

# Hard Work

Michael Walzer

(Excerpt from *Spheres of Justice*)

## Equality and Hardness

It is not a question here of demanding or strenuous work. In that sense of the word, we can work hard in almost any office and at almost any job. I can work hard writing this book, and sometimes do. A task or a cause that seems to us worth the hard work it entails is clearly a good thing. For all our natural laziness, we go looking for it. But *hard* has another sense--as in "hard winter" and "hard heart" --where it means harsh, unpleasant, cruel, difficult to endure. Thus the account in Exodus of Israel's oppression, "And the Egyptians embittered their lives with hard labor" (1:14). Here the word describes jobs that are like prison sentences, work that people don't look for and wouldn't choose if they had even minimally attractive alternatives. This kind of work is a negative good, and it commonly carries other negative goods in its train: poverty, insecurity, ill health, physical danger, dishonor and degradation. And yet it is socially necessary work; it needs to be done, and that means that someone must be found to do it.

The conventional solution to this problem has the form of a simple equation: the negative good is matched by the negative status of the people into whose hands it is thrust. Hard work is distributed to degraded people. Citizens are set free; the work is imposed on slaves, resident aliens, "guest workers"---outsiders all. Alternatively, the insiders who do the work are turned into "inside" aliens, like the Indian untouchables or the American blacks after emancipation. In many societies, women have been the most important group of "inside" aliens, doing the work that men disdained and freeing the men not only for more rewarding economic activities but also for citizenship and politics. Indeed, the household work that women traditionally have done -cooking, cleaning, caring for the sick and the old-makes up a substantial part of the hard work of the economy today, for which aliens are recruited (and women prominently among them).

The idea in all these cases is a cruel one: negative people for a negative good. The work should be done by men and women whose qualities it is presumed to fit. Because of their race or sex, or presumed intelligence, or social status, they deserve to do it, or they don't deserve not to do it, or they somehow qualify for it. It's not the work of citizens, free men, white men, and so on. But what sort of desert, what sort of qualification is this? It would be hard to say what the hard workers of this or any other society have done to deserve the danger and degradation their work commonly entails; or how they, and they alone, have qualified for it. What secrets have we learned about their moral character? When convicts do hard labor, we can at least argue that they deserve their punishment. But even they are not state slaves; their degradation is (most often) limited and temporary, and it is by no means clear that the most oppressive sorts of work should be assigned to them. And if not to them, surely to no one else. Indeed, if convicts are driven to hard labor, then ordinary men and women should probably be protected from it, so as to make it clear that they are not convicts and have never been found guilty by a jury of their peers. And if even convicts shouldn't be forced to endure the oppression (imprisonment being oppression enough), then it is a fortiori true that no one else should endure it.

Nor can it be imposed on outsiders. I have already argued that the people who do this sort of work are so closely tied into the everyday life of the political community that they can't rightly be denied membership. Hard work is a naturalization process, and it brings membership to those who endure the hardship. At the same time, there is something attractive about a community whose members resist hard work (and whose new members are naturalized into the resistance). They have a certain sense of themselves and their careers that rules out the acceptance of oppression; they refuse to be degraded and have the strength to sustain the refusal. Neither the sense of self nor the personal strength are all that common in human history. They represent a significant achievement of modern democracy, closely connected to economic growth, certainly, but also to the success or the partial success of complex equality in the sphere of welfare. It is sometimes said

to be an argument against the welfare state that its members are unwilling to take on certain sorts of jobs. But surely that is a sign of success. When we design a system of communal provision, one of our aims is to free people from the immediate constraints of physical need. So long as they are unfree, they are available for every sort of hard work, abased, as it were, by anticipation. Hungry, powerless, always insecure, they constitute "the reserve army of the proletariat." Once they have alternatives, they will rally and say No. Still, the work needs to be done. Who is to do it?

It is an old dream that no one will have to do it. We will solve the problem by abolishing the work, replacing men and women with machines wherever men and women find it unpleasant to be. Thus Oscar Wilde in his fine essay "The Soul of Man Under Socialism":

All unintellectual labor, all monotonous, dull labor, all labor that deals with dreadful things and involves unpleasant conditions, must be done by machinery. Machinery must work for us in the coal mines and do all sanitary services, and be a stoker of steamers, and clean the streets, and run messages on wet days and do anything that is tedious and distressing.. 1

But that was always an unrealistic solution, for a great deal of hard work is required in the human services, where automation was never in prospect. Even where it was and still is in prospect, the invention and installation of the necessary machines is a much slower business than we once thought it would be. And machines as often replace people doing work they like to do as people doing "tedious and distressing" work. Technology is not morally discriminating in its effects.

If we set automation aside, the most common egalitarian argument is that the work should be shared, rotated (like political offices) among the citizens. Everyone should do it-except convicts, of course, who now have to be excluded so as to make sure that the work carries no stigma. This is another example of simple equality. It has its beginning, I think, in the dangerous work of war. As we conscript young men for war, so, it's been said, we should conscript men and women generally for all those necessary jobs that are unlikely to attract volunteers. An army of citizens will replace the reserve army of the proletariat. This . is an attractive proposal, and I shall want to give it its due. It can't be defended, however, across the range of hardness-not even across the range of danger. Hence I will have to consider more complex distributions. Negative goods have to be dispersed not only among individuals but also among distributive spheres. Some we can share in the same way that we share the costs of the welfare state; some, if market conditions are roughly egalitarian, we can buy and sell; some require political arguments and democratic decision making. But all these forms have one thing in common: the distribution goes against the grain of the (negative) good, Except in the case of punishment, it just isn't possible to fit the distribution to the social meaning of the good, because there is no race or sex or caste and no conceivable set of individuals who can properly be singled out as society's hard workers. No one qualifies-there is no Pascalian company-and so all of us, in different ways and on different occasions, have to be available,

### **Dangerous Work**

Soldiering is a special kind of hard work. In many societies, in fact, it is not conceived to be hard work at all, It is the normal occupation of young men, their social function, into which they are not so much drafted as ritually initiated, and where they find the rewards of camaraderie, excitement, and glory, It would be as odd, in these cases, to talk about conscripts as to talk about volunteers; neither category is relevant. Sometimes whole age cohorts go off to battle, doing what they are expected to do and what their members (most of them, at any rate) want to do, Sometimes, fighting is the special privilege of the elite, and compared with it, everything else is hard work, more or less degrading. Young men are energetic, combative, eager to show off; fighting for them is or can be a form of play, and only the rich can afford to play all the time. John Ruskin had a wonderfully

romantic account of "consensual war," which aristocratic young men fight in much the same spirit as they might play football, Only the risks are greater, the excitement at a higher pitch, the contest more "beautiful."<sup>2</sup>

We might attempt a more down-to-earth romanticism: young men are soldiers in the same way that the French socialist writer Fourier thought children should be garbagemen, In both cases, passion is harnessed to social function, Children like to play in the dirt, Fourier thought, and so they are more ready than anyone else to collect and dispose of garbage, He proposed to organize his utopian community so as to exploit their readiness.<sup>3</sup> But I suspect that he would have found doing this more difficult than he anticipated, For it is hardly an accurate description of what garbagemen do to say that they *play* with the garbage, Similarly, the account of war as the natural activity of young men or the sport of aristocrats fits only a small number of wars, or it fits only certain sorts of engagements in war; and it doesn't fit modern warfare at all. Mostly soldiers have little opportunity for play; nor would their officers be happy with their playfulness. What soldiers do is, in the strictest sense, hard work. Indeed, we might take trench warfare in the First World War, or jungle warfare in the Second, as the first archetype of hardness.

Even when its true character is understood, however, soldiering is not a radically degraded activity. Rank-and-file soldiers are often recruited from the lowest classes, or from outcasts or foreigners, and they are often regarded with contempt by ordinary citizens. But the perceived value of their work is subject to sudden inflation, and there is always the chance that they will one day appear as the saviors of the country they defend. Soldiering is socially necessary, at least sometimes; and when it is, the necessity is visible and dramatic. At those times, soldiering is also dangerous, and it is dangerous in a way that makes a special mark on our imaginations. The danger is not natural but human; the soldier inhabits a world where other people--his enemies and ours, too--are trying to kill him. And he must try to kill them. He runs the risk of killing and being killed. For these reasons, I think, this is the first form of hard work that citizens are required, or require each other, to share. Conscription has other purposes too--above all, to produce the vast numbers of troops needed for modern warfare. But its moral purpose is to universalize or randomize the risks of war over a given generation of young men.

When the risks are of a different sort, however, the same purpose seems less pressing. Consider the case of coal mining. "The rate of accidents among miners is so high," wrote George Orwell in *The Road to Wigan Pier*, ". . . that casualties are taken for granted as they would be in a minor war."<sup>4</sup> It isn't easy, however, to imagine this sort of work being shared. Mining may not be highly skilled work, but it is certainly very difficult, and it's best done by men who have done it for a long time. It requires something more than "basic training." "At a pitch," wrote Orwell, "I could be a tolerable road-sweeper, or . . . a tenth-rate farm hand. But by no conceivable amount of effort or training could I become a coal-miner; the work would kill me in a few weeks."<sup>5</sup> Nor does it make much sense to break in upon the solidarity of the miners. Work in the pits breeds a strong bond, a tight community that is not welcoming to transients. That community is the great strength of the miners. A deep sense of place and clan and generations of class struggle have made for staying power. Miners are probably the least mobile of modern industrial populations, A conscript army of mineworkers, even if it were possible, would not be an attractive alternative to the social life the miners have designed for themselves,

But there is a deeper reason why the conscription of ordinary citizens for coal mining has never been urged by a political movement or become the subject of public discussion. The risks that miners live with are not imposed by a public enemy, and they don't involve the special terrors of killing and being killed, To some extent, indeed, the risks are imposed by negligent or profiteering owners, and then they are a political matter. But the obvious remedy is to nationalize the mines or regulate their operations; there seems no need to conscript miners, It makes sense to seek a similar remedy for the risks imposed by nature. In ancient Athens, the men who worked the silver mines were state slaves, permanently in the service of the city, Miners today are free citizens, but we might think of them, however the mines are owned, as citizens in the service of the nation, And then we might treat them as if they were conscripts, not sharing their risks, but sharing the costs of the remedy: research into mine safety, health care designed for their immediate needs, early retirement,

decent pensions, and so on, The same argument plausibly applies to other dangerous activities, whenever they are socially necessary-not to mountain climbing, then, but to construction work on bridges, tall buildings, deep sea oil rigs, and so on, In all these cases, the casualty statistics may resemble those of a war; but the everyday experience is different, and so is our understanding of the work.

### **Grueling Work**

Peacetime conscription raises still different issues, There remains a certain risk of war, which varies for each cohort of conscripts depending upon the political situation when they come of age. Mostly, however, what is being shared is the burden of service: the time spent, the difficult training, the harsh discipline, One could, of course, pay people to serve, recruit volunteers, opening up possibilities for advancement and encouraging soldiers to view the army as a career rather than the interruption of a career. This is an alternative that I will consider later. But I should note here an important political argument against it, which holds that citizen-soldiers are less likely than professionals or mercenaries to become the instruments of domestic oppression. The argument applies, however, only to soldiering (and to police work); while what is most interesting about peacetime conscription is that it invites the assimilation of soldiering to many other forms of hardness. If the army is manned, why shouldn't the roads be built, the sugar cane cut, the lettuce picked by conscripts?

Among political theorists, Rousseau made the strongest positive response to this question, drawing on a moral argument that is central to his theory as a whole. Men (and we would add, women too) must share in socially necessary work, as they share in politics and war, if they are ever to be the citizens of a self-governing community. If political participation and military service are required, so is the corvee, or labor service, else society divides into masters and servants, the two groups caught alike in the trap of hierarchy and dependency. We know that the republic is in decay, Rousseau argued, when its citizens "would rather serve with their money than with their persons."

When it is necessary to march out to war, they pay troops and stay at home: when it is necessary to meet in council, they name deputies and stay at home. . . . In a country that is truly free, he citizens do everything with their own arms and nothing by means of money. . . . I am far from taking the common view: I old enforced labor to be less opposed to liberty than taxes.<sup>6</sup>

The common view is that men and women are free only when they choose their own work. Taxes are the price of the choice, and the commutation of labor services into taxes is everywhere regarded as a victory for the common people. Rousseau's view is indeed radical, but it is undercut by an uncharacteristic vagueness. He never tells us how much of the community's work is to be shared among the citizens. Over what range of jobs will the corvee extend? We can imagine it extended so as to include every sort of hard work. Then the citizens would have to be organized into something like Trotsky's industrial army; there would be little room left for individual choice; and the command structure of the army would reproduce in new forms the old patterns of hierarchy and dependency. Rousseau almost certainly intended something more modest; he probably had in mind the sorts of work for which the corvee was historically used, like the building of the king's highways. A partial commitment, then, leaving more than enough time for the smallholders and craftsmen who inhabit Rousseau's ideal republic to pursue their own affairs: we can think of it as a symbolic commitment (though the work they share would be real work).

If this is right, then the choice of symbols is very important, and we must be clear about its purpose. Road building was a good choice for Rousseau because it was the typical form of forced labor under the old regime: men of noble birth were in principle exempt; the bourgeoisie was in practice exempt; the work was imposed on the poorest and weakest of the king's subjects, and so it was experienced as the most degrading kind of work.

Were the citizens as a body to take it upon themselves, they would free the poor not only from the physical labor but also from its stigma—from aristocratic disdain and the bourgeois imitation of aristocratic disdain. That's not to say that work on the roads would cease to be a negative good for most of the people who did it, whether they were conscripts or volunteers. Back-breaking, grueling, and oppressive, it suggests the second archetype of hardness. But even a full-time commitment to it would cease to entail the disrespect of one's fellows. And then the other entailments might gradually be cut off, too; for the citizens might be ready to pay for the roads they needed, and the workers might be ready to demand more pay. All this might happen—but, in fact, we have evidence of a far more radical transformation in attitudes toward physical labor that actually did happen, and that happened, too, in something like a Rousseauian community.

### The Israeli Kibbutz

From its beginning, Zionism presupposed the creation of a Jewish working class, and one or another form of Marxist ideology, exalting the power of the workers, was always a significant tendency within the movement. But there was, from the beginning again, another tendency, philosophically and politically more original, which exalted not the power of the workers but the dignity of the work, and which aimed to create not a class but a community. The kibbutz, or collective settlement, the product of this second tendency, represents an experiment in the transvaluation of values: the dignifying of work through the sharing of work. The creed of the early settlers was a "religion of labor" in which one took communion by working in the fields. And the hardest work was the most uplifting, spiritually, and socially, too. 7

The first collectives were established in the early 1900s. By the 1950s, when Melford Spiro published his classic study *Kibbutz: Venture in Utopia*, the transvaluation of values was so successful that it was no longer necessary to require the members to share the physical labor of the collective. Everyone who could work wanted to work; a callused hand was a badge of honor. Only jobs with inconvenient hours (dairyman, nightwatchman) had to be rotated among the members. High school teachers, on the other hand, had to be conscripted, for teaching was far less honored than work in the fields—an amazing fact, given the culture of European Jews.<sup>8</sup> (Less amazing, kitchen work posed problems, too, which I will come back to in a moment.)

It was crucial to the success of the kibbutz, I think, that each collective settlement was also a political community. It wasn't only the work that was shared, but decisions about the work. Hence the workers were free in that all-important sense that Rousseau calls "moral liberty": the burdens they lived with were self-imposed. Anyone who did not want to accept them could leave; anyone who refused to accept them could be expelled. But the members would always know that the shape of their workday and the allocation of tasks over time were matters of communal decision; and in these decisions they had, and would have, a significant voice. That's why the sharing could be total. In the case of a republican corvée, in a larger community and a more complex and differentiated economy, where the workers could participate only indirectly in decision making, a partial sharing would be more appropriate. But there is another contrast suggested by the kibbutz experience: between the close integration of work and politics possible in a residential community and the more partial integration possible in various on-the-job settings. Workers' control or self-management provides, as we shall see, an alternative to the corvée. The political reorganization of work can sometimes be a substitute for the sharing of work—though it is a central feature of the kibbutz, and a key to its moral character, that there the two go together.

The kibbutz is founded on a radical effort to transform a negative into a positive good. I have called that effort a success, and so, by and large, it is. But there is one area where it has not been successful. "Certain jobs are regarded as so distasteful," wrote Spiro, "that they are filled by a permanent rotation system. . . the most notable instance is work in the [communal] kitchen and dining room, cooking, dishwashing, and serving."<sup>9</sup> In the kibbutz that Spiro studied, women were drafted for a year at a time, men for two or three months, to do kitchen work. Now, sexual differentiation in work need not be problematic if it is freely chosen (either by individuals or by an assembly in which men and women have an equal voice) and if the different jobs are

equally respected. The second of these conditions, however, didn't hold in this case. One might plausibly say that, with regard to food, the kitchen is as important as the fields. But kibbutz members were generally disdainful of bourgeois "graciousness" in eating; they had a Rousseauian uneasiness with anything that smacked of luxury. Hence, Spiro reported, "little effort [was] made to improve the preparation of the food that [was] available." 10 (Food was rationed in Israel in the early 1950s.) Kitchen work might have been more respected if its products were more individuated and highly valued--and so one might hope for an improvement in its relative status as the hard edges of kibbutz ideology soften, But cleaning up after a meal may just be distasteful, however tasty the meal itself, And other sorts of cleaning up may be distasteful, too, Here, perhaps, kibbutz ideology comes up against a negative good that can't be transformed, Adam's curse would be no curse at all were there not some irreducible hardness in the hard work we have to do, And even in the kibbutz apparently, the curse is borne by some more than by others,

### Dirty Work

In principle, there is no such thing as intrinsically degrading work; degradation is a cultural phenomenon, It is probably true in practice, however, that a set of activities having to do with dirt, waste, and garbage has been the object of disdain and avoidance in just about every human society, (Fourier's children haven't yet learned the mores of their elders,) The precise list will vary from one time and place to another, but the set is more or less common, In India, for example, it includes the butchering of cows and the tanning of cowhide-jobs that have a rather different standing in Western cultures, But otherwise the characteristic occupations of the Indian untouchables suggest what we can think of as the third archetype of hard work: they are the scavengers and sweepers, the carriers of waste and night soil. No doubt the untouchables are peculiarly degraded, but it is difficult to believe that the work they do will ever be attractive or widely esteemed, Bernard Shaw was perfectly right to say that "if all dustmen were dukes nobody would object to the dust," 11 but it isn't easy to figure out how to produce such a happy arrangement. If all dustmen were dukes, they would find some new group, under another name, to do their dusting, Hence the question, in a society of equals, who will do the dirty work? has a special force, And the necessary answer is that, at least in some partial and symbolic sense, we will all have to do it. Then we will have an end to dukes, if not yet to dustmen. This is what Gandhi was getting at when he required his followers--himself, too--to clean the latrines of their ashram. 12 Here was a symbolic way of purging Hindu society of untouchability, but it also made a practical point: people should clean up their own dirt. Otherwise, the men and women who do it not only for themselves but for everyone else, too, will never be equal members of the political community. What is required, then, is a kind of domestic corvee, not only in households--though it is especially important there--but also in communes, factories, offices, and schools. In all these places, we could hardly do better than to follow Walt Whitman's injunction (the poetry is weak but the argument right):

For every man to see to it that he really do  
something, for every woman too,  
.....  
To invent a little--something ingenious--to  
aid the washing, cooking, cleaning,  
And hold it no disgrace to take a hand  
at them themselves.13

There would probably be less dirt to clean up if everyone knew in advance of making it that he couldn't leave the cleaning to someone else. But some people-patients in a hospital, for example-can't help but leave it to someone else, and certain sorts of cleaning are best organized on a large scale. Work of this sort might be done as part of a national service program. Indeed, war and waste seem the ideal subjects of national service: the first, because of the special risks involved; the second, because of the dishonor. Perhaps the work should be done by the young, not because they will enjoy it, but because it isn't without educational value. Perhaps each citizen should be allowed to choose when in the course of his life he will take his turn. But it is certainly appropriate that the cleaning of city streets, say, or of national parks should be the (part-time) work of the citizens.

It is not an appropriate goal for social policy, however, that all the dirty work that needs to be done should be shared among all the citizens. That would require an extraordinary degree of state control over everyone's life, and it would interfere radically with other kinds of work, some of it also necessary, some of it only useful. I have argued for a partial and symbolic sharing: the purpose is to break the link between dirty work and disrespect. In one sense, the break has already been accomplished, or substantially accomplished, through a long process of cultural transformation that begins with the early modern attack on feudal hierarchy. Before God, Puritan preachers taught, all human callings, all useful work, is equal. <sup>14</sup> Today we are likely to rank jobs as more or less desirable, not as more or less respectable. Most of us would deny that any socially useful work can be or should be debasing. And yet we still impose on hard-working fellow citizens patterns of behavior, routines of distancing, that place them in a kind of pale: deferential movements, peremptory commands, refusals of recognition. When a garbageman feels stigmatized by the work he does, writes a contemporary sociologist, the stigma shows in his eyes. He enters "into collusion with us to avoid contaminating us with his lowly self." He looks away; and we do, too, "Our eyes do not meet. He becomes a non-person."<sup>15</sup> One way to break the collusion, and perhaps the best way, is to make sure that every citizen has a working knowledge of the working days of his hardest working fellows. Once that is done, it is possible to consider other mechanisms, including market mechanisms, for organizing the hard work of society,.

So long as there is a reserve army, a class of degraded men and women driven by their poverty and their impoverished sense of their own value, the market will never be effective. Under such conditions, the hardest work is also the lowest paid, even though nobody wants to do it. But given a certain level of communal provision and a certain level of self-valuation, the work won't be done unless it is very well paid indeed (or unless the working conditions are very good). The citizens will find that if they want to hire their fellows as scavengers and sweepers, the rates will be high--much higher, in fact, than for more prestigious or pleasant work. This is a direct consequence of the fact that they are hiring fellow citizens. It is sometimes claimed that under conditions of genuine fellowship, no one would agree to be a scavenger or a sweeper. In that case, the work would have to be shared. But the claim is probably false. "We are so accustomed," as Shaw has written, "to see dirty work done by dirty and poorly paid people that we have come to think that it is disgraceful to do it, and that unless a dirty and disgraced class existed, it would not be done at all."<sup>16</sup> If sufficient money or leisure were offered, Shaw rightly insisted, people would come forward.

His own preference was for rewards that take the form of leisure or "liberty" --which will always be, he argued, the strongest incentive and the best compensation for work that carries with it little intrinsic satisfaction:

In a picture gallery you will find a nicely dressed lady sitting at a table with nothing to do but to tell anyone who asks what is the price of any particular picture, and take an order for it if one is given. She has many pleasant chats with journalists and artists; and if she is bored she can read a novel. . . . But the gallery has to be scrubbed and dusted each day; and its windows have to be kept clean. It is clear that the lady's job is a much softer one than the charwoman's. To balance them you must either let them take their turns at the desk and at the scrubbing on alternate days or weeks; or else, as a first-class scrubber and duster and cleaner might make a very bad business lady, and a very attractive business lady might make a very bad scrubber, you must let the charwoman go home and have the rest of the day to herself earlier than the lady at the desk.<sup>17</sup>

The contrast between the "first-rate" charwoman and the "very attractive" business lady nicely combines the prejudices of class and sex. If we set aside those prejudices, the periodic exchange of work is less difficult to imagine. The lady, after all, will have to share in the scrubbing, dusting, and cleaning at home (unless she has,

as Shaw probably expected her to have, a charwoman there, too). And what is the charwoman to do with her leisure? Perhaps she will paint pictures or read books about art. But then, though the exchange is easy, it may well be resisted by the charwoman herself. One of the attractions of Shaw's proposal is that it establishes hard work as an opportunity for people who want to protect their time. So they will clean or scrub or collect garbage for the sake of their leisure, and avoid if they can any more engaging, competitive, or time-consuming employment. Under the right conditions, the market provides a kind of sanctuary from the pressures of the market. The price of the sanctuary is so many hours a day of hard work--for some people, at least, a price worth paying.

The major alternative to Shaw's proposal is the reorganization of the work so as to change, not its physical requirements (for I'm assuming that they are not changeable), but its moral character. The history of garbage collecting in the city of San Francisco offers a nice example of this sort of transformation, which I want to dwell on briefly both for its own sake and because it connects in useful ways with my earlier discussion of office and with the arguments still to come about honor and power.

### *The San Francisco Scavengers*

For the past sixty years, roughly half of the garbage of the city of San Francisco has been collected and disposed of by the Sunset Scavenger Company, a cooperative owned by its workers, the men who drive the trucks and carry the cans. In 1978 the sociologist Stewart Perry published a study of Sunset, a fine piece of urban ethnography and a valuable speculation on "dirty work and the pride of ownership"-it is my sole source in the paragraphs that follow. The cooperative is democratically run, its officers elected from the ranks and paid no more than the other workers, Forced by the Internal Revenue Service in the 1930s to adopt bylaws in which they are referred to as "stockholders," the members nevertheless insisted that they were, and would remain, faithful to the program of the original organizers "who intended to form and carry on a cooperative, . . . where every member was a worker and actually engaged in the common work and where every member did his share of the work and expected every other member to work and do his utmost to increase the collective earnings."<sup>18</sup> Indeed, earnings have increased (more than those of manual workers generally); the company has grown; its elected officers have shown considerable entrepreneurial talent. Perry believes that the cooperative provides better-than-average service to the citizens of San Francisco and, what is more important here, better-than-average working conditions to its own members. That doesn't mean that the work is physically easier; rather, cooperation has made it more pleasant-has even made it a source of pride.\* \*

In one sense, the work is in fact easier: the accident rate among Sunset members is significantly lower than the industry average. Garbage collecting is a dangerous activity, In the United States today, no other occupation has a higher risk of injury (though coal miners are subject to more serious injury), The explanation of these statistics is not clear, Garbage collecting is strenuous work, but no more so than many other jobs that turn out to have better safety records, Perry suggests that there may be a connection between safety and self-valuation, "The 'hidden injuries' of the status system may be linked to the apparent injuries that public health and safety experts can document. "<sup>20</sup> The first "accident" of garbage collecting is the internalization of disrespect, and then other accidents follow, Men who don't value themselves don't take proper care of themselves, If this view is right, the better record of Sunset may be connected to the shared decision making and the sense of ownership.

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\* \*Perry's book, then, is an argument against Oscar Wilde's pessimism, "To sweep a slushy crossing," wrote Wilde, "is a disgusting occupation. To sweep it with mental, moral, or physical dignity seems to me to be impossible. To sweep it with joy would be appalling,"<sup>19</sup> Perry's work suggests that Wilde underestimates the chances for dignity, if not for joy. It makes a difference how the worker stands to his work, his fellow workers, his fellow citizens. But I don't want to forget Wilde's point that what the worker does also makes a difference: there is no way to turn sweeping or scavenging into an attractive or intellectually stimulating occupation.

Membership in the Sunset Scavenger Company is distributed by a vote of the current members and then by the purchase of shares (it has generally not been difficult to borrow the necessary money, and the shares have steadily increased in value). The founders of the company were Italian-Americans, and so are the bulk of the members today; about half of them are related to other members; a fair number of sons have followed their fathers into the business. The success of the cooperative may owe something to the easiness of the members with one another. In any case, and whatever one wants to say about the work, they have made membership into a good thing. They don't distribute the good they have created, however, in accordance with "fair equality of opportunity." In New York City, because of a powerful union, garbage collecting is also a widely desired job, and there the job has been turned into an office. Candidates must qualify for the work by taking a civil service exam.<sup>21</sup> It would be interesting to know something about the self-valuation of the men who pass the exam and are hired as public employees. They probably earn more than the members of the Sunset cooperative, but they don't have the same security; they don't own their jobs. And they don't share risks and opportunities; they don't manage their own company. The New Yorkers call themselves "sanitationmen"; the San Franciscans, "scavengers": who has the greater pride? If the advantage lies, as I think it does, with the members of Sunset, then it is closely connected to the character of Sunset: a company of companions, who choose their own fellows. There is no way to qualify for the work except to appeal to the current members of the company. No doubt the members look for men who can do the necessary work and do it well, but they also look, presumably, for good companions.

But I don't want to underestimate the value of unionization, for this can be another form of self-management and another way of making the market work. There can't be any doubt that unions have been effective in winning better wages and working conditions for their members; sometimes they have even succeeded in breaking the link between income differentials and the status hierarchy (the New York garbage collectors are a prime example). Perhaps the general rule should be that wherever work can't be unionized or run cooperatively, it should be shared by the citizens--not symbolically and partially, but generally. Indeed, when union or cooperative work is available to everyone (when there is no reserve army), other work just won't get done unless people do it for themselves. This is clearly the case with domestic cooking and cleaning, an area where jobs are increasingly filled by new immigrants, not by citizens. "Mighty few young black women are doin' domestic work [today]," Studs Terkel was told by a very old black woman, a servant all her life. "And I'm glad. That's why I want my kids to go to school. This one lady told me, 'All you people are gettin' like that.' I said, 'I'm glad.' There's no more gettin' on their knees."<sup>22</sup> This is the sort of work that is largely dependent on its (degraded) moral character. Change the character, and the work may well become un-doable, not only from the perspective of the worker but from that of the employer, too. "When domestic servants are treated as human beings," wrote Shaw, "it is not worthwhile to keep them."<sup>23</sup>

This is not true of garbage collectors or of coal miners, though the demand for human treatment will certainly make every kind of dirty and dangerous work more expensive than it was before. It is an interesting question whether it is true for soldiers. One can, as I've said, recruit soldiers through the labor market; in the absence of a reserve army, the inducements would have to match or surpass those of other forms of hard work. Given the discipline necessary to military efficiency, however, unionization is difficult, self-management impossible. And that may well be the best argument for a conscript service even in peacetime. Conscription is a way of sharing the discipline and, perhaps more important, of bringing political controls to bear on its harshness. Some men and women enjoy the harshness, but I doubt that there are enough of them to defend the country. And while the army is an attractive career for those who hope to become officers, it isn't attractive--or in a community of citizens, it shouldn't be--for those who will fill the lower ranks. Soldiering has far more prestige than garbage collecting; but compared with a private in the army, the San Francisco scavengers and the New York sanitation workers look to me like free men.

What is most attractive in the experience of the Sunset company (as of the Israeli kibbutz) is the way in which hard work is connected to other activities--in this case, the meetings of the "stockholders," the debates over policy, the election of officers and new members. The company has also expanded into land-fill and salvage

operations, providing new and diversified employment (including managerial jobs) for some of the members; though all of them, whatever they do now, have spent years riding the trucks and carrying the cans. Throughout most of the economy, the division of labor has developed very differently, continually separating out rather than integrating the hardest sorts of work. This is especially true in the area of the human services, in the care we provide for the sick and the old. Much of that work is still done in the home, where it is connected with a range of other jobs, and its difficulties are relieved by the relationships it sustains. Increasingly, however, it is institutional work; and within the great caretaking institutions--hospitals, mental asylums, old-age homes--the hardest work, the dirty work, the most intimate service and supervision, is relegated to the most subordinate employees. Doctors and nurses, defending their place in the social hierarchy, shift it onto the shoulders of aides, orderlies, and attendants--who do for strangers, day in and day out, what we can only just conceive of doing in emergencies for the people we love.

Perhaps the aides, orderlies, and attendants win the gratitude of their patients or of the families of their patients. That's not a reward I would want to underestimate, but gratitude is most often and most visibly the reward of doctors and nurses, the healers rather than merely the caretakers of the sick. The resentment of the caretakers is well known. W. H. Auden was clearly thinking of the patients, not the hospital staff, when he wrote:

. . . the hospitals alone remind us  
of the equality of man.<sup>24</sup>

Orderlies and attendants have to cope for long hours with conditions that their institutional superiors see only intermittently, and that the general public doesn't see at all and doesn't want to see. Often they look after men and women whom the rest of the world has given up on (and when the world gives up, it turns away). Underpaid and overworked, at the bottom of the status system, they are nevertheless the last comforters of humanity--though I suspect that unless they have a calling for the work, they give as little comfort as they get. And sometimes they are guilty of those petty cruelties that make their jobs a little easier, and that their superiors, they firmly believe, would be as quick to commit in their place.

"There is a whole series of problems here," Everett Hughes has written, "which cannot be solved by some miracle of changing the social selection of those who enter the job."<sup>25</sup> In fact, if caretaking were shared--if young men and women from different social backgrounds took their turns as orderlies and attendants--the internal life of hospitals, asylums, and old-age homes would certainly be changed for the better. Perhaps this sort of thing is best organized locally rather than nationally, so as to establish a connection between caretaking and neighborliness; it might even be possible, with a little invention, to reduce somewhat the rigid impersonality of institutional settings. But such efforts will be supplementary at best. Most of the work will have to be done by people who have chosen it as a career, and the choice will not be easy to motivate in a society of equal citizens. Already, we must recruit foreigners to do a great deal of the hard and dirty work of our caretaking institutions. If we wish to avoid that sort of recruitment (and the oppression it commonly entails), we must, again, transform the work. "I have a notion," says Hughes, "that, , , 'dirty work' can be more easily endured when it is part of a good role, a role that is full of rewards to one's self. A nurse might do some things with better grace than a person who is not allowed to call herself a nurse, but is dubbed 'subprofessional' or 'non-professional.'"<sup>26</sup> That is exactly right. National service might be effective because, for a time at least, the role of neighbor or citizen would cover the necessary work. But over a longer period, the work can be covered only by an enhanced sense of institutional or professional place.

This enhancement is unlikely without far-reaching changes in our institutions and professions; it depends, then, on the outcome of long and prolonged political struggle, the balance of social forces, the organization of interests, and so on. But we might also think of it in terms more susceptible to philosophical discussion. What is necessary is what the Chinese call "the rectification of names." In one sense, names are historical and cultural givens; in another, they are subject to the play of social and political power. The process by which

office holders and professionals hold onto the title and prestige of a particular place, while shunting off its less agreeable duties, is an example--perhaps the crucial example--of a power play. But unless one is a radical nominalist, it leaves the question of names still to be settled. "Who will be called a 'nurse' when the nurse's tasks are re-shuffled? Will it be the teacher and supervisor? The bedside comforter? Or will it be those who give more humble services?"<sup>27</sup> Surely we ought to give the name, and all that goes with the name, to the person who does the "nursing" -who (as the dictionary says) "waits upon and attends to" the sick. I don't mean to make any claims about the essence of nursing; nor do I intend a purely linguistic argument. My reference, once again, is to common understandings, and these are always subject to dispute. Still, it seems fair to say that there is a range of valued activities that include "humble services" and that are valued, at least in part, because they include such services. The hardness of the work is connected to the glory, and we should never be too quick to allow their separation, even in the name of efficiency or technological advance.

There is no easy or elegant solution, and no fully satisfying solution, to the problem of hard work. Positive goods have, perhaps, their appropriate destination; negative goods do not. "To escape facing this fact," wrote Shaw, "we may plead that some people have such very queer tastes that it is almost impossible to mention an occupation that you not find somebody with a craze for. . . . The saying that God never made a job but he made a man or woman to do it is true up to a certain point."<sup>28</sup> But that plea doesn't take us very far. The truth is that hard work is unattractive work for most of the men and women who find themselves doing it. When they were growing up, they dreamed of doing something else. And as they age, the work gets more and more difficult. Thus, a fifty-year-old garbage collector to Studs Terkel: "the alleys are longer and the cans larger. Getting old."<sup>29</sup>

We can share (and partially transform) hard work through some sort of national service; we can reward it with money or leisure; we can make it more rewarding by connecting it to other sorts of activity--political, managerial, and professional in character. We can conscript, rotate, cooperate, and compensate; we can reorganize the work and rectify its names. We can do all these things, but we will not have abolished hard work; nor will we have abolished the class of hard workers. The first kind of abolitionism is, as I have already argued, impossible; the second would merely double hardness with coercion. The measures that I have proposed are at best partial and incomplete. They have an end appropriate to a negative good: a distribution of hard work that doesn't corrupt the distributive spheres with which it overlaps, carrying poverty into the sphere of money, degradation into the sphere of honor, weakness and resignation into the sphere of power. To rule out negative dominance: that is the purpose of collective bargaining, cooperative management, professional conflict, the rectification of names--the politics of hard work. The outcomes of this politics are indeterminate, certain to be different in different times and places, conditioned by previously established hierarchies and social understandings. But they will also be conditioned by the solidarity, the skillfulness, and the energy of the workers themselves.

## NOTES

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3. See the discussion of Fourier's system in Frank E. Manuel, *The Prophets of Paris* (Cambridge, Mass., 1962), p. 229.
4. George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (New York, 1958), p. 44.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

6. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, book III, chap. 15, in *Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G. D. H. Cole (New York, 1950), p. 93.
7. Melford E. Spiro, *Kibbutz: Venture in Utopia* (New York, 1970), pp. 16-17.
8. Ibid., p. 77.
9. Ibid. For an analysis of the sexual division of labor on the kibbutz, see Joseph Raphael Blasi, *The Communal Future: The Kibbutz and the Utopian Dilemma* (Norwood, Pa., 1980), pp. 102-3.
10. Spiro, *Kibbutz* [7], p. 69.
11. Bernard Shaw, *The Intelligent Woman's Guide to Socialism, Capitalism, Sovietism, and Fascism* (Harmondsworth, England, 1937), p. 106.
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16. Shaw, *Woman's Guide* [11], p. 105.
17. Ibid., p. 109.
18. Perry, *Scavengers* [15], p. 197.
19. Wilde, "Soul of Man" [1], p. 268.
20. Perry, *Scavengers* [15J], p. 8.
21. Ibid., pp. 188-91.
22. Studs Terkel, *Working* (New York, 1975), p. 168.
23. Bernard Shaw, "Maxims for Revolutionists," *Man and Superman*, in *Seven Plays* (New York, 1951), p. 736.
24. W. ., Auden, "In Time of War" (XXV), in *The English Auden: Poems, Essays, and Dramatic Writings 1927-1939*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York, 1978), p. 261.
25. Everett Hughes, *The Sociological Eye* (Chicago, 1971), p. 345.
26. Ibid., p. 314.
27. Ibid.

28. Shaw, *Woman's Guide* [11], p. 107.

29. Terkel, *Working* [22], p. 153.

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