See also OA 543.

solely governed by economic rationality, that is, for the sole purpose of generating maximum profit:

... Economic rationality was, for a long time, held in check not only by tradition, but also by other types of rationality, other goals and interests which set limits that were not to be exceeded. Industrial revolution was only able to take off when economic rationality freed itself from all the other principles of rationality and submitted them to its dictatorial control” (Gorz 1989, 18)... “in seventeenth-century France, new techniques and machines had to be approved by a council of elders composed of four merchants, four weavers, and then authorized by the judges. The wages earned by day-labourers and apprentices were fixed by the corporation and protected from all attempts to bargain over them. (Gorz 1989, 16)

Gorz, an important European figure in labour theory and the philosophy of labour, whose writings straddle both pre- and post-globalization eras, accepts that the condition of workers in western industrial countries has somewhat improved (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 37). But this improvement is accompanied not only by a growing “fragmentation “of this class, but also “by new forms of poverty, and workers' alienation and the frustration of their qualitative and existential needs” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 37). Gorz defines qualitative needs as the needs for “creativity, communication and autonomy: in short, the need for a meaningful life” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 38). Gorz, furthermore, declares that “the need for a meaningful life is universal,” as “there is more to life than mere self-production” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 39). If these words sound familiar to Beauvoir's readers, this is no coincidence. Gorz, who was among the

close circle of friends to both Sartre and Beauvoir, published these words in his 1964 book *Stratégie ouvrière et néocapitalisme* (Seuil, 1964), later translated into English as *Strategy for Labor*. It is very likely that there had been cross-pollination between the two contemporary thinkers and friends.

Gorz follows the path of alienated workers as they increasingly lose their autonomy and points out how alienated labour leads to alienated consumption. One needs to scratch the veneer of improvement in the condition of labour in the industrialized world just a little to find that even simple “relations of cooperation and mutual aid .... have been replaced by the purchase of institutionally produced [read commercial] goods and services” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 59). As productive life infringes more and more, workers' lives naturally shrink to the point of being “reduced to little more than instantaneous consumption” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 63).

Meanwhile the burden of the cost of items previously considered luxurious takes an increasingly larger share of the growth in workers' income. These items include automobiles, increasingly advancing technologies including telephones, television, internet, personal computers, etc., some of which have become modern necessities and next to impossible to live without.

Moreover, the capitalist economy, by virtue of its generation of waste, population density, urban sprawl, pollution and stress, has created an entirely new category of consumption and needs: examples abound – travelling far away to seek peace and quiet, fresh air, water, and other privileges that formerly came without any price tag, courtesy of nature.

In summary, Gorz suggests that the situation of workers (and employees) in our time has become more complex. While there may appear to have been some improvement in their lot, this has come at a cost to their qualitative social and personal lives. While full time jobs have seen a considerable drop in number, leading to more uncertain employment situations such as part-time and casual employment, the entire working population has become more vulnerable and dependent on services and products they can no longer produce personally. Instead, they have to be purchased, from the care of children and elderly parents, to means of communication with family and friends, down to food preparation and household maintenance.

In conclusion, Beauvoir's transcendence/immanence differentiation corresponds fairly well with Marx's conception of species and natural powers. Individual human beings need to engage in activities that satisfy both the realms of the immediate and the existential. Obviously, the satisfaction of immediate and urgent needs – the natural in Marx's account and the biological on Beauvoir's – and the material scarcity in their environment makes them vulnerable to exploitation by those who hold claims or power over materials and resources. Beauvoir, Marx and Heidegger, all, emphasize the human need for freedom from the economy, in order to pursue one's freely chosen end: one's existential project; one's true interest; what is specific to each and every individual.

In this thesis, it has been demonstrated that both Marx and Beauvoir are concerned that an economic system that takes the immediate needs of the individual hostage and places him or her at the mercy and will of a few is the cause of alienation and the void in the existential realm.

Even in contemporary industrial capitalist economies where the means of satisfaction, in the biological realm, have relatively been improved, cyclic economic insecurity and instability remain a serious source of anxiety. Additionally, the shrinking job market, rising household debts and the associated falling household savings, with an explosion in payday loan companies (charging interest rates of up to 2000%) (Insley 2011), indicate something more fundamental and troubling even in advanced capitalist economies.

On the other hand, overseas where many of the commodities rich countries consume are produced, the conditions of employment are, at times, horrendous. Workers work in near slavery conditions at Chinese factories that lock them in, sometimes sleep in “coffin” apartments in many Asian industrial countries and earn salaries that are so low that the desperate workers sometimes fall into what could on occasion be described as forced labour.

What concerns this thesis is, however, the general condition of labour and employment in the West. The anxiety and insecurity of workers in advanced industrial society during their productive lives is important as we endeavour to understand aging and the retired worker.

Firstly, the stress and anxiety resulting from job insecurity due to the never-ending drive for productivity, efficiency to cut costs, and inherent systemic competition, combined with the cyclic downturns characterizing capitalist economy, wear active workers down both physically and mentally. These workers will reach retirement broken.

But most importantly, active workers who are stressed and anxious about their own future are unlikely to view older and retired workers with sympathy or empathy. Instead, in a shrinking job market, those not yet old are likely to view older and retired people as a threat to their own employment prospects. This may answer the question Beauvoir raised about the complacency and reticence with which the rest of society treats the aged facing discrimination and injustice.

Furthermore, this is why the questions of employment and treatment of the aged are inseparable and why one cannot be addressed without remedying the other.

Chapter Three

3.1 Aging with Dignity

The questions that arise naturally from the previous chapters are these: How could a society, any society that considers itself just, allow its working citizens to be physically and mentally exploited? Why would a society striving toward progressive and just ends treat its citizens with even more contempt and neglect when they cease to be productive? Why would any contemporary society not strive to ensure permanent and inspiring jobs with good pay for all its citizens?

What should have become evident so far as a central message in the previous chapter is the disproportionately unbalancing and unsettling role employment plays in the life of citizens and as a culprit in the treatment (or mistreatment) of society's aged. In other words, the cause of much misery and illness among our population, old and young, can be traced to the consequences, as a rule adversarial, of their productive lives. What should a just society do for its citizens? What needs to happen for individuals to lead a satisfying productive life so as to also have a decent living when retired or otherwise unable to work? But first some preliminary criteria for justice are required. According to Michael Sandel: "To ask whether a society is just is to ask how it distributes the things we prize – income, wealth, duties, powers and opportunities, offices and honors. A just society distributes these goods in the right way; it gives each person his or her due" (Sandel 2009, 19).

For the purposes of this thesis, initially John Rawls's conception of justice will

be examined as to its capacity (or lack thereof) to address some, if not all, of what is wrong with employment in our societies today, and the consequent mistreatment of the aged in our contemporary societies. I will then look at Martha Nussbaum's complementary version, the Capability Approach, to seek answers to the same questions.

Why these two to the exclusion of the others – the utilitarian and libertarian?

This is because what has come to be known as Rawls's egalitarian liberalism distinguishes itself by a foundational conception or claim that avoids “morally arbitrary contingencies as a framework for justice” (Sandel 2009, 224). It is thus assumed that any criterion that arbitrarily grants some citizens certain privileges while, at the same time, depriving some others of those same privileges is not a just moral criterion for an idea of justice, in relation to employment and a just distribution of wealth. Furthermore, Rawls supports wealth redistribution, “on the grounds of hypothetical consent” (Sandel 2009, 266), something libertarians object to. He thinks that under the Veil of Ignorance, no one is likely to accept a social contract supporting unfettered claim to an individual's freedom of choice to the detriment of government regulation of free exchange of goods and services. As fairness, particularly with regard to employment and wealth, is the main focus of concern for the issues concerning aging in this thesis, Rawls's theory of justice with its emphasis on fairness in establishing fair terms of cooperation seems more useful and promising for this purpose.

Moreover, I find Rawls's thinking more inclusive compared to that of the utilitarians, because initially, at least, it seems to start from assumptions similar to

universal human rights. He envisions, in fact, a world order in which every country would be “maintaining a well-ordered and decent political (domestic) regime, not necessarily democratic, but fully respecting basic human rights” (Rawls 2001, §5).¹⁰ This entails an affirmation that everyone is worthy of respect regardless of where they are, globally and in society at large, that individuals' rights should not be determined based upon their race, class, possessions or personal endowments (or lack thereof) of capital, etc.

Yet another reason for choosing Rawls's conception of justice is that it is rooted in the long tradition of social contract theory, particularly its notion of mutual consent. As such one would expect a social contract tradition to better handle, influence or shape contracts on a lower level among citizens, as well as those of its citizens with society's institutions. The assumption here is that contracts generally draw their legitimacy from two ideals of “autonomy and reciprocity” (Sandel 2009, 144). As both Rawls's social contract and any legal employment contract share this claim, one would expect the former lends itself, more suitably, to the facilitation and realization of the latter.

Furthermore, Rawls's moral devices or concepts, such as the Veil of Ignorance and the Original Position, have promising advantages: the former by virtue of a framework that sets aside political power, personal interest, and moral and religious convictions as means to structure society so that no one could allocate to oneself more advantageous social position, rights and wealth; the latter as an initial framework and motivation for all kinds of social cooperation including, one assumes, the social division

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¹⁰ Subsequent references to this book will use the § symbol plus the section number.

of labour.

But are Rawls's devices able to form the basis of a generic employment contract considered just? Setting aside arbitrary moral contingencies, both a social contract and an employment contract could share a set of terms conducive to a reciprocal agreement establishing goals, duties and responsibilities among individuals who have varying bargaining powers and claims to resources, such as money, savings and capital, and differing needs and vulnerabilities over a dynamic lifetime. Still more significant for this thesis is whether Rawls's principles of justice are capable of ruling out the injustices that, according to Beauvoir, are inflicted upon the aged.

3.2 Rawls's Principles of Justice

Rawls's first principle of justice guarantees equal claim to equal basic liberties for all citizens. They are defined as “freedom of thought and liberty of conscience; political liberties (for example, the right to vote and to participate in politics) and freedom of association” (§13.3). His second principle, known as the difference principle, seeks to establish what sort of inequalities are to become permissible in a liberal democracy. But what of the issues beyond this high-level perspective of political liberties? What about the right to decent-paying employment and control over one's labour or one's life-long career, for the vast majority of population who work for a living? What about the right to a decent income and a decent life in old age, in the aftermath of one's productive life? In what way and in what order of priorities are the important conditions and considerations for justice, such as equality of opportunity and welfare (as well as post-productive care of individual workers) to be established by

Rawls?

On a fundamental level, Rawls's political philosophy is mandated, narrowly, to “finding ... reasoned common ground for political agreement,” in periods of “deepened sharp conflict” (§1). Mandating his political philosophy to play a role of reconciliation – or to perform deep-rooted conflict resolution, Rawls thereby foregoes an approach or tradition that relies on the idea of philosophical critique, thus neglecting to attend to certain fundamental questions: what if a structure is, by nature, conflict creating? The problem with structural inequalities is that those inequalities that Rawls allows to exist may be counterproductive to those he would try to eliminate, in which case his remedies may not in fact work. Rawls acknowledges this problem (see §52.2) posing “a major difficulty” for his ideal of justice.

In other words, instead of examining the root causes of conflict, in order to address fundamental conflicting interests, Rawls runs the risk of addressing and remedying only the symptoms: to mitigate pain and suffering or not to eliminate them substantially. According to Daniel Little, “the idea of critique involves the notion that there are hidden presuppositions ..., and critical philosophy can uncover them” (Daniel Little 2010). This was not what Rawls intended to do.

This choice undoubtedly has a cost, as I will hope to demonstrate. This thesis will, however, not critique the merit of Rawls's prioritizing his first principle over the second. This is an important choice made by Rawls. As Perry Anderson has pointed out, “Why should equal liberties always have priority over equal sufficiencies? Material subsistence is a condition of any juridical existence, and its demands have for most of

human experience been overriding” (Anderson 2005, 104).

3.3 Principles of Justice and the Difference Principle: A Critical Review

Having affirmed equal claim to equal basic liberties for all citizens as a primary objective, Rawls allows – as a second priority – for social and economic inequalities to hold under two conditions:

1. the inequalities are to be attached to opportunities subject to equal opportunity provision for all,
2. only those inequalities are permitted that would benefit “the least-advantaged members of society” (§13.1(b)). This is known as the difference principle.

Here, Rawls is looking to reconcile the facts, on the ground, of existing inequalities caused by wealth differential, social class, education and good fortune, with his idea of free and equal citizens. In the process, he is legitimizing some of these inequalities through his proposed difference principle.

Let us suppose that the fundamental social and economic inequalities are the differences in citizens' life -prospects (their prospects over a complete life) as these are affected by such things as their social class of origin, their native endowments, their opportunities for education, and their good or ill fortunes over the course of life (§16). We ask: by what principles are differences of that kind — differences in life-prospects —made legitimate and consistent with the idea of free and equal citizenship in society seen as a fair system of cooperation? (§12.2).

The difference principle is thus tasked to perform two functions: to legitimize certain existing inequalities in the society; and to help those most affected by the

disadvantages of such inequalities.

The difference principle leaves many questions unanswered. Why is it only the economic condition of the most disadvantaged that is considered? Why is the large population, in between the most well-to-do and the most disadvantaged, not considered in the equalization scheme? What happens to people just slightly above the cut-off?

Furthermore who exactly are the least advantaged? To answer, Rawls introduces his idea of primary goods. “These are various social conditions and all-purpose means that are generally necessary to enable citizens adequately to develop and fully exercise their two moral powers, and to pursue their determinate conceptions of the good.... These goods are things citizens need as free and equal persons living a complete life; they are not things it is simply rational to want or desire, or to prefer or even crave” (§17.1).

Here in the list of primary goods we find many kinds of goods, including ‘all-purpose’ goods such as income and wealth. There is, however, no provision for ensuring equal opportunity for what Beauvoir considered transcendent activity. While the rich and the wealthy have plenty of time and resources available to them outside their income-earning activity to complete their lives with other kinds of learning and development (life-long and personally satisfying), this opportunity is not available to anyone other than the rich and wealthy. Rawls’s second principle allows for this inequality in transcendent activities to remain. If these questions are satisfied only by arbitrary criteria, no matter who at what level makes them, they do not reflect well on an egalitarian principle of justice.

It suffices to appeal to G. A. Cohen's criticisms, which challenge Rawls's difference principles in so far as it would be relevant to this thesis (Cohen 2008). Cohen sees the second principle as involving two premises:

a) major normative premise: “economic inequalities are justified when they make the worst off people materially better off”;

b) minor factual premise: when the richest are allowed to keep more of their wealth, the better the materially worst off will become (Cohen 2008, 34).

Cohen contends that if (b) is refuted, that is, it cannot be used as justification for (a), Rawls's argument for the justification of inequality collapses (Cohen 2008, 47).

Cohen employs a number of arguments to demonstrate problems associated with the second principle. Among them are the interpersonal and community test, the kidnapper's argument, and challenge to the Pareto argument. I will however appeal to Cohen's incentive argument. He argues the factual premise that the income gap suggested by Rawls's principle helps the very poor, is complex and ambiguous. Secondly, it is not clear whether this suggests that the very rich are unable to produce in an optimum manner if not exempt from strict egalitarian criteria, or whether they are unwilling to work and produce as best they could. It is difficult to argue in favour of the former (the inability argument) as there is no scientific evidence from social sciences to support it. Cohen's subsequent scrutiny of the motivational interpretation of the principle, or what he calls the incentive argument, leads to still undesirable and unsupported premises. For one thing, there is an assumption at work here that the 'talented people', whose profession is of higher importance to the strength of production,

are morally more feeble and less committed, by nature, to strict egalitarian principles. If this belief depends on habits, expectation or cultural indoctrination, Cohen contends that:

we could safely set it aside. We could say that if it is true, it is compromised in the present context by what its truth rests on, that it does not furnish an appropriate reason for saying that talented people could not work as hard on 60 percent tax as they do at 40. The claim might help to silence moralistic charges against the present generation of talented rich people, but it could not contribute to a robust vindication of inequality in human society. (Cohen 2008, 51)

Cohen adds that “there is also something weird going on when the will of a class is depicted by its members as just a sociological fact ...” (Cohen 2008, 66) and that the incentive argument implies “that they (the rich] do not qualify as choosing human agents” (Cohen 2008, 67).

Cohen thus concludes that such claims based on incentive or inability rest “entirely on factors of habit and ideology” and as such these claims must be dismissed (Cohen 2008, 51). Cohen takes this further to declare that the difference principle, in fact, contradicts a genuine belief underlying the first principle of justice: “anyone who affirms the difference principle should judge incentive-generated inequality to be unjust, since it helps the worst off only because the better off disrespect the principle that is supposed to justify that very inequality” (Cohen 2008, 153).

But more importantly, Cohen proceeds to question the causes of inequality. In objecting to the Pareto argument (where under a scheme of unequal rewards, if everyone

could be made better off, inequality is justified) he asserts: “The cause of the inequality that Pareto argument ends up endorsing, might be, and standardly is, the exploitation by the talented of the morally arbitrary talent differential”(Cohen 2008, 153).

Cohen's reply to the Pareto argument raises two important criticisms against Rawls's difference principle. Firstly, that Rawls, in accommodating the talent or wealth of the best off, appeals to a morally arbitrary differential. Hence, whereas Rawls's first principle of justice attempts to avoid the morally arbitrary contingencies as a framework for justice, his difference principle in fact allows for certain inequalities based on a morally arbitrary notion of talent. In Cohen's words, “the moral arbitrariness claim, which looms large in the intuitive case for the difference principle, contradicts the content of that very principle” (Cohen 2008, 156).

Secondly, Rawls's choice of privileging talent over, for example, hard and dangerous works is hardly justifiable. In a society that offers equal opportunity and freedom of choice in the matter of occupations, incentives should be available to reward those who take on jobs that are manually hard, dangerous, or otherwise risk prone. Incentives offered for the purposes of productivity, profitability or toward other motivational ends could still be considered but only after all others receive their fair and equitable reimbursements for the job they perform. This is not an argument for strict egalitarianism. Inequality may still exist but only after a just non-alienating employment with decent pay, including satisfactory post-retirement income, is assured for everyone.

Furthermore, Rawls's justification for inequality in so far as there exist unequal opportunities for transcendent activity cannot be defended. This inequality affects active

workers, who are left with no space (energy, time, means, etc.) for their private and personal development, as well adversely impacting retired workers, who subsequently suffer from lack of any meaning or means of personal satisfaction.

3.4 Nussbaum and the Capability Approach

As I pointed out in the discussion of Rawls, his guarantees of basic freedom and liberties, as discussed, turn out to benefit those already advantaged because of the priority Rawls grants them over material equality. It is not apparent why the well-off deserve such special treatment and why they should not be committed to a more egalitarian arrangement. The principles of justice do not include, nor do they consider, any guarantees as to citizens' right to pursue decent stable and secure jobs over the course of their lifetime.

Nussbaum's theory, which she considers to be complementary to that of Rawls (Nussbaum 2006, 69) focuses on several important areas where she finds Rawls's theory falls short to satisfy the requirements of a robust theory of justice. She thinks Rawls's principle of justice should be revised to include a number of important issues. Most significantly, her theory is intended as a complete "account of core human entitlements" (Nussbaum 2006, 70) to be available universally to all citizens. She is particularly concerned about those excluded by previous justice theories, including Rawls's: people with disabilities, citizens of other nations and non-human animals.

She is rightly concerned about any "sharp division" of rights and entitlements into two separate areas of political, or "first-generational rights," and socio-economic or "second-generation rights" (Nussbaum and Faralli 2007, 145-161). In her view "all

rights have an economic and social aspect” (Nussbaum and Faralli 2007, 145-161).

To begin with, Nussbaum raises valid concerns about the contractarian rationale of mutual advantage. She expresses doubts about whether, in the Initial Situation, parties with great disparity in power and resources have a realistic motivation to reach agreement or consensus. She cites Hobbes' statement to the fact that “If one group could simply dominate the others, there would be no need for such a contract” (Nussbaum and Faralli 2007, 146). This shortcoming, she adds, while valid in the case of people with mental and physical disability, is equally worrisome in “any relationship in which there are large asymmetries of power” (Nussbaum and Faralli 2007, 146).

More importantly, Nussbaum disputes the contractarian notion of social cooperation of Rawls and others focused primarily on mutual advantage (Nussbaum 2006, 2). Rawls's later writings might be interpreted to suggest that he had a change of heart regarding the primary function of mutual advantage in matters of social cooperation, because he replaced it with the phrase “society as a fair system of cooperation over time.” But Nussbaum argues that this modification was more a matter of expediency than a change of heart (Nussbaum 2006, 59). Nussbaum correctly focuses on mutual advantage, not only because it goes to the root of a contractarian conception of the individual, but also because it excludes a vast number of society's rightful citizens from enjoying full membership benefits:

As all the classical theorists emphasize, the goal of mutual advantage is closely connected to the restriction on the initial group of contracting parties that Hume so eloquently discussed. As Hume says: if there is a group that is grossly unequal in power and

resources to the majority group, it is not very clear that cooperating *with those people* on their fair terms is advantageous – as opposed to either dominating them or dealing with them by personal charity. (Nussbaum 2006, 61)

Hume, as I understand him in the above passage, seems to suggest that a majority who, in his case, possess superior power and resources may choose to dominate the minority group. But there is no reason to think that the reverse is not possible. In fact, one could argue that those who possess capital and resources and consequently have a more effective voice in policy decisions, do constitute a minority versus the rest of the population that work for salaries and wages. This impediment is not limited to the participation and fairness involved in the Initial Situation. It affects the quality of agreements reached through public reason as well. There also, we may see groups in possession of disproportionately large capital and resources who may find domination more advantageous than a fair (mutually and all-around beneficial) cooperation.

Nussbaum's conception of social cooperation is quite different. She begins from an account of the human being that is fundamentally different from that of Rawls. In Rawls, the individual human possesses no prepolitical rights or entitlement prior to the Initial Situation and before the establishment of social cooperation. This is an intuitive conception. Nussbaum, however, begins with a different intuitive idea of

a conception of the dignity of the human being, and a life that is worthy of that dignity – a life that has available to it “truly human functioning,” in the sense described by Marx in *1844 Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* ... Marx speaks of the human being as a being “in need of a totality of human life – activities”

(Nussbaum 2006, 74, quoting Marx (EPM 1844/1978)).

Nussbaum's Capability Approach “takes its bearing from an idea (similar to Marx's species man) that the capabilities to which all citizens are entitled are many and not one and are opportunities for activity, not simply quantities of resources” (Nussbaum 2006, 74-5).

The Capability Approach is hence based on an alternative conception of social cooperation, one that defines cooperation not in the strict sense of advantage, but that is cognizant of the individual's need for support, opportunity, for further activities and enhancement of life, both in the private and public spheres. And I introduce this distinction of public/private here because I think it is of vital importance. Nussbaum, in contrast to Rawls, proposes a theory of justice that does involve the individual's life in its totality. Its effects go beyond Rawls's index of primary goods and place more emphasis on conceptions such as dignity and agency. The Capability Approach is, as stated before, prepolitical and a “cross-boundary theory.” It addresses issues beyond those of mutual advantage. “It is an account of minimum core social entitlements” (Nussbaum 2006, 75). Although, not “a complete account of social justice” (Nussbaum 2006, 75), it is however conceived as an open-ended template for entitlements. It can be expanded depending on the commitment of and resources available to governments.

Nussbaum begins by asking “What opportunities are entailed by the idea of a life worthy of human dignity?” (Nussbaum 2006, 25). In answering this question, she generates a list consisting of ten classes or categories of capabilities or “goals that fulfill or correspond to people's prepolitical entitlements” (Nussbaum 2006, 26), without

which the lives of individuals would not be worthy of the dignity they deserve. These ten 'central capabilities' "are inherent in the very idea of minimum social justice" (Nussbaum 2011, 24-5). Humans are entitled to them "just on account of their human dignity" (Nussbaum 2011, 25), and it is incumbent upon governments to ensure that their citizens have what they are entitled to. For this, after all, is "a major reason for governments to exist" (Nussbaum 2011, 27).

What is then the motivating concern when these central capabilities or human entitlements are absent? Nussbaum's reply to this question is that capabilities, when unrealized or absent, result in "waste and starvation" (Nussbaum 2011, 27), "tragedy" and an inability "to choose, to act, to use key human powers ... lives are thus not worthy of human dignity" (Nussbaum 2011, 28). This declaration is quite significant. Much like Marx before her, who described the fate of workers deprived of their powers (both species and natural) with words like "idiocy" and "cretinism" (EPM 1844, 71). Nussbaum, too, predicts dire consequences – or at least deprivation from functioning in ways that are required in order to have a good life – for the individual in all aspects of life, when denied his or her central capabilities: "the central capabilities on my list, like human rights, are 'trumps' in the sense that they have a very strong priority over the pursuit of welfare generally" (Nussbaum 2011, 35).

Nussbaum's proposed list of capabilities, life, health, bodily integrity, sense/imagination/thoughts, emotions, practical reason, affiliation, living with concern for other species, play, and control (both political and material) over one's environment, "are implicit in the idea of a life worthy of human dignity" (Nussbaum 2006, 70).

Nussbaum refers to her list of capabilities at times as 'central', at other times as 'combined' (Nussbaum 2011, 31). I interpret these two attributes to indicate that these capabilities are not for picking and choosing. Their meanings reside in the collective role they play in the quality of human life. As well, individuals at times may need the personal ability combined with the external means, in a particular way, in order to function effectively. These capabilities are not independent of each other. When one or more are denied, or undermined, they have an impact on one's dignity and freedom to be and to do what one is rightly entitled to. Therein lies an important understanding, as I pointed out earlier, one that was articulated, first by Marx and reiterated by Nussbaum herself: all capabilities are needed collectively for the “totalities of human life-activities” (EPM 1844, translated 1978, 88-9: translation modified by Nussbaum).

3.5 Nussbaum and Aging

Nussbaum's critique of Rawls initially involves noticing the absence of children, the elderly and adult women from Rawls's account of participation and engagement in social contracts (Nussbaum 2006, 32). But her own account – aside from a few passing references to old age – primarily in relation to care of the elderly and the burden this represents for care givers – sheds sparse light on the plight of this segment of the population and the challenges they face. She does however pay considerable attention to people with disabilities. This constitutes one of the three new frontiers of justice she introduced in her 2006 book *Frontiers of Justice*. She points out, and rightly so, that we all need to acknowledge the universal fact that “we are needy temporal animal beings who begin as babies and end, often, in other forms of dependency” (Nussbaum 2006,

160). She also debunks the widely held and yet unexamined virtue that to be respected one has to be productive: “We do not have to win the respect of others by being productive. We have a claim to support in the dignity of our human need itself ... Productivity is necessary, and even good; but it is not the main end of social life” (Nussbaum 2006, 160). In this sense she could be considered to be of the same mind as Beauvoir. Productivity, in the contemporary sense, is an immanent activity, necessary but not the be-all and end-all.

Furthermore, in criticizing Kant's rigid concept of moral agency, Nussbaum makes a very insightful observation that “the usual human life cycle brings with it periods of extreme dependency, in which our functioning is very similar to that experienced by people with mental and physical disabilities throughout their lives” (Nussbaum 2006, 133).

The acknowledgment that we all live lives of which some part is marked by disabilities is very illuminating. If we all go through periods of dependency at different stages of life and if everyone inevitably comes to experience for themselves their own cycles of dependency, we should become more sympathetic to providing satisfactory levels of care for all people in need. The care and support required for such periods of neediness should not have to depend on a political constitution, public reason and political debate. The dignity of human life demands care and support for cyclic as well as permanent disabilities as a permanent feature of a just society governed by a theory of justice worthy of human life.

Yet, strangely, aging does not resurface except in a few passing remarks in

Nussbaum's *Frontiers of Justice*. Why is this? Does she think her account of care for disability covers old people as well? If so, she does not clarify this. Perhaps Nussbaum's account requires a new capability, one that we now need to explore.

Why should we focus on this issue? Some facts are in order. There are few recent national surveys on the prevailing attitudes and prejudices against old people in current societies. Ageism here in Canada is worrisome, to say the least. A recent report by the Law Commission of Ontario (2011) presents a snapshot. According to this report:

Caregivers routinely assume seniors can't make their own decisions. Policymakers don't bother to consult them on issues affecting them. Health-care and social service providers withhold supports to which they are entitled. People patronize them, ignore them or exclude them from the life of the community.” The report then makes a number of recommendations: “All laws should reflect these principles:

- Respect for the dignity of the individual.
- The presumption of ability, not disability.
- The right to be included in community affairs.
- Freedom from abuse or exploitation. (Goar 2011)

The Law Commission of Ontario also quotes the Ontario Human Rights Commission's *Policy on Discrimination Against Older People Because of Age* (Toronto 2007): “Age discrimination is not seen as something that is as serious as other forms of discrimination, despite the fact that it can have the same economic, social and psychological impact as any other form of discrimination” (Law Commission of Ontario, 25). The report also takes note of the particular importance of gender in dealing with this segment of the population “since most old adults are women” (Law

Commission of Ontario, 2).

According to Rose Gilroy of Newcastle University, “while less discussed than other forms of discrimination, ageism, according to a British survey of 2005 [British Concern, 2005], is the most commonly experienced form of prejudice with 29% of adults reporting experiences of age discrimination” (Gilroy 2006, 343-4).

Here is why Nussbaum's project of justice as stipulated in *The Frontiers of Justice* should rethink its framework and include provisions to address the problems affecting the aged. Firstly, discrimination against old people (women and men) shares many common features with sexual discrimination, about which Nussbaum has extensively written. In both cases, as Beauvoir argued through the two pioneering books, *The Second Sex* and *The Coming of Age*, we have biological facts that are not really biological facts but cultural ones. This is because, for her, physical facts do not exist in abstraction from social, historical, subjective and economic factors, “Old age is in western culture the other, held in disregard, in economic and social impoverishment” (Deutscher 2003, 289).

By proclaiming that we all live lives of which some part is marked by disabilities, Nussbaum has already arrived at the shore of a new territory. As she noted, human life involves several cycles: birth, infancy, adolescence, youth, middle age and old age, some of which are marked by varying degrees of dependencies. The dignity of human life requires a just society to be empathetic and supportive of those dependency periods and to do so equally. If we care for infants against mortality, malnutrition and disease, for the young and the adolescent, to help them through education and training,

for the mature adult, by helping them with earning a decent living, we are equally obligated to ensure our aged are not ignored. Human dignity entails respecting the needs of individuals in every stage by not favouring only some cycles and not others.

This is why it is important to include the entire human life cycle and all humankind into the frontiers of justice. Our prevailing attitude toward old people, as noted earlier, eerily resembles the kind of discrimination women experienced in the past and continue to experience in less developed countries. By consolidating the full array of threats to the dignity of humankind, including discrimination, exploitation and any other forms of exclusion from the social support, into the frontiers of justice, we could protect people of poorer nations as well. This protection would involve ensuring that their rights to good and decent jobs and fair treatment in workplace trumps the excessive profit local or multinational companies make in producing cheap commodities for rich nations.

As to the discrimination based on age, Nussbaum recognizes that in a just society the provision of capabilities could be respected, implemented and protected by governments in general, and yet certain functionings of a class or group could still be denied due to the discrimination or stigmatization affecting them. This is why Nussbaum's list of capabilities includes a direct reference to the enjoyment of "self-respect and non-humiliation: being able to be treated as a dignified being whose worth is equal to that of others" and requiring the "provisions of non-discrimination" against a specific list of categories: "race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin and species" (Capabilities, Affiliation (b)). This provides a solid basis for

taking on the issue of ageism, or adding it to the list of discriminations.

We recall from Chapter One that Beauvoir suggested in *The Coming of Age* that old age covers “two profoundly different kinds of reality” (OA, 213). A smaller wealthy exploiting class continues to enjoy freedom and their activities of choice. This is in sharp contrast with the exploited class, where health problems, poverty, boredom, and loneliness makes their life a “parody” (OA, 539).

Beauvoir didn't suggest it, but it is tempting to think that wealthy old people are not affected by ageism. Beauvoir, however, considered transcendent activities to be necessary for an existentially meaningful life: “There is only one solution if old age is not to be an absurd parody of our former life, and that is to go on pursuing ends that give our existence a meaning – devotion to individuals, to groups or to causes, social, political, intellectual or creative work” (OA, 540).

The point to be made here is that the wealthy – and not just the wealthy, but the financially comfortable class too – are also vulnerable to the social stigma related to old age, even though they may not be aware of it. A hundred-billion-dollar industry proves it. According to Global Industry Analysts, a market research firm, cited in *The Huffington Post* on August 20, 2011, the baby boomer consumer base, “seeking to keep the dreaded signs of aging at bay” is pushing “the U.S. Market for anti-aging products from \$80 billion now to more than \$114 billion [dollars] by 2015.” The baby boomers, having grown up “in a culture glamorizing youth, face an array of choices ... cosmetic surgery procedures at \$10,000, or ... human growth hormone treatment at \$15,000 per year and a skin-care product called Peau Magnifique that costs \$1,500 for a 28-day

supply” (Crary 2011). The American Academy of Anti-Aging Medicine claims 22,000 members.

3.6 Old Age and Nussbaum's Central Capabilities

Let us remind ourselves of the milestones of the previous chapters: Beauvoir affirmed that a good decent life involves more than meeting one's biological needs, a goal which a vast majority in many current societies utterly fail to reach. The solution to the miseries old people experience involves tackling the presumptions and social and economic structures reinforcing these miseries. Any remedy for this malaise, therefore, has to involve asserting control over one's occupation (in the broader sense) – the productive life of each individual – thus allowing the individual to pursue his or her own existential meanings and aspirations. There is a distinction here to be made: I use ‘occupation’ in a more specific sense to include both its paid and unpaid components. I could as well use ‘vocation’ in the sense of person's suitability for a particular occupation. I allow, however, for a person to have an unpaid vocation he or she enjoys while having a paid occupation for financial support. In this case, however, one expects that the person is entitled to sufficient control over his or her private life in order to pursue personal ends.

We sought and found the fundamental roots of Beauvoir's thinking in Marx's conception of the human as a whole being, in its totality. Any break in this wholeness, in its relations with its constituent parts, leads to inevitable misery, poverty and alienation. Central to this wholeness is that the human life activity must be a free and conscious activity, that the individual himself chooses his activity freely and that this freedom and

choice involves one's own reasoning and one's free will. As life activity is, mostly if not entirely, productive activity, the individual is what he produces, what he does for a living (Ollman 1971, 111-15). This is what Marx means when he says “alienated activity is not free” (EPM 1844, 75). This characteristic is what distinguishes man from animals. “Only man makes his life-activity itself the object of his will and of his consciousness ... Conscious life-activity directly distinguishes man from animal life-activity” (EPM 1844, 75). This is what Marx implies by its 'totality' and what I mean by 'wholeness'. Man reduced to labour to meet his immediate biological and basic needs is reduced to partiality, to something that is indistinguishable from animals. It is only when man is not engaged in forced or alienated labour that he lives in the totality of his species being.

With this as the context, we may see whether, and if so how fully, Nussbaum's capabilities capture problems affecting the aged. We will be looking for capabilities (or components thereof) that are essential to meeting Marx's demands vis-à-vis an individual's non-alienating productive activity.

More importantly, in what will follow, this thesis proposes a new capability for Nussbaum's list of capabilities. It is hoped that this capability accomplishes at least two objectives. Firstly, the case will be made for a capability to pursue transcendent activity. This capability, as discussed before, involves freely making choices about activities one has reasons to pursue as essential to one's being. This, in itself, is a two-faceted capability. On the one hand, it speaks to a condition of employment or immanent activity where one performs a task for and along with others. In this sense, the capability

I propose relates to exertion of control, equal with others involved with the said employment, over conditions of productive activity (decisions regarding the process and outcomes). On the other hand, it relates to freedom (time, space, energy, resources) to pursue transcendent (self-directed) activities of the kind associated often (but not necessarily always) with one's private domain.

Secondly, this new capability consolidates and gives form to several of Nussbaum's capabilities and in so doing, hopefully, emphasizes and accentuates their centrality to human dignity more clearly. This capability is already being enjoyed by a few people; it is, however, denied to many who work for a wage or salary. This denial adversely affects each person's equally valuable striving to live a life of contentment in the company of others. With this in mind, we begin a review of Nussbaum's list of capabilities.

Nussbaum's list of capabilities illustrates, from the outset, the complexity of human life: that is, as essential as physiological requirements are to a decent life, and although meeting biological needs is by far the most immediate of requirements in many countries of the world, meeting these needs is not in itself sufficient for living a good life.

1. Life:

This pertains to an entitlement to live one's life "to the end of normal length; not dying prematurely" and before "it is so reduced as to be not worth living" (Nussbaum 2006, 78).

Beauvoir firmly believed labour and work, in general, in capitalist societies

prematurely ages and kills workers. They are left grappling with poverty, loneliness, anxiety about the future, social stigma, and resentment for having lost their life entirely in return for mere subsistence. She furthermore, cited reports and examples related to neglect and further suffering by the retired and the aged in institutions where a majority die shortly after they arrive. A capability or right to occupation with good pay in working environments that are not disempowering, treating them instead with dignity and decency while employed and providing them with pay and health and pension benefits and a decent lifestyle that does not diminish after retirement, would address and perhaps replace this first capability on Nussbaum's list satisfactorily.

2 and 3. Bodily Health and Bodily Integrity:

Good health, nourishment, shelter, and mobility are relevant to the plight of old people in modern-day society.

Good health (for old people this always implies absence of disease, enjoyment and having meaningful activities) adequate nourishment, adequate and secure shelter, and mobility are of the essence to old age, in particular (Gilroy 2006, 348). Beauvoir decried the conditions of active workers as well as those who cease to work because of age. They are overworked in unstable and often temporary and precarious jobs. They live a life, characterized by Marx, as one of “alien habitation” in dwellings “from which, if he does not pay, he can be thrown out any day” (EPM 1844, 117). This too contributes immensely to anxiety in contemporary workers.¹¹ The adverse effects of working in a

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¹¹ According to a September 2011 survey of U.S. households, fully one third of American households, including 10% of those earning more than \$100,000, would be unable to make their

strongly competitive global market against prevailing 'low-wage no-benefit jobs' that are devouring an increasingly larger portion of manufacturing and now other professional jobs in the industrial countries, manifest themselves in the mental and physical health of active workers. This frenzied work environment and a fast-paced economy also take their toll in the private sphere of active workers. When workers retire or lose their jobs later in life, these effects, such as the loss or shrinking of social circles and community engagement, catch up with them, leading to isolation and depression, combined with poverty caused by low pension income and the loss of the ability to sustain an active engaging life.

As noted in Chapter One, the effects of depression, isolation and poverty on health are well documented. Citing numerous studies in Great Britain, Gilroy asserts that for older people health and well-being have practical meanings:

When older people talk of health it is in the more holistic sense of well-being. Part of that well-being is enjoyment and meaningful activities. Those older people in disadvantaged areas with little or no social infrastructure are heavily prone to isolation and depression. (Scharf et al. 2004 in Gilroy 2006, 348).

Furthermore and according to André Gorz, the environment in which production takes place nowadays has changed, altering “our relationship with nature,” in the process replacing also “the natural environment with an ever-changing social environment.” Referring to the “exhaustion or destruction of resources (air, water, light,

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rent or mortgage payment for more than a month if they lost their jobs:
<http://tinyurl.com/3chh9a3>.

silence, space) which until now were taken as natural' ... [h]e shows how our need for these resources can only be satisfied by expensive purchases, often in complex form” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 40).

This is true, for example, of the need for air, which is immediately apprehended as the need for vacations, for public gardens, for city planning, for escape from the city; of the need for nightly rest, for physical and mental relaxation, which becomes the need for tasteful, comfortable housing protected against noise. [T]he need in question is not a new or 'rich' need which corresponds to an enrichment of man and a development of his new faculties; it is merely an eternal biological need which now demands 'rich' means of satisfaction because the natural environment has become impoverished. (Gorz 1967, 89-90)

All of this means that health and mobility require more complex and costlier responses than before. Mobility and social inclusion for the aged, in our times, translate into the provision of modern necessities, such as the means of communication – telephone, home computer and technical support, internet access, as well as the ability to travel for visits to family (and its extended) members who were forced to relocate to find jobs. These needs all contribute to costs of living that cannot be sustained by current levels of pension.

Moreover, special interests represented by car manufacturers, oil and gas producers and home developers have helped to create “arguably the most significant of the new necessities ... the car” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 41). Thanks to a refusal to invest in public transportation in order to keep taxes low (as a means of appeasing

corporations and wealthy libertarians), combined with the phenomenon of urban sprawl and the concentration of economic activities, including the ever-increasing service sector in urban centres, “access to work, shops, recreational and cultural facilities requires private transportation” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 41). And because “urban space is organized in terms of private transportation ... The private automobile becomes a social necessity” (Gorz 1967, 88).

All in all, it is evident that health and mobility are related: Poor health hinders mobility and produces depression and lack of mobility is, at least partly, responsible for common physical and mental health woes afflicting old people. These two are particularly impeded in a society governed by the economic rationality of capitalism.

Once again, a capability involving having real choices of good and non-alienating occupation(s) (with adequate pay benefits, pension and lifetime access to health care) throughout one's life will absorb much if not all the functionings associated with Nussbaum's second and third capabilities.

4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought:

This is a capability involved in the use of one's senses, imagination, thinking and reason, in a “truly human” way, according to Nussbaum. This is especially relevant to “experiencing and producing works and events of one's choice.” What does she mean by one's choice? Nussbaum presents a few exemplary attributes seemingly associated with this question of choice: “religious, literary, musical, and so forth” (Nussbaum 2006, 76). She also makes references to guarantees of freedom of expression with respect to political and artistic speech, and freedom of religious exercises, followed by a reference

to the ability to have pleasurable (rather than painful) experiences.

It is difficult to draw any conclusions, from Nussbaum's description, as to whether what she means by senses, imagination and thought, are matters of existential importance, or whether this capability is simply one among others subject to her minimum entitlement threshold to be determined by the state. How then could we determine a minimum threshold for 'senses, imagination, and thought' and on what basis could any nation state possibly argue that its citizens are provided with a minimum threshold of such capability? I think this is a serious problem for Nussbaum. Unless she could anchor senses, imagination and thought to some concrete domain of activity such as productive life or private life, the ground for the realization of this important capability remains unclear. As such these will not be seen as central to human development in the way Marx, Heidegger or Beauvoir emphasized them. Democratic industrial societies then would not worry about fulfilling this capability or its provision. Freedom of expression and freedom of thought, in any case, would guarantee it through the political constitution. If correct, this is a significant shortcoming,

I go back to Beauvoir's transcendent/immanent dichotomy. Beauvoir considered any activity performed for purely economic reasons or serving others – and all that involves repetitive and mundane tasks, not resulting in new learning – as immanent activities. As such, these activities opposed creativity, learning, thinking and the development of senses and skills. More importantly, Beauvoir made the observation that one cannot engage in transcendent activities unless one retains control over one's productive life. Such control would translate into one of the following scenarios: either

one engages in a vocation where one's potential can be realized through projects and activities that are uniquely one's own (OA, 540), or one's occupation, if it involves only biological and economic ends, leaves sufficient time and space (and energy) for one's private sphere so that one can pursue transcendent activities.

For Heidegger, *Gestell*, a concept closely related to (if not the inspiration for) Beauvoir's immanent activity, is the fundamental and the main characteristic of western culture and western productive activity. *Gestell* forces all who work for others, for economic reasons, to become objectified. To avoid disappearing into an object as an end for others, Heidegger prescribes, as a minimum, an activity in the private sphere resembling those referred to as festivals by the ancient Greeks. Festivals, we recall, were a rehumanizing exercise of leisure where one stepped out of everydayness and entered into an experience of freedom of being true to oneself.

In both Beauvoir and Heidegger, activities that engage personal imagination, reflection, thinking and the development of the senses, be it in old age or during the active productive life of an individual, have a stricter meaning and are also central to human existence in a way that Nussbaum does not seem to have captured in her fourth capability category. Perhaps, if she ameliorated this capability by emphasizing the importance of 'senses, imagination, and thought' to the individual's total humanity – as opposed to the present description where she seems to marginalize it to life's periphery (the sphere of leisure) – this shortcoming could be overcome.

Marx, however, would not have accepted any kind of break between an individual and his productive activity, for labour (productive activity) is life itself (EPM

1844, 34) and in capitalist society those who are involved in productive activity in return for a wage become alienated. Labour in capitalism inevitably and inexorably “mortifies man's body and ruins his mind” (EPM 1844, 69-80):

the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful the alien objective world becomes which he creates over against himself, the poorer he himself – his inner world – becomes, the less belongs to him as his own. It is the same in religion. The more man puts into god, the less he retains himself. (EPM 1844, 70)

Marx therefore cannot see that once alienated, the individual could redeem himself through self-engagement in creative activities of some sort. In capitalist society, the product of labour has individuality – what the worker, himself, is deprived of. Individuals acquire their individuality only in so far as they can own the product, or the commodity they can afford to purchase. Individuals thus acquire a substitute for their lost self through consumption of consumer goods (Ollman 1971, 145-6). We recall from Chapter Two that for Marx, man was made up of a duality: a natural man striving to meet his biological needs (food, shelter, procreation, security), and a species man. As the latter, the individual was self-aware, pursuing ends that are truly his. Man's corresponding powers (natural or animal and species) are, as we have already seen, very much like abilities, capacities, or potential for acquiring what each of the dualities requires to replenish itself. A truly human activity of labour involves the combination of both of man's powers.

It is in this Marxian sense, that 'senses, imagination and thought' are considered

the integral parts of an individual's species capability. My point is that this class of capability cannot be seen in spite of and in isolation from the social division of labour. Moreover, alienated workers, mortified in body and mind, have no reason to hope, as Beauvoir demonstrated, that they will be able to recover from alienation once they are no longer productive. In fact there is every reason, as we saw in Chapter One, for them to be condemned to lives plagued by mental and physical illness and social stigma as well as neglect and discrimination.

My initial intuition about this capability was that by breaking into parts (abstraction) what I consider to be a human being in its totality (wholeness), Nussbaum has not brought clarity to this otherwise important angle of human existence in the way it deserves. On second thought, it may be fortuitous to this thesis that she has left the capability as is, in that 'senses, imagination and thought' seem exactly the kind of capabilities that are withheld from alienated workers and whose absence creates the "idiocy" and "cretinism" that Marx described. As such, these human qualities would remain underdeveloped or otherwise missing in aged retired workers, hindering their efforts to seek a good and meaningful life, and hence further indicators of their rather tragic ordeal.

5. Emotions:

As a footnote to this capability, Nussbaum attempts to clarify what it is meant to satisfy: "Supporting this capability means supporting forms of human association that can be shown to be crucial in their development." But what are these human associations? I take these to mean voluntary attachments to others that support us

emotionally. This would mean family, like-minded friends, group members committed to the same causes, and what is generally considered as one's social support network. Emotions were previously thought of as the exclusive domain of human animals but it turns out this is far from certain. Yet if there is, as Marx suggested, something specific about humankind, what Ollman refers to as the Marxian 'human specificity', this trait should clearly include the associations and connections humans voluntarily create and maintain over long periods for objectives that are not immediate, nor related to day-to-day survival or biological needs. Human specificity involves an individual's relation with activity, the product of this activity and his fellow human beings. Any break involving any of these relations conflicts with human specificity.

Of Marx's alienated man, Ollman says “he has lost touch with all human specificity. He has been reduced to performing undifferentiated work on humanly undistinguishable objects among people deprived of their human variety and compassion” (Ollman 1971, 134). What is significant here is that both Marxian specificity and Nussbaum's emotion entail attachments to others and reciprocity. Others are required to participate in a mutuality of relationship with me. It is something that is as much self-directed as it is other-directed, something akin to maintaining relations with parents as an adult, or with people we care for and who care for us. Here we are dealing with community-based linkages and connections, those outside of work and a legal political constitution.

There are two aspects here that relate to this thesis. One is that old people are generally vulnerable on this account. They are often isolated, and lack of sufficient

income, insufficiency of public transportation and mobility issues related to disabilities prevent them from reaching out to those they love. Additionally, discrimination and stigma against people who are no longer productive increases their distance from the community and causes further resentment on the part of old people. Beauvoir refers to this feeling of resentment and its accompanying emotions of anger, depression, anxiety and fear. These emotions are all included in Nussbaum's inventory of emotion under this capability.

Secondly, however, there is the aspect of this attachment that is opposed in modern-day employment. André Gorz expends considerable efforts to describe this dichotomy which he refers to as autonomy/heteronomy. I will discuss this in more detail under “practical reason”.

6. Practical Reason:

Nussbaum describes as relevant functioning for this capability an ability to form one's own conception of good and the ability to plan one's life based on one's own critical reflection. I interpret this capability as agency. To the extent that one pursues one's own ends through one's chosen vocation, one exerts control over one's destiny and one's life. Pursuing one's inherent talents (and freely choosing one's occupation) and employment in a capitalist economy present individuals with a dichotomy. André Gorz expends considerable effort to describe this dichotomy, which he refers to as autonomy/heteronomy.

This dichotomy is more specific than that of Beauvoir's transcendent/immanent. Autonomy refers to living and what is entailed in private and personal life. It can include

activities of both an immanent and transcendent nature. Individuals' attachment to their neighbourhood, communities, social and personal causes are all present under autonomy. On the other hand, heteronomy entails work, the vocational and professional aspects of an individual's life. "All work performed within social production is necessarily heteronomous" (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 62). Here the individual functions, as a rule, as an end for others, in return for money. Gorz contends that not only do individuals experience a split between the two domains in capitalist society, but that increasingly it is the autonomous part that disappears as a result of the conditions and insecurity of capitalist employment (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 59-61). Gorz adds that modern-day capitalist society has successfully promoted "professional success" as a "means of achieving private comfort and pleasure." Personal virtues no longer play a role (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 62).

Heteronomy for Gorz is a system, not just confined to a place of employment. It includes – Gorz asserts it requires – an elaborate infrastructure of administration, communication, the state and service sectors. As such, the heteronomous domain has the support of the state that serves it and perpetuates consumerism in all its functions (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 62). Gorz, furthermore, describes our present time as a time when "private life shrinks and is reduced to little more than instantaneous consumption," where values at work such as "competition and opportunism, combined with subservience towards superiors" are rewarded by gain and comfort at home (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 63). It is in this Gorzean sense that I would see Nussbaum's 'practical wisdom' correspond with Gorz's call for a reduction in working hours and

days for all employees and workers. This would, for all who work, mean not only more time and space for their private lives. It would also call for more autonomy at work. This in turn would require a radical transformation of private and professional life. Alienated work makes for alienated workers as well as an alienated life and manipulated consumption (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 42):

the alienated consumer is one and the same as the manual, intellectual, or white collar worker, cut off from his fellow workers made passive by the military discipline of the factory, cut off from his product, ordered to sell his time, to execute with docility a pre-fabricated task, without worrying about the purposes of his work. (Gorz 1967, 71)

For a disregard with regards to autonomy – given the unpredictability and variable expressions of individual needs – Gorz equally derides the capitalist and the Soviet models, the latter for its “productivist” unpopular imitation of capitalism. The communist party was as blind to the issue of alienated labour as its western capitalist rival (Gorz 1967, 46).

Nussbaum's support for this capability crucial to human development cannot therefore be divorced from addressing the condition of employment and labour and the choices (or lack thereof) individuals face in the labour market, as the most significant barrier to the provision of this capability.

7. Affiliation:

a) Living with and toward others, to recognize and show concerns for other human beings, to engage in various forms of interaction; to be able to imagine the

situation of another:

This capability lends itself easily to argue for workplaces involving an empowered workforce engaged in shared decision-making on issues related to allocation of profit and cooperative production management. As such, the productive life of an individual would naturally become an important ground for social interaction that is essential to human nature. Hence, a workplace transformed would allow for a more sympathetic and fairer treatment of older workers.

b) It is curious that Nussbaum makes no reference to people with disabilities and old people here. I would suggest that the addition of these two categories would complete her list of discrimination categories.

Elsewhere Nussbaum expresses her confidence in social contract theories in handling matters of discrimination. She does, however, question why such theories have been less successful in matters of sex equality:

Social contract theories of justice do a superb work for traditional issues of discrimination and exclusion. They are well suited to address inequalities of wealth, class, and status, and can be rather easily extended to address inequalities of race, and, in some ways, sex – although our historical sketch has shown how difficult it is to arrive at sex equality from a starting point that insists on equality in power. (Nussbaum 2006, 92)

She elaborates in a footnote on what was previously quoted, suggesting that *the difficulty* stems from social contract theorists' reluctance to engage in the “critique of family” (Nussbaum 2006, 423).

It is my opinion that, within the context of dignity, Nussbaum has an excellent

opportunity to frame and bring together several issues related to disparity in power, such as conditions of employment for the vast majority of people who work for a wage, as well as various universal discriminatory practices, like those based on sex, age and disability. No institution other than government has the power and capacity to regulate the very central matter of the productive lives of its citizens, by ensuring that good decent jobs are generated and available in sufficient quantities to ensure the security and well-being of all citizens. There is nothing more fundamental than a just social division of labour and the prevention of exploitation and alienation of wage earners. And nothing more antithetical to an individual's right to a decent job with dignity and security than giving capitalists a free rein to pursue the single-minded objective of profit making. Societies and nations cannot pay attention to issues of global justice before having paid attention to the single most important aspect of their own citizens' right to decent and dignified jobs. A capability or inalienable universal right to the occupation of one's choosing with good pay, sustainable benefits and in proper balance with a person's other social activities may accomplish justice both on the local and global levels at the same time.

10. Control of Environment:

b) Material: having the right to seek employment on an equal basis with others.

This capability has good potential for helping old people to maintain their jobs – not forcing them to retire and helping them find new jobs with a decent sustainable income if they lose their jobs for any other reason. It could be said that this capability could address discrimination against old people in so far as employment opportunities

are concerned. It does not however say anything about the quality and condition of jobs available to citizens.

It is equally essential for jobs and ensuing incomes to be sustainable. Pensions should be based on a decent living standard while employed, and an equally decent comfortable living, devoid of fear, anxiety and insecurity, after the individual retires. Equal dignity commands that people's well-being remain the subject of concern and attention even after they cease to be productive.

In summary, upon examination of Nussbaum's capabilities, this thesis discussed some of these capabilities that are particularly relevant to people in old age. Capabilities that relate more pressingly to one's occupation were also examined. In what will follow, firstly Beauvoir's legacy issues will be discussed in virtue of their relevance to workers of today's economy more than forty years after she wrote about them. Secondly, an attempt will be made to discuss what has changed or has remained unchanged since Beauvoir's pioneering work followed by a proposal for a new and improved capability to be added to Nussbaum's list of central capabilities.

3.7 To Work as a Human: The Case for Just Employment

Beauvoir commenced her lengthy investigation out of concern for the tragic state of old people in modern societies. I understood her quest as an ethical one. Returning to the question I posed at the outset: to what degree is society responsible for the sad plight of the aged, and for the decline we associate with ageing? Beauvoir explored two different paths: human biological and human existential needs. The latter is, for her,

fundamental to our personal philosophy of a good and satisfying (happy) life. She observed that in our current societies old age is life's parody, but that it does not have to be this way. She clearly held individuals responsible for seeking existential meaning for their lives through transcendent activities. But she was shaken by the fact that for a majority of working people, the pursuit of natural needs (food, shelter, family), through what she called immanent activities, was detrimental and counter-productive to their personal existential projects. One cannot pursue one's existential project if one is exploited and underpaid in ever more consuming jobs.

Beauvoir also observed that our contemporary and sophisticated societies continue to harbour legacy prejudices and beliefs pertaining to the glorification and aggrandizement of one stage of life – youth – within the full course of human life. She also observed a reinforcement of this misbelief in the nineteenth century, a watershed era when workers became predominantly passive instruments of the forces of production. Prior to this era, inhabitants of preindustrial societies were considered by and large passive instruments of the forces of nature.

Since Beauvoir's monumental investigation on ageing and the aged forty years have passed. In some ways, a lot has changed. In other ways, not much has changed. What has not changed is that some fundamental questions about the just treatment of old people remain unanswered even though the population of old people has exploded dramatically. Judging from the survey presented earlier in this section, regarding principles of justice in the writings of Rawls and Nussbaum, old people continue to be treated as second-class citizens, if not outright ignored.

What has changed, however, in the forty years between Beauvoir's study and the present, is that those who exchange their labour for wages have become passive instruments of yet more formidable forces of global competition, characterized by an undisputed pursuit of profit maximization and unquestioned consumerism.

If the social problem confronting old people was the Mount Everest of social problems, as said forty years ago by a British sociologist quoted by Beauvoir, judging from today's debates about old age and pension on a global scale, it is no less of a problem in 2011.

André Gorz in *Critique of Economic Reason* (first published as *Métamorphoses du travail* by Galilée, 1988), asserts that "'Work' as we know it, is a modern invention. Work in the form in which we recognize and perform it, and to which we give a central place in the life of the individual and of society, was invented" (Gorz 1989, 13). It is therefore important to remember and to remind ourselves that we are not confronting a long established phenomenon. It is helpful to think about modern-day employment as a recent experiment of contemporary societies.

In the same light, Beauvoir's criticism of the state pension system appeared a mere 70 years after Otto Von Bismarck invented the concept, and only 25 years into France's own implementation of a state pension regime. As I write this thesis, in an environment where much of the burden and the risks associated with old age income have now been transferred to old people themselves, the debates and, the protests as well as some of those legacy misbeliefs, rage on. In the U.K., 80% of those under the age of 25 have no pension plan and "half of those aged between 25 and 34 are not saving for

their retirement” (Adams 2010). In the United States, the average middle class American has only saved 7 percent of their desired retirement savings. Those approaching retirement age, between the ages 50 and 59, have saved an average of only \$29,000 for retirement (Reuters 2010).

Perhaps the most lasting legacy of Beauvoir's book is found in her closing remarks linking the injustices inflicted on old people to the ordeal of employment that the majority or the rest of the population experience when they are still young and before the onset of old age:

The reason that the retired man is rendered hopeless [for the lack of] meaning in his present life is that the meaning of his existence has been stolen from him from the very beginning. A law of ... wages allows him no more than the right to reproduce life: it refuses him the possibility of discovering any justification for it. When he escapes the fetters of his trade or [vocation], all he sees around him is an arid waste: he has not been granted the possibility of committing himself to projects that might have [instead engaged him in] the world with goals, values and reasons for existence. That is the crime of our society. Its 'old-age policy' is scandalous. But even more scandalous still is the treatment that it inflicts upon the majority of men during their youth and their maturity. It prefabricates the maimed and the wretched state that is theirs when they are old. It is the fault of the society that the decline of old age begins too early, that it is rapid, physically painful and, because they enter in upon it with empty hand, morally atrocious. (OA, 542)¹²

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¹² My modification (in square brackets) of the translation of *La vieillesse*, 568. See also OA 542.

What this passage signifies, more than anything, is the fact that lack of material means rooted in today's conditions of employment has far-reaching and unforeseen – at the time – consequences for the worker when old. This means we cannot address the social justice issues relevant to old age in isolation from the current prevailing situation of employment that adversely affects everyone. Of equal importance is the existential aspect of worker's lives. On one level, there is a social justice dimension, and on another level, there are capabilities or potential, private and internal to the individual. The former is the ground of satisfaction of the latter.

Beauvoir's contemporary, Gorz presents a more nuanced picture of work and its impact on the individual, and new forms of workers' alienation. He defines work as “an activity in the *public* sphere,” that is “demanded, defined and recognized as useful by other people and, consequently, as an activity they will pay for” (Gorz 1989, 13). It is by virtue of this activity that “we belong to the public sphere, acquire a social existence and a social identity (that is, a 'profession')” (Gorz 1989, 13).

As discussed towards the end of Chapter Two, Gorz argues that conditions of labour and the social division of labour, until the emergence of capitalism, was determined not only by an economic rationality, but by other types of rationality as well, such as tradition, welfare of the membership belonging to various guilds, ideological and cultural traditions, and other goals and interests. Capitalism, once it freed itself from all other constraints, directed its focus single-mindedly on “the one dimensional reductionism of economic rationality,” to the detriment of all other considerations (Gorz 1989, 19).

There is no doubt that the condition of the working class has improved, especially in the industrial world, a fact both Beauvoir and Gorz acknowledge. Beauvoir, however, condemns a society that “cares about the individual only in so far as he is profitable” (OA, 543).

The young know this. Their anxiety as they enter in upon social life matches the anguish of the old as they are excluded from it. Between these two stages, the problem is hidden by routine. The young man dreads this machine that is about to seize hold of him, and sometimes he tries to defend himself by throwing half-bricks; the old man, rejected by it, exhausted and naked, has nothing left but his eyes to weep with. Between [the two generations] there turns the machine, the crusher of men, [those] who let themselves be crushed because it never occurs to them that they can escape it. Once we have understood what the state of the aged really is, we cannot satisfy ourselves with calling for a more generous 'old-age policy', higher pension, decent housing and organized leisure. It is the whole system that is at issue. (OA, 543)

Gorz focuses on a different aspect of work. Lodziak and Tatman (1997) suggest that Gorz acknowledges that the condition of employment in western industrial countries has generally improved and he observes that the affluence of the working class has grown. But this increased affluence, Lodziak and Tatman contend, is “accompanied by new forms of poverty, and workers' alienation and frustration of their qualitative and existential needs” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 37). They assert that Gorz distinguishes between the ordeals of the working population in the 'Third World' and those of the affluent societies of the west. In the former, their struggle is “driven by the need to

satisfy basic needs,” while in the latter the demands “arise from 'qualitative needs' such as “creativity”, “autonomy”, in short, the need for a meaningful life” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 38). Meaningful life for Gorz consists of not only the provision of secure jobs with decent pay supporting the productive and post-productive life of salaried individuals, but also jobs that do not hinder workers' social interactions and their private life. The need for a meaningful life is universal. It is also an indisputable fact that “there is more to life than self-production” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 39).

Capitalism is “antithetical to the satisfaction of qualitative needs” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 39). Having been forced by social movements and the collective social awareness of the working class, to provide “the basic necessities for a majority in advanced capitalist societies” it has

devised new ways of maintaining its domination, and in the process ensures our enslavement to fundamental needs, creates new needs, and as a consequence further submerges qualitative needs. In short capitalism, in its pursuit of profit, and in its desire to maintain its domination, manipulates our need. (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 39-40)

These new needs are not for basic necessities alone, they are also for things that were once considered as luxuries; home theatres, big-screen televisions, personal fitness machines, means of private transportation, vacations in foreign or otherwise faraway places, are all what Gorz rightly considers “superfluous” to genuine needs. Moreover, some biological and psychological needs that are not new now demand “'rich' means of satisfaction because the natural environment has become impoverished”, and unfettered

and thoughtless consumerism has “altered our relationship with the environment.” As well, “Exhaustion and destruction of resources (air, water, light, silence, space) which until now were taken as natural” has produced a whole infrastructure of consumption where what was once available and free in nature is now commercially available for purchase (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 40-41).

If anything, our needs are constantly growing while the buying powers of middle and lower classes have not kept up with costs. So how do we explain the impoverishment of workers and a rise in their consumption? Robert B. Reich, the former American secretary of labour and now at UC Berkeley, recently wrote that in spite of the steadily increasing gap between the income and spending of American middle-class families since the 1960s, they

nevertheless continued to spend, at first enabled by the flow of women into the work force. (in the 1960s only 12 percent of married women with young children were working for pay; by the late 1990s, 55 percent were.) When that way of life stopped generating enough income, Americans went deeper into debt. From the late 1990s to 2007, the typical household debt grew by a third. As long as housing values continued to rise it seemed a painless way to get additional money. Eventually, of course, the bubble burst. That ended the middle class's remarkable ability to keep spending in the face of stagnant wages. (Reich 2011)

Automobiles as a means of private transportation draw Gorz's special attention. He observes that private automobiles have become a “social necessity” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 42), resulting in resources and infrastructures being

diverted from building public transportation, walker-friendly and old age-friendly urban planning (sidewalks, public washrooms, etc.) and other social spending. People are now expected to travel long distances to shops, hospitals, and to visit friends and acquaintances, but most importantly to work.¹³ Owning a car has become a necessity, permitting factories and offices to move farther and farther from residential areas in order to save money, a saving that will not go towards reimbursing adequate public transportation. Instead, it is workers who end up paying, through their taxes, for the profit that private road construction companies earn through building more roads and highways. Furthermore, having to drive long distances to work and shops eats into workers' time that could be better spent on personal and family causes.

Hence, Gorz theorizes that in capitalism “production determines consumption” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 43), and as mentioned earlier he connects the two:

The alienated consumer is one and the same as the manual, intellectual, or white collar worker who is cut off from his fellow workers made passive by the military discipline of the factory, cut off from his product, ordered to sell his time, to execute with docility a pre-fabricated task, without worrying about the purposes of his work. (Gorz 1967, 71)

Gorz proposes a labour strategy that demands autonomy for the worker, a

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¹³ This is particularly unsettling for old people whose driver's licenses are removed because of medical conditions or simply due to the greater scrutiny, such as periodic exams, they attract. While having a car involves considerable costs and resources, losing one's privilege to drive is even more costly psychologically and socially.

demand to which unions in the west, as well as socialist and communist alternative systems of the past and present, have also been blind. “In societies in which work is the main social activity, it makes sense to fight for more autonomy in work” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 46). The surest most effective way to achieve autonomy and to fight against alienation is for unions to fight for a reduction in working hours and not simply an increase in the wages of alienating labour (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 47).

Gorz quotes Marcuse saying that “Economic freedom means freedom from the economy – from being controlled by economic forces and relationships; from the daily struggle for existence, from earning a living” (Marcuse 1972, 33-4).

Gorz, in the tradition of Kant, as well as Marx, asserts that:

[T]he humanism of work is the humanism of free activity and of self-management at all levels. It presupposes that individuals instead of seeing themselves and being seen as means of society and of production, be seen and see themselves as ends, that no longer the time at work, but free time becomes the standard of wealth. (Gorz 1967, 128)

Gorz observes that standardization and automation of industrial processes have led to, where possible, the creation of “deskilled work”:

Indeed the de-skilled nature of what most workers have to do to earn a living is a major source of meaninglessness. De-skilled work is an insult to human intelligence and does not begin to tap the range of capacities and skills embodied in individual workers. (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 66)

These de-skilled jobs have the advantage for the factory owners that they can be performed abroad where there is little or no investment in labour and wages are many times cheaper.

On the other hand, Gorz speaks of the multi-skilled process workers of a computerized manufacturing plant with “its own standardizations such that the kind of work done, irrespective of its location (brewery or nuclear power station), is essentially the same – monitoring and controlling the production process at a distance, that is via display screens” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 67). Among the many points Gorz makes is that standardization has produced savings in labour costs and labour time. These savings can be relied upon to reduce working hours and hence create more free time for employees if savings from automated socialized production are used differently. “In a capitalist system, these 'savings' are used up in unnecessary production, and what cannot be thus used fetches up in unemployment, casual, temporary and part-time employment. In other words social inequalities are exacerbated” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 67).

With the automation and standardization of manufacturing processes, corporations can basically move anywhere in search of the cheapest labour and production costs to generate maximum profit. As de-skilled jobs in traditional sectors disappear, where they were once abundant, the service industry grows on the back of unemployed, insecure and low-paid employees, so that those who hold well-paid stable jobs can buy services once performed only in the homes of the rich by domestic servants, hence giving the well-to-do more leisure time: the processing and cooking of food, the cleaning of the house and other personal items, child and other home care

services all fall into this category. Gorz reminds us that “to buy someone else's time to increase your own leisure or comfort is merely to purchase the work of a servant. Even when the purchaser and the servant are of the same economic status” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 67-8).

There are grave consequences involved in the growth in the service industry or what Gorz considered “the development of personal services for the private sphere” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 68) of the kind we have witnessed in recent years:

By dint of monetizing, professionalizing and transforming into jobs the few remaining production and service activities we still perform for ourselves, might we not reduce our capacity to look after ourselves almost to the point of where it disappears, thus undermining the foundations of existential autonomy, not to mention the foundations of lived sociality and the fabric of human relationship. (Gorz 1994, 51-2)

Hence domestic chores, food, parenting and relationships of care are all commodified and commercialized, and for purchase. Those who are unemployed, underemployed or living on meagre pensions now have to purchase even basic needs the previous generation performed by themselves. This current generation of old adults and the generations to come are no longer able to perform their basic personal necessities. They consequently become more impoverished and vulnerable.

This is truly a post-Marxian contribution by Gorz to the field of labour theory. Alienated labour, Marx observed in his time, produced idiocy and retarded intellectual growth in workers. Gorz observes that in our time, alienated labour

produces frenzied consumerism and personal dependency. But even more alarming is that economic rationality now extends itself into all spheres of life, including the private personal sphere. Medicine, caring relationships, disability care, and most other private affairs are now governed by economic rationality, by the criteria of maximization of profit. It is not that Gorz bemoans economic rationality absolutely. His objection is to “the extent of the sphere in which economic rationality exerts its effect” (Gorz 1994, 80). “Capitalism is the expression of economic rationality finally set free of all restraints” (Gorz 1989, 122). This extension of rationality has allowed it into “inappropriate places” (Lodziak and Tatman 1997, 80), such as health care, education, domestic security, care of the disabled, children, old people, prisons and, most recently, wars.

3.8 A New Frontier of Justice?

Nussbaum's central capabilities represent a major advancement for a theory of justice by starting from prepolitical entitlements and freedoms for the individual, and extending these to everyone equally. As Drydyk says: “Everyone's striving towards living well in the company of others matters and matters equally” (Drydyk 2011, 39). It is also a remarkable underlying foundation of Nussbaum's thinking that she insists in ensuring that “the capabilities to which all citizens are entitled are many and not one” and that she calls for “opportunities for activities, not simply quantities” (Nussbaum 2006, 74). She does reiterate Marx's understanding of a human being as being “in need of a totality of human-life activities” (Nussbaum 2006, 74, and EPM 1844, 112). But she seems hesitant in committing herself to the central focus Marx

brings to the matter of the social division of labour, and where it affects the majority of the population, that is, work.

Marx in his theory of alienation considers work as an affirmation of human nature and work in capitalist systems as denial of what belongs to the worker as a human being (Ollman 1971, 139). Furthermore, if the productive activity and social activity of a human being, in its totality, are the same, as Marx thinks they are, and if in capitalism productive activity causes breaks in all human relations (with self, one's activity and one's fellow beings) by transforming these relations into abstractions, then it would only make sense to focus on the break in relations and not on the resulting severed parts.

Productive activity or work receives but a scant and passing treatment in Nussbaum's capabilities. Indeed, work or the ability to work as a human being is positioned in a subsection (Material) under 'Control over One's Environment' and way down on the list of specifics that begins with property rights. This reminds us of Rawls and his unwavering embrace of the market economy.

What Marx and Nussbaum share, however differently, is their attempt to restore to human beings the human totality (freedom, entitlements, etc.) that is original to their nature and that they truly deserve. But because this totality, in its present state, is considered compromised or, in Marx's vocabulary, the whole has suffered abstractions (has been cut into pieces) and no longer exists, both thinkers have to invent ways of restoring the whole by piecing together the severed parts. For Marx, these severed parts (or abstractions), though they may function as independent

pieces upon the break from the whole, are the function and result of alienation. It is in fact this function of alienation that allows or forces the parts to be transformed, to be reorganized and to appear as something else, something independent. What of the whole that once was, the human per se? In Marx's analogy this human being becomes a "filled void into an absolute void," or in Ollman's interpretation, 'a hole in the air' (EPM 1844, 82, and Ollman 1971, 135).

At the same time that the individual is degenerating into an abstraction, those parts of his being which have been split off (which are no longer under his control) are undergoing their own transformation ... In each instance, the other half of the severed relation, carried by a social dynamic of its own, progresses through a series of forms in a direction away from its beginning in man. Eventually it attains an independent life, that is, takes on 'needs' which individual is then forced to satisfy, and the original connection is all but obliterated. (Ollman 1971, 135)

While Marx does not let himself be distracted from his quest for the authentic whole being, by remaining focused on figuring out the relations between the severed and separated parts of a human being to arrive at and reconstruct a unified being once again, Nussbaum considers these parts in their current state of independence and obscurity.

Nussbaum's capability approach, therefore, stands to be improved if we could consolidate some of the capabilities under an all new capability. This new and improved capability involves:

1. a universal right for everyone, to occupation(s) (an individual should be free to

change occupations, given the dynamics of the labour market and individual's continued maturing of views) of one's own choosing;

2. free and equal access to training for one's chosen occupation;
3. a supportive regulated labour market that would ensure the security and stability of various occupations against monopolization and manipulation by capital holders, ensuring that the principles of participatory democracy and consensus-base management are instituted in the workplace, and establishing disincentives for corporations to move their operations elsewhere;
4. a decent sustainable, equitable and universal pay and benefits regime, including health care and pensions that do not drop or diminish upon retirement or in the face of economic downturns.

This new capability has the advantage of consolidating and unifying many of Nussbaum's capabilities as well as focusing on workforce policies that are crucial to the satisfaction of those capabilities and the dignity of individual.

By focusing on empowering individuals where it most matters, in the domain of their productive activity, and by not ignoring the central role of productive activity in the welfare and well-being of the individual, Nussbaum could have an opportunity to restore individuals' agency in managing their own life in a truly human way.

This capability could respond to the central human need for independence, security and welfare, in a unified manner rather than to an inventory of splintered abstracted parts on the basis of core minimum thresholds. Productive activity is central to the life of the individual. Restoring to individuals their control over how the

product of their labour is produced, limiting “the managerial 'right to manage',” and sharing the decision-making process regarding management of profit with workers and employees will bring back their agency and restore their dignity (Standing 2009, 46). Salaries and wages need to include provision of a decent pension plan. A radical reform of employment laws will close the ever increasing gap between the rich and the poor and have an equally leveling effect on political power and participation of the majority.

Individuals, freed from the yoke of exploitative and manipulative relations in their workplace, will reclaim their private and leisure life. They will inevitably lead less stress-inducing lives, will require less consumerism as a means of self-distraction and will be more likely to engage in the social and political lives of their communities.

This new capability would therefore allow for pursuit of existential needs that according to Beauvoir:

give our existence a meaning – devotion to
individuals, to groups or to causes, social,
political, intellectual or creative work, In spite of
the moralists' opinion to the contrary, in old age
we should wish still to have passions strong
enough. (OA, 540)

As such it prevents us from becoming self-absorbed and losing our full relationship with the world and issues surrounding us.

In an economy not fixated on the maximization of profit, there would not

exist an income gap such as that in a capitalist system. The motivation to seek a career would be based upon the inherent and intrinsic talents of individuals rather than on mere economic considerations. Productive activity would not consume all other classes of social activities. Hence, individuals could, as Beauvoir suggested, devote themselves to other individuals, groups, or social, political, intellectual and otherwise creative endeavours (OA,540). This devotion would then naturally continue into individuals' old age. The wealthy class already enjoys this privilege. Justice then requires that such a privilege be also available to the rest of society. This is the conclusion Beauvoir reached at the end of her investigation into aging and the aged. By tracing her steps through the thinkers and philosophers that inspired her, we too should arrive at the same place.

That is why all the remedies that have been put forward to lessen the distress of the aged are such a mockery: not one of them can possibly repair the systematic destruction that has been inflicted upon some men throughout their lives. Even if they are treated and taken care of, their health cannot be given back. Even if decent houses are built for them, they cannot be provided with the culture, the interests and the responsibilities that would give their life a meaning ... It is the whole system that is at issue. (OA, 542-3)

It is indeed difficult if not impossible to imagine a situation where capabilities could be provided in a meaningful way in the absence of a just employment condition. It is equally unimaginable to speak of agency, a normal life, and control over one's life without focusing on the most imposing and important aspect of an

individual's life, that is, their productive life.

Conclusion

This thesis began by examining the experience of aging and the plight of old people in past and present times, through the pioneering work of Beauvoir. Her main claim that our societies age their workers prematurely was examined in the context of philosophies that influenced Beauvoir. This thesis spent considerable time on the matter of employment as the culprit, of its being responsible for the ordeal that the vast majority of our older citizens experience. If this approach has left the reader with some degree of ambiguity as to the principle focus of this thesis, it was not unintended. Much in the way of Beauvoir's footsteps, this thesis did not focus on aging as a natural biological phenomenon. If justice was held and the working members – as opposed to those for whom others work – of our societies retained a decent degree of control over their work and were also fairly compensated for their services to others, there would have been nothing to write about. Beauvoir's central argument is that one's career is the single most important predictor of one's mental, and to a greater degree, one's physical state as one ages. In other words, the disempowerment individuals experience in their productive activities throughout their working lives – by virtue of loss or suppression of self-expression, self-development, agency and poverty – has an invisible but undeniable, cumulative, adverse, and by and large irreversible impact on them.

Hence the difficulty in separating the two seemingly different domains of work and aging. Therefore any philosophical inquiry into aging, not unlike a medical

study, for example, needs to go back to the source, to the root causes of what could be described as failing a subpopulation of our society. In the same way that the question of women as a disadvantaged and disempowered portion of the population could not have been divorced from the abundance of advantage men enjoyed in the societies of the past (and still in some contemporary societies), the problems encountered by the aged cannot be discussed without losing sight of the underlying economic factor.

There are, therefore, two aspects to any examination of the aging: the descriptive aspect and the normative aspect. This thesis makes a conscious effort not to separate the two.

But then what of the pressing issues old people are already facing? The remedy is in the pain itself.¹⁴ If what ailed the aged was an absence of genuine choice and freedom to participate in the division of social activity, the remedy would thus lie in restoring to them their lost sense of agency, and the respect they are owed by virtue of their equal human dignity. This will not happen so long as decisions regarding retirement age or income, and medical and social support services, are made only based on expediencies characteristic of anemic capitalist economies.

A just economic system would not make economic decisions based upon arbitrary factors such as race or ethnicity or age. A just economic system cares about satisfaction and the job security of its working population. A social division of labour based upon principles of justice and equity would focus not only and purely on economic rationality at the expense of ignoring all other rationalities. It would reward

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¹⁴ From a poem by the Persian poet Rumi (Molana Jalaaluddin – 1207-73).

its members for participating in the realization of collective good even after they cease to be actively employed. As such, it would care for the physical and mental health of its citizens, thus supporting them to remain in control of their varying life circumstances. A just economic system would encourage and deepen the sense of civic responsibility of its workers by assuring them of and providing them with the needed support when they become less independent, in return for their social cooperation in the division of labour. Only an economic system relying on short-term profit maximization schemes and a cheap disposable workforce would conduct itself in ways and manners that are detrimental to the physical and mental health of its working population. Any socio-economic system claiming adherence to principles of justice would consider health and welfare and equality for all its members regardless of their relative position in the managerial hierarchy of economic institutions. It would not consider the endeavours of some more favourable than others.

Such an economic system would naturally give priority to policies of job creation as opposed to those that motivate job reduction. Any policy to enhance productivity would consider how and in what way and to what purpose the resulting savings would be utilized.

It is in this context, one of justice based on equity and not freedom alone, that government, economic institutions and academia need to discuss issues such as demographics, care and other issues related to aging. Anything else, such as alarming reports about the negative impact (or burden) the aging population represent for current societies is therefore misguided, if not misleading.

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