CARE, GENDER, AND JUSTICE

DIEMUT BUBECK

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PREFACE

Philosophy, according to one of the many accounts of itself, has its origins and its motivation in the bemused or awed amazement of those who refuse to take for granted what everybody else takes for granted.[1] Amazement, though, does mostly not occur 'naturally': it is often an achievement which has to overcome the combined pressures of history, social context and individual habits of thought, all of which lead to certain things being taken for granted. In fact, it may be the fundamental task of philosophy to elicit amazement in its readers or listeners where there was none before, and a proof of its quality if it succeeds. In my own case, it took me years of studying philosophy before I felt comfortable enough—or maybe, rather, driven enough—to start turning my often unacknowledged and certainly pre-philosophical frustration and anger into a more productive amazement at certain aspects of society which most philosophers seemed to take for granted even if they questioned much else. Having been steeped in marxist theory and analytical philosophy and subsequently in marxist and socialist feminist theory, none of which helped me in the end to articulate quite what it was I wanted to question, it took me a long time to work out the particular amazement that I felt deeply and wanted to elicit in others, as well as the answers I wanted to give to the questions posed.

The working out spanned several years as a doctoral student and lecturer and its results materialized finally in my doctoral thesis. Hence I would like to start off by expressing my special gratitude to the two supervisors who, in their own and very different ways, saw a slow and ever changing doctoral thesis and a rather unhappy doctoral student through to a happy end. Jerry Cohen started off very unconvinced, forcing me to question my own ideas to the point of despair, but surprised me in the last stages by having changed some of his ideas and being as

[1] This idea has always been with me and is probably the one that enticed me to become a philosopher eventually. I must have come across it either as a pupil in an evening course on philosophy or as an undergraduate student in one of the philosophy lectures or seminars at the University of Bochum (Germany). Unfortunately, I could not trace a written source for this account.

supportive, encouraging and reliable as anyone could wish for. Sabina Lovibond joined in after a year with characteristically tentative but spot-on comments, a general conviction that whatever it was I was trying to do was worth doing, and a belief in me which helped carry me through periods of complete self-doubt. Being now involved in Ph.D. supervision myself, with the nature of Ph.D. supervision in the UK changing toward a much more directive style and strict time limits, I appreciate greatly the freedom I had to change my mind as often as I did and that I could take my time to develop my ideas. The initial years of working on the thesis were supported by a grant from the Studienstiftung des Deutschen Volkes (Scholarship Foundation of the German People) which gave me not only the material means, but also some confidence to persist in my academic work.

Special thanks also go to Andy Mason, who commented on some version of all of the chapters of the thesis and who was one of the very few men in the male-dominated and male-biased academic environment of Oxford to be interested; and to David Beetham, who not only encouraged me and commented on work in progress, but also saved me from exam marking in my first year as a lecturer so that I could get down to some work on my thesis: I did, and came up with a then path- and paralysis-breaking draft of the central part of this book. Janet Coleman and Rodney Barker have taken an interest in, commented on, and encouraged my work since my arrival at the London School of Economics. John Charvet, Brian Barry, Diana Coole, Anne Sellers, Elisabeth Kondal and Julie George also commented variously and at various stages.

Elizabeth Frazer and Richard Norman, my thesis examiners, Tony Skillen and Vicky Randall, who read the thesis for OUP, and Tim Barton at OUP, helped with the crucial stage of turning the thesis into a book with comments and suggestions for rewriting.

Last, but not least, I am deeply grateful to Wendy Ayotte and Aleine Ridge whose care in difficult times sustained me and taught me a lot of what I know about care. If I have not been able to weave into the argument of the book all that is important about care—all that we should be amazed about when thinking about it—this is partly because of bad timing, and partly because academic writing and materialist theory are not very hospitable contexts for the expression of certain kinds of knowledge.

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used for texts by Karl Marx. Dates in parentheses indicate locations in the References.

Cap.	*Capital* (vols. i, iii) (1976*a*, 1981)
CGP	'Critique of the Gotha Programme' (1969*c*)
EPM	'Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts' (1975)
GR	*Grundrisse* (1973)
Preface	'Preface to the *Critique of Political Economy*' (1969*d*)
'Results'	'Results of the Immediate Process of Production' (1976*b*)
TSV	*Theories of Surplus Value* (parts i, iii) (1969*a*, 1972)
WLC	'Wage Labour and Capital' (1969*b*)

Texts by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels are abbreviated:

CM	'Manifesto of the Communist Party' (1969*a*)
GI	*German Ideology* (1965)

In addition, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* is cited with the abbreviation *NE*.

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Introduction

(i) *Amazement: social justice and gendered reality*

Social justice, according to John Rawls's famous formulation, is 'the first virtue of social institutions'.[1] In his theory, principles and considerations of social justice apply to 'the basic structure of society',[2] comprised of the basic social institutions. Thus the principles of justice 'are to govern the assignment of rights and duties in these institutions and . . . are to *determine the appropriate distribution of the benefits and burdens of social life*'.[3] Thus far, I have no qualm with Rawls. In fact, I more than agree. I find his formulations very helpful, and so have many others: his theory has been immensely stimulating for political philosophy as a whole. If Rawls has got these very basic ideas about justice right, however, how is it possible that he could not see, along with many others, that his theory applies equally to a social institution which he never even acknowledges: the sexual division of labour? If, more generally, theorists of social justice are interested in spelling out how societies have to be structured to be just, how can they possibly not address the obvious and persistent inequalities between men and women?[4] How could they not see what is staring them in the face, and how could they not realize its relevance?

Many facts could be cited here to illustrate these inequalities, but the statistic originating from the UN Decade of Women puts most succinctly the kind of facts that should have worried all theorists of social justice and that capture the fundamental concern informing this book: women, it states,

[1] Rawls 1971: 3. [2] Ibid. 54.
[3] Ibid. (my emphasis). [4] See Okin 1989, ch. 1.

> constitute *half* the world's population,
> perform nearly *two-thirds* of its work hours,
> receive *one-tenth* of the world's income
> and own less than *one-hundredth* of the world's property.[5]

Now even if it is true that the statistics for the Western industrialized countries, to which my argument is restricted, are less scandalous, they would nevertheless bear witness to persistent material inequalities between men and women. Since other forms of inequality have scandalized political and social philosophers—notably those of class and to some extent race in the recent discussion of social justice—why, on the whole, have they not been scandalized by the inequalities of gender?[6] And how exactly are we to understand these inequalities?

The main inequality I am concerned with in this book is the fact that it is still mainly women who do most of the unpaid work performed in any home which goes towards the meeting of needs in others. Part of the problem with this work, which I take the first three chapters to grapple with, is its complete misconception in the history of social and political philosophy until the present. So it is, on the one hand, not surprising that this work has not really troubled the heads of philosophers on the whole. On the other hand, however, if social justice concerns the distribution of burdens and benefits in a society, it should: work is one of the main burdens anybody faces in their lives—if they have to face it—and even if it is not always burdensome, it is usually burdensome enough to have to be paid or usher in other benefits for those who work actually to engage in it. Hence even on its own terms, Rawls's conception of justice should have led him and many others after him to discuss the distribution of work as an important, if not the most important, instance of the distribution of burdens, hence also the sexual division of labour.

The most obvious reason why what I shall call 'women's work'[7] has not been discussed in social and political philosophy is that

[5] Quoted after Pahl 1988: 349.

[6] Green 1985 is a notable exception, but the topic of his book is democracy rather than social justice.

[7] By 'women's work', I do not mean to imply that this kind of work is necessarily or 'naturally' done by women. Rather, I use the term descriptively and as a useful shorthand for the particular kinds of work that, traditionally and in most if not all societies, women have been responsible for and taken on more or less as a matter of course.

philosophers on the whole still do not take into account the issues or problems raised for their own topics by a gendered reality. (This is not really a reason, but simply a reference to a general pattern which itself remains unexplained.) Feminist philosophers have criticized gender bias in its various manifestations over the last twenty years. The feminist critique of theories of justice in particular has recently been much advanced by Okin's *Justice, Gender, and the Family*.[8] My own work shares with Okin's a preoccupation with the sexual division of labour—more specifically the gendered distribution of work in and between the public and private spheres—and the material inequality that results from it. As should be obvious from the preceding paragraphs, I agree with Okin and her critique of Rawls that the sexual division of labour poses important questions with regard to the distribution of benefits and burdens for any theorist of social justice: if social justice at its most basic is about the distribution of benefits and burdens, questions about the differential distribution to women and men of work and material benefits that may or may not be linked to their performance of work are central to any feminist conception of social justice.[9] In contrast to Okin, however, who remains loyal to the liberal, Rawlsian framework, seeing herself as rectifying its gender bias, I approach the issue of social justice from a materialist perspective. I also focus

[8] Okin 1989.

[9] Another feminist, Iris Young, has provided us with a sustained discussion of social justice in her *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990). This is a fascinating book in many respects, especially in its reach beyond distributive considerations, but her critique of too narrow a concern of theorists of justice with what she calls the 'distributive paradigm' is mistaken. Most unfortunate in this respect is her unquestioned assumption that divisions of labour do not fall within the scope of distributive considerations. It is, of course, true that the liberal distributive theorists whom she discusses have not looked at divisions of labour, but she is wrong in concluding that this throws a bad light on the distributive paradigm. Rather, what the example of liberal distributive theorists shows up is the limited scope or interpretation which they have given to the 'distributive paradigm'. Instead of criticizing this limited scope and thus widening the distributive paradigm, Young concurs with this interpretation. As a result, she perceives social divisions of labour—which are nothing but unequal distributions of labour, and as such very much within the scope of distributive considerations—as falling outside the distributive paradigm, and then criticizes the distributive paradigm itself as too narrow. Furthermore, and very unfortunately given her feminist provenance, the only division of labour she is seriously interested in is that between mental and manual work. The sexual division of labour, by comparison, is not discussed at any length.

on the more preliminary question of conceptions of work and exploitation in the first part of the book. These two points of difference are systematically connected. I shall explain them in the next section by first looking at the centrality of work in the materialist tradition of thought and then at the notion of exploitation.

(ii) *The materialist perspective: work, exploitation, and social justice*

Nothing hinders liberal theorists from concerning themselves with the work people do, but they usually do not,[10] and Okin's discussion of the sexual division of labour represents a notable exception to the rule. By contrast, it is typically writers from within the materialist tradition of thought who have been most interested in work and the social structures which underlie and systematically reproduce specific distributions of work among different groups in society. Work has such a central place in the materialist tradition of thought for at least two reasons. First, Marx, as the most influential thinker in this tradition, makes it central throughout his work. Whilst the early Marx tended to focus on the quality of work as a result of social conditions, notably the many ways in which work could be alienated, the later Marx was more interested in the social distribution of work and the conditions which create particular distributions of both work and the goods produced by it, especially the exploitative conditions which are characteristic of class-divided societies. It is this focus on the distribution of work and material benefits deriving from work, and specifically the notion of exploitation, which makes Marx and the materialist perspective more generally interesting for anybody working on social justice. This focus also presents itself as an obvious starting-point for anybody interested in looking at women's work in relation to social justice. Secondly, writers in this tradition also typically believe that facts about the work people do—what type of work they do, how they do it, and under what constraints, how work is distributed,

[10] Skillen (1977) takes various mainstream political philosophers, including Rawls, to task for their lack of attention to work in their theories.

how technologically developed it is—explain or at least causally constrain all other social phenomena including history and the sphere of ideas and values. In the words of the early Marx and Engels, materialist theory starts with and focuses on 'the representation of practical activity, of the practical process of development of men'.[11] Work, then—practical activity, or 'material production'[12] or 'the production and reproduction of immediate life'[13] in roughly equivalent formulations—plays a very prominent role in the materialist tradition of thought.[14]

It follows from this centrality of work that a materialist approach to social justice—in so far as this is thought possible[15]—will

[11] *GI* 38. [12] *GI* 38 and *passim*.

[13] Engels's often quoted formulation from the Preface of his *Origin of the Family* . . . (Engels 1972: 71).

[14] This is one among many possible interpretations of materialist theory, and certainly not the most orthodox one. But it is the most productive one for my own purposes, and I also think it captures a very basic aspect of Marx's own thought which has been obscured by narrowly economic interpretations, which also purport to be more 'scientific'. Moreover, as will be seen from my argument in the first two chapters, a concentration on the paid (and hence visible) work performed as part of what is officially and theoretically recognized as a society's economy is in itself inherently gender biased. Hence it is absolutely vital for anybody interested in gender from a materialist perspective to distinguish a focus on work or material practice from a focus on the 'material basis' or the economy and to take the former rather than the latter as the basic characteristic of their approach. Note also that this interpretation differs radically from that of two feminists whose theories are heavily influenced by marxist thought: Firestone's reinterpretation of historical materialism focuses on the sexually differentiated human biology and its transcendence through technological progress (Firestone 1971), whilst MacKinnon (1989), rather categorically, claims that 'sexuality is to feminism what work is to marxism', thus giving up a focus on work altogether, but retaining a reinterpreted materialist analysis of social and political institutions. For yet another interpretation of materialist theory and explanation see Mason 1993, chs. 4 and 5.

[15] There is an extended debate about whether Marx himself had a conception of social justice and whether, more specifically, he thought capitalism was unjust. Arguably, Marx does think that capitalism is unjust despite his explicit denial mainly because the concept of exploitation is a normative as well as an economic concept and is used as such by Marx despite himself. Hence the fact that capitalism as an economic system is based on the systematic exploitation of wage workers establishes the injustice of capitalism as an economic and social system. But I want to side-step this debate here. (Geras 1986 gives an admirably clear presentation of the evidence and the arguments on both sides of this debate; see also his 'Addendum and Rejoinder' in Geras 1992.) Even if Marx did not have a conception of justice himself and used the concept of exploitation only in its technical, economic sense, there is still an argument to be made that materialist theory, if not Marx himself, provides us with a distinctive perspective on social justice.

include work as one of the main entities that are socially distributed and that can therefore be justly or unjustly distributed. Thus notice the contrast between two different conceptions of who in any given society might be badly off, or even worst off, and hence most likely to be unjustly treated. Rawls, on the one hand, defines the 'worst off' in terms of their access to primary social goods[16]—benefits consisting of 'rights and liberties, powers and opportunities, income and wealth'[17]—while their share of burdens does not play a role in determining their position, even though principles of justice apply to the distribution of both benefits and burdens. Furthermore, Rawls's very limited discussion of burdens includes only duties and obligations, such as the duty of justice and the more specific duties to contribute one's share of the tax to finance social redistribution and the duties related to political office or public functions, but not work. Marx and Engels, on the other hand, say of the proletariat that it is the class which 'has to bear all the burdens of society without enjoying its advantages'.[18] What makes the proletariat badly off, as far as Marx and Engels are concerned, is a particularly striking combination of high burdens and low benefits: not only is it most burdened with work, but it also enjoys little in terms of material resources and goods.

Marx and other materialist theorists after him have used the notion of *exploitation* to point to this particular combination of being burdened with work whilst not receiving many benefits in return. The notion of exploitation implies reference to both benefits and burdens in that it compares the work people do, their burden, with the material benefits they enjoy in their lives. Those who are exploited are burdened more than they benefit, while exploiters benefit without being burdened (or are burdened less than they benefit). Furthermore, these different combinations of burdens and benefits in exploiters and the exploited arise because exploiters 'extract' work, or the products of work, from those they exploit, hence there is a one-sided transfer of benefits combined with a one-sided performance of work.[19] According to a materialist perspective, then, wherever there is

[16] Rawls 1971: 396. [17] Ibid. 62. [18] *GI* 85.

[19] This characterization of exploitation is sufficient for the purposes of the introduction, but obviously very vague. I discuss the concept of exploitation at length in Ch. 2 sect. vi and Ch. 3.

exploitation there is an uneven distribution of the burden of work and the benefits deriving from that work. What is thus distinctive about a materialist approach to social justice is its focus on work or people's material activity and on the conditions and constraints under which they engage in it, notably exploitative conditions.

Since the materialist perspective has a peculiarly powerful grasp on a combination of distributive facts about both burdens and benefits, it is in a good position to indict such distributive patterns and their systematic reproduction in society with regard to their injustice: it seems obvious that those who are comparatively heavily burdened, whilst also being comparatively little benefited, are treated unjustly. I do not have any elaborate argument to establish this last point, but if it were disputed, it seems to me that the burden of proof lies on those who want to say that those who are exploited are being treated perfectly justly, hence that there is a presumption that, unless shown otherwise, exploitation is unjust. Hence I shall presume for the rest of the book that those who are exploited are on the whole unjustly treated.

Given this focus on work and exploitation in the materialist approach to social justice, this approach seems to lend itself perfectly to looking at the work women do, and specifically to discussing the question whether women are exploited and hence treated unjustly in doing all the unpaid work they do. Unpaid work, more than any work that is paid but nevertheless exploitative, seems to be a perfect candidate for work that is exploitative: anybody who does a lot of unpaid, unremunerated work, or any social group or class which shoulders a large part of the work that is done unpaid or unremunerated in a society, is likely to be exploited because they are burdened without receiving any benefits in return. Looking specifically at the above-quoted UN statistic which indicates women's collective high work burdens and appallingly low control of material benefits, it is all the more astounding that materialist theorists have not been more forthcoming with discussions of the exploitation of women.

In the first part of the book, I explore the reasons why even a tradition of thought which would have been an obvious place to look for a discussion of women's work and women's exploitation has either been completely gender blind or else obstructive