Perfectionism, Neutrality and Work Requirements
The Problem

What can justify conditioning welfare benefits on the meeting of work requirements? I will argue in this paper that non-perfectionist theories which argue that government should not promote the moral integrity of its citizens cannot justify work requirements. That to justify work requirements we must return to the ancient teleological conception of the good which states that there is an objective conception of what the good life is- and that government should promote that life.

Central Tradition

Our public policies are justified by fundamental agreements on political morality and ideology. They are based on traditions that define in broad strokes the purposes of political society and the means to achieve those purposes. Robert P. George in Making Men Moral cites Alasdair MacIntyre’s\(^1\) definition of traditions as “an argument extended through time” in which “fundamental agreements” evolve with respect to two kinds of conflict. The first kind of conflict is between the bearers of the tradition against those outside of the tradition who reject its central tenets. The second conflict is between those within the tradition who agree on its fundamental concepts but disagree on their interpretation (George, 1993, p. 19).

George states that among the ‘fundamental agreements’ of the central tradition of Western thought is the idea that “sound politics and good law aspire not only to help make people safe, comfortable, and prosperous, but also to help make them virtuous” (George, 1993, p. 20). What is distinctive of the central tradition is that it asserts that the

\(^1\) This citation is from Whose Justice? Which Rationality? (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988), p. 12.
law is “rightly concerned with the moral well-being of members of political communities” (George, 1993, p. 20).

Non-perfectionist liberalism on the other hand argues that that the concern of the central tradition with making individuals better or moral is “inconsistent with a due regard for human liberty”. Individuals must be free to design for themselves their own conception of the good life and therefore the central traditions is not justified in making “moral laws” - codes of conduct that are enforced by the state not for the purposes of protecting rights but for encouraging morally good behavior and for the making of better people. (George, 1993, p. 20.)

For George no one is more important for understanding the central tradition than Aristotle (George, 1993, p. 21). He cites Aristotle in *The Politics* who argues “whatever is correctly called a city … must be concerned with virtue”. A city not concerned with virtue is “merely an alliance … a mutual guarantor of just treatment, but unable to make the citizens good and just”\(^2\) (Aristotle, *Politics*, iii. 8. 1280b). It is necessary for a city to protect the rights of its citizens, but this is not sufficient to make a city. The city is “a community for living well for both households and families, aiming at a complete and self-sufficient life … the city aims at fine actions, not merely living together” (Aristotle, *Politics*, iii. 32. 1280b).

Why does the city aim at fine actions? George argues that the answer is found in the Nicomachean Ethics (George, 1993, p.22). In this work Aristotle argues that arguments for living well are sufficient to convince the wise but for the bulk of society more is needed to get people to live morally upright lives. This is due to the fact that for

\(^2\) Quotations of Aristotle are from *Readings in Ancient Greek Philosophy* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000).
the majority arguments cannot motivate people to do what is right. The vices that have been acquired by long habit are not easily undone by convincing words. Most people will therefore only avoid vice if the punishments for partaking in it are worse than the pleasures that are to be gained from it (Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.* x. 7. 1179b).

Morally upright actions are not considered to have value, however, if they are coerced. For people to be moral they must act for the right reasons. They must act because they think it is *right* to act in such a way not because they are afraid of the punishment. George argues that Aristotle’s point in requiring moral laws is not that “moral good” is realized when people act uprightly because they are afraid of the punishment, but that they are useful in “calming” an individuals passions. The law must first “settle people down” to help them “gain some appreciation of the good”. Once an individual has been denied what he lusts for he has the opportunity to “gain some intelligent, reasonable, and reflective control of his passion” (George, 1993, pp. 26-27).

Why is the public law necessary to instill such moral values? George cites Aristotle’s argument in the *Nicomachean Ethics* “a father’s instructions, however, lack this influence and compelling power … Law, however has the power that compels” (Aristotle, *Nic. Eth.*, X. 19. 1180a). Children are not only shaped by their families, but by their neighborhood, and society. Parents can lay down a moral law for their children to follow, but the probability of obedience and the gaining of moral knowledge are decreased if those around the children routinely break the moral law (George, 1993, p. 27).

The key idea here is that the “social environment” of a society is more than just a “political alliance” it is a “framework of understandings and expectations” that will
“profoundly” affect the choices individuals make. Widely held agreements on family life, sex, marriage and for the purposes of this essay – work – will affect “everything from people’s tendency to abuse drugs, to their driving habits on the highways” (George, 1993, p. 45). If the right agreements are made then we can say that a society is conducive to virtue, if, however, this is not the case then “the moral environment will seduce people into vice” (George, 1993, p. 45).

We can therefore talk about “moral pollution” and “moral ecology”. The analogy being that environmental pollution is detrimental to an individual’s health in the same way that a society “abounding in vice” threatens the individual’s “moral well being and integrity”. In a vice filled society, a person who wants to be virtuous will find himself being pulled into the behavior that is prevalent in his society. Parents will also find it difficult to shield their children from the rampant moral pollution. Finally in the absence of moral laws those who want to commit immoral acts will not be prevented from doing themselves further “moral harm” by committing such acts (George, 1993, pp. 45-46).

Moral laws therefore help to create an environment based on common understandings of what is right and wrong. This environment encourages people to seek vice and avoid virtue. The community’s laws will serve to “reinforce” what is taught by parents, religious institutions and other community organizations that are important for the upbringing of the next generation (George, 1993, p. 46).

Why should the state care at all whether the people are virtuous or vicious? As long as they do not harm the rights of others why is this a state matter? It may be true that virtue in a society can only be preserved through the application of moral laws, but this creates two important questions. What are the virtues and why should they be promoted?
Macintyre’s Teleology

Alasdair Macintyre in *After Virtue* argues that classical ethics involved man as he actually is to be contrasted with man as he could be. Ethics “is the science” in which man learns how to leave the former state and enter the latter state. The ethics teaches us what the virtues are and what vices are to be avoided in order to “realize our true nature and to reach our true end” – to reach our telos (Macintyre, 1984, p. 52).

To “defy” the ethics is to “be frustrated and incomplete, to fail to achieve that good of rational happiness which is peculiarly ours as a species to pursue”. Our passions and instincts need to be educated and ordered by gaining the “habits of action” which are commanded by the ethics. Only when we have done so is it possible to become what we ought to be, to achieve our purpose as a species (Macintyre, 1984, pp 52-53).

The good of man is not to be found in “money, with honor or with pleasure”. Macintyre cites Aristotle’s use of “eudaimonia” meaning “blessedness, happiness, prosperity”. Aristotle, however, according to Macintyre deliberately leaves this concept of the good, open; simply put “eudaimonia” is what the virtues enable an individual to achieve. We cannot, however, say that the virtues are *merely* the means for achieving the good for man. This is because the good for man is “human life lived at its best” and the possession of the virtues is an essential part of that life. The good life is therefore defined as the life of virtue (Macintyre, 1984, pp. 148-149).

As we saw earlier a virtuous life is facilitated by a society where vice is rare and discouraged – a society that has a good “moral ecology”. The moral laws therefore help individuals to gain knowledge of what is necessary to achieve his or her own telos and to
prevent others from “polluting” the society with acts of vice which will tend to prevent otherwise good people from becoming all that they can be.

Morality cannot be understood apart from this role of pulling people away from their base desires and character to the higher and better life of their essential nature. Since the essential or true purpose of the human species is found in living a life of virtue and this life can be harmed in a society that is overrun with vice a society should do all it can to preclude others from committing such acts of immorality and filling the community with moral pollution.

If society abdicates this responsibility and states that the virtue of each individual is his own concern, then it is no longer acting as a community. Human beings cannot live lives of virtue in a vacuum. They need the cooperation of those they live with to help them live such a life. This cooperation is needed to produce the goods necessary to sustain life and prevent it from being one of unending hard labor where people will not have time to gain the habits of virtue. It is also needed to produce the moral climate or “ecology” conducive to the creation of good human beings.

Those opposed to a teleological justification for morality could ask why should the community care about virtue? Why can it not be simply an alliance of self-interested partners? To make such an argument, however, it is necessary to say that there is no such thing as virtue or that it is impossible for us to know what it is. To live a good life means to live a life that is not in need of significant reform. Such a life as we saw earlier is necessarily a life of virtue. It would be incoherent to say that an individual (regardless of how much wealth he had or how much pleasure he enjoyed) was living a good life (not in
need of reform) when in fact his life was characterized by vice. The good life is thus defined as the life of virtue.

Thus those who are opposed to a teleological justification for ethics but who still believe in the necessity of ethical laws for the creation of a livable society must reject virtue and any concept of the good life for humans in constructing their ethical systems. This rejection can be studied in the history of political and moral philosophy.

Macintyre argues that we see the first signs of this rejection in the theologies of “Protestantism and Jansenist Catholicism”. According to these beliefs reason is not sufficient to gain knowledge of what is the true end of man. This power of reason according to the Calvinists was destroyed by the fall of man in the first sin of Adam (Macintyre, 1984, p. 52).

We cannot therefore learn of the virtues through reason and it is therefore incapable to “correct our passions” and transform our sinful nature. The divine moral law is still necessary to teach us the difference between what is right and wrong and lead us to a more righteous life but we cannot obey or know this law without divine grace. Macintyre argues that this Calvinist understanding of the failure of reason is in line with seventeenth century philosophy and science. It was by this time that the older notion of using reason to understand the “essences” of objects was discredited. Reason can only “assess truths of fact and mathematical relations but nothing more”, it can only discern means and must be “silent” on the question of ends (Macintyre, 1984, p. 54).

Eventually religious faith itself was rejected as the means to justify virtue and human good which therefore meant the final doing away of the notion that man had a telos and needed the moral law to get him there. There can therefore no longer be an appeal to
“man as he is” and “man as he could be” to justify morality. The law remains but it no longer has the teleological framework that justified it (Macintyre, 1984, pp. 53-54).

The moral law, however, was never meant to be compatible with human nature as it is but as a means to educate and improve upon it. Subsequent moral philosophers are therefore left with a tremendous problem. They will have to try to ground morality in a rational understanding of human nature (as it is without regard to its essence or true nature). When the morality that they inherited was essentially and necessarily opposed to that nature, they had to combine two incompatible fragments of thought from what was once a coherent account of ethics (Macintyre, 1984, pp. 54-55).

The results of this problem are seen particularly in the political philosophy of Rousseau, Kant, and Rawls. These philosophers seemingly solved the problem of justifying morality without a teleological scheme by appealing to the conceptions of autonomy and freedom. Their solutions as we will see have created the modern day political doctrine of non-perfectionism and the necessary loss of a justification for work requirements.

Rousseau, Kant and Rawls

The philosophy of Jean Jacques Rousseau in the Social Contract is an important example of this rejection of teleology and perfectionism. Close to the beginning of the work Rousseau writes – “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” (Rousseau, 1987, p. 141). This statement introduced the main aim of the Social Contract, which is to find the principles of political legitimacy that will ensure the greatest freedom for everyone. We are no longer interested in producing a community of humans who are living the best life possible; we now seek to create the freest humans possible.
Rousseau’s project is to find the “form of association” that will best provide security for each individual while preserving the “natural liberty” of every citizen. (Rousseau, 1987, p. 148). An individual accomplishes this by accepting the rule of the “general will” of the community. In agreeing to be constrained by the “general will” each individual becomes a moral being capable of having duties. Each citizen loses the “unlimited right to everything that tempts him and that he can acquire”, but he gains “moral liberty” which is the only thing that can make man truly free – to be “the master of himself”. For to be pushed and pulled by one’s instincts is slavery but to obey the law one has made for oneself is liberty (Rousseau, 1987, p. 151)

This law is not based on the personal whims of each individual but the collective will of the entire society. Individuals cannot seek freedom that is unlimited by the general will because such an action would destroy the body politic by rendering its dictates ineffectual and thus eliminating the security that had originally been necessary to preserve each individual’s freedom (Rousseau, 1987, p. 150). Additionally, the general will is not to represent the selfish interests of the majority, but the collective interests of the entire society (Rousseau, 1987, p. 155). Thus the citizen is obeying only himself and not the will of the majority, because the general will represents no private interest that would seek to dominate him, but the interest of all in the preservation of a society that preserves his freedom.

Citizens need the law not to provide them with the means to live the life best lived (according to a robust objective standard) but to obtain “moral liberty” or autonomy. The general will is instrumental to personal freedom, thus citizens have a right to make sure that this will is not perverted by the private interests of the many. Rousseau further argues
that if an individual, who has agreed to the social contract, wishes to break the contract by claiming all its benefits while not partaking in any of its duties (i.e. obedience to the general will) he must be coerced by society into obedience. This “means merely that he will be forced to be free”, since the social contract is the only means for his freedom, his disobedience must be considered an irrational or unreasonable act and therefore the society is authorized in coercing him to be rational and accept his freedom (Rousseau, 1987, p. 150).

Immanuel Kant adds to Rousseau’s account by providing a justification for the primacy of freedom in his argument for the categorical imperative in the *Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysics of Morals*. In this work he gives an account for why “freedom” or more accurately the “moral liberty” of Rousseau should be the most important concern for ethics and political morality.

There are two ways of explaining an action the first is based on the hypothetical imperative, the second on the categorical imperative. The hypothetical imperative states what should be done in order to obtain some other end. It is always contingent on the ends an individual has already chosen. The categorical imperative, which defines moral duty, must be obeyed not because it leads to some other good like happiness but because it is an end in itself (Kant, 2002, p. 34).

One of Kant’s formulations for the categorical imperative is that one should only act on such maxims that can be made into a universal law. If one had a maxim that stated that he should be allowed to steal from another he could not make this into a universal law because he would never will that others steal from him. Thus the moral duties one places on others must also be placed on oneself. This is because it is in what it *means* for
something to be a categorical imperative that it not be contingent on the personal wishes of individuals, it must apply to all in all cases, with no exceptions (Kant, 2002, pp. 35-36).

Another formulation for the categorical imperative is that every individual should be treated as an end in himself. All things can be considered a means to furthering of ends except those “things” that are ends in themselves. The “things” that are ends in themselves are human beings who are capable of rational thought enabling them to use the world for the furtherance of their purposes. Human beings strive to be autonomous, i.e. live according to the law (or ends) that they have made for themselves. Individuals are constrained by this categorical imperative from using other rational beings as means. Such an action would not be in keeping with the dignity that humans have in virtue of their rational nature (Kant, 2002, pp. 36-37)

No one would will that rational actors can be used as means (or be exploited) because no would want to be used as a means in his own case. This is because Kant argues that the “dignity of humanity” lies in the ability to be “universally legislative” provided that one is also “subject to this same legislation” (Kant, 2002, p. 38). The respect for human dignity is therefore based on the same definition of the categorical imperative as we saw earlier: that its dictates should apply to all with no exception. It is from this argument that we have the non-perfectionist respect for each individual as a free and equal person. Each individual must be treated with equal respect because of her status as a rational actor and must be granted the freedom to act so long as such freedom does not impair the freedoms of others (i.e. cause others to become the means to her own end).
It is from this basic moral principle that we can move towards constructing the basis for political legitimacy. The morally right government must respect the equal dignity of each citizen. It must accept the basic interests of each individual in autonomy to choose their own ends. Individuals for their part must accept a series of laws that enables them to have freedom by constraining those actions, which treat others as means and not ends in themselves. Since individuals are concerned with their own freedom, are reasonable and therefore accept the equal dignity of others they will submit to laws that best enable the freedoms of all.

The obvious problem here is why should anyone care about the freedoms of others? It may be true that I want freedom and other citizens want freedom also, but why should I respect their freedom? Why should I not make an exception in my own case? It is here that without a perfectionist account of why it is a good in itself to not place duties on others that one would not place on oneself - the good of practical reasonableness- that Kant’s account fails. I will address this problem later on in the thesis.

John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* takes Kant’s and Rousseau’s arguments for moral liberty one step further by creating the idea of the “original position of equality” where no one knows his position in the society or his natural talents. Crucially individuals do not know their “conceptions of the good or their special psychological propensities” (Rawls, 1999, p. 11). In this hypothetical state agents are expected to come to certain fundamental agreements on principles of justice.

This “veil of ignorance” ensures fair bargaining because everyone is in the exact same position (of ignorance). No one is favored by “natural chance” or the “contingency of social circumstances”. These principles of justice do not stem from any altruistic or
perfectionist tendencies among the actors but from the self-interest of free and rational persons. Rawls assumes that these individuals will have such a self-interest and that they will share a very basic sense of “Justice as Fairness” (Rawls, 1999, pp. 10-11).

Rawls admits that in existing societies people have differing conceptions of justice. However, he argues that all agree that “institutions are just” when there are no “arbitrary distinctions” made between individuals “in the assigning of basic rights and duties”. Such a basic agreement is necessary not only as a prerequisite for social cooperation but also for solving such problems that deal with “coordination, efficiency and stability” (Rawls, 1999, p. 5).

This is very similar to Kant’s notion of a categorical imperative that applies to all with no exceptions made for personal wishes. The same problems arise, however, because by definition it could be argued that justice requires disregarding arbitrary distinctions, but he has not shown why individuals are required to be just. People may share a common understanding of what the just is and still disagree over whether they should have to be just. Rawls asserts that society would be impossible without such a shared conception of justice. He would be right in this assertion, however, it also shows that a notion of justice cannot be disentangled from what a good society is. We need to share a sense of practical reasonableness because it is the foundation of a good society made up of good individuals. However, as we shall see Rawls, account disallows such a justification.

Since individuals are self-interested and they do not know what position they will have once the “veil of ignorance” is lifted, they will not argue for perfectionist principles. This is because they are assumed to each have their own, differing and contending
visions of the good life. Since they do not know what that conception is they would not choose principles of justice that could possibly disallow their own conception of the good while promoting another. Thus they would establish principles of “equal liberty” allowing each individual to pursue his own conception of the good life so long as it is compatible with the liberty of others.

Rawls justifies this rejection of perfectionism because the parties in the original position cannot possibly share a criterion to judge different perfectionist theories. To accept such a standard would cause a reduction of liberty, potentially blocking one from advancing his “spiritual ends”. The parties cannot “risk their freedom” by accepting any “teleological principle of justice”. The acceptance of equal liberty therefore requires rejecting perfectionist principles (Rawls, 1999, 288).

It is important to note that Rawls does not argue that there is no objective principle of perfectionism, he states that there is no agreed upon criterion to judge what that principle would be. This claim of ignorance can be traced back to the rejection of teleological principles during the enlightenment, i.e. the rejection of both divine law and the notion of the essential nature of bodies. Rawls argues that we cannot know what the divine law is and we cannot know what the essential nature of humans is, therefore we must reject any principles of justice that favor one conception of that essential nature or divine law over another, and we must embrace a stance of neutrality to all such conceptions.

The distribution of goods in a society is obviously one of the most important aspects of justice that Rawls takes on in *A Theory of Justice*. The first principle of justice as we have seen requires the equal liberty of each citizen. The second principle states that
“social and economic inequalities” are just only if they “result in compensating benefits for everyone” especially the least advantaged. Those who are more advantaged because of talents or social position (which they do not deserve) can only expect the cooperation of those less advantaged if they see that the distribution of resources in a society is truly for the benefit of all (Rawls, 1999, p.13).

It seems that resources in such a society are distributed in an arbitrary manner when those who are advantaged by factors such as natural talents or social position (that they do not deserve) get the greatest portion of society’s product. Rawls argues, though, that it is still just because those who are disadvantaged in such a society only have to compare that society to a more equal one. In such a society the more talented would have less of an incentive to produce the goods necessary for society thus reducing the total production in the society leaving everyone with relatively little to share equally. Thus the least advantaged would choose greater inequality because this situation would at least improve their condition relative to equality.

Would an able bodied person who refused to work be considered part of the least advantaged? If such a person could claim this he would be entitled to benefits from the government because it could be assumed that in a completely equal society he would receive some income. Relative to equality then he should expect that in an unequal society (as a member of the least advantaged) he should get more than he would get under equality.

Fair terms of cooperation, however, require according to Rawls in Justice as Fairness: A Restatement, that all are “willing to work and to do their part in sharing the burdens of social life”. Rawls solution then to the problem of those who refuse to work is
to add leisure time to the index of the advantages an individual may have. Therefore a person who spent all his time in leisure would be considered to have as many advantages as the “least advantaged who do work a standard day”. This “surfer off of Malibu” therefore has already received his compensation in the form of leisure time and should not expect any more from the government. The worker who has not had the benefit of this leisure time is worse off because of this and therefore has the right to expect compensation for his work (Rawls, 2001, p. 179).

The claim here then is that an individual must work because in a fair society all are expected to do their share. Those who refuse to work cannot claim in this way that they are the least advantaged because they have the advantage of leisure time. Stuart White makes a similar argument in his own conception of non-perfectionism. His argument further elucidates what purposes a just social structure is designed for, while maintaining the core of Rawls argument that a just social system is not based on teleological principles of the good but on the fairest distribution of resources so that all have the equal liberty to pursue their own conception of the good.

White’s Anti-Perfectionism

Stuart White in *The Civic Minimum* justifies his anti-perfectionism by presenting the concept of “Democratic Mutual Regard”. This concept requires as its foundational principle that individuals within a good society do not seek to impose institutions and laws on one another but regard each other as equals having “shared basic interests” (White, 2003, p.27).
These basic interests are derived from the fact that citizens have conceptions of the good life that influence their morality, preferences, and plans of life. Possession of this conception gives an individual a fundamental interest in “ethical integrity” - being able to live according to one’s own preferred ends without interference from government or society in general. In order to defend their ethical integrity individuals have a shared interest in liberty and physical integrity (White, 2003, p.30)

Physical integrity requires that an individual have the ability to “draw some elementary boundaries between her physical self and other people” (White, 2003, p. 30). Crucial to ethical integrity is the freedom from physical aggression and the threat of such aggression. Individuals also have an interest in “expressive integrity” which requires the freedom from being pressured into believing and following a conception of the good life that is not one’s own (White, 2003, p.31)

If an individual is coerced to act in a way that goes against what he views to be valuable or worthy conduct, his interest in living in accordance with his own conception of the good life is violated. Crucial to White’s argument is that it cannot be the case that an individual would or should deny the importance of ethical integrity in her own case, and therefore democratic mutual regard requires that she respect ethical integrity for others (White, 2003, p. 31) Again we see Kant’s argument arising as the crucial starting point for all non-perfectionist theories. In the absence of a conception of the good we must base society on a fundamental notion of fairness- that duties and constraints on liberty must apply to all with no exceptions made for self.

Individuals also have an interest in having the opportunity to deliberate about what the good life is and how to live according to that conception of the good life. No
individual according to White can have a comprehensive conception of the good that is free of doubt and therefore no person can use coercion to force his beliefs on others. Every individual must have the opportunity to make such decisions on the good for themselves. Seeing the vital importance of deliberation for their own case, individuals must once again respect the deliberative interest of others (White, 2003, pp.31-32).

Democratic Mutual Regard also requires that the economic institutions “acknowledge and manifest the equal worth of each citizen” (White, 2003, p. 33). In regard to the economic life of a citizen, White argues that there are two distinct interests involved. First there is the interest of each citizen to have the opportunity to put into action his own conception of the good life. Each individual must have equal prospects for “ethical agency” – to act on their own goals, preferences, and beliefs. Secondly each individual has an interest in his “core well being”, which involves being in good physical and mental health – the capacities necessary for normal human behavior. These aspects of “core well being” are shared by all regardless of personal conceptions of the good. This interest in “core well being” is important both for ethical agency and for avoiding involuntary suffering (White, 2003, pp.34-35).

A society not based on a conception of the good, but founded on the ideals of “democratic mutual regard” would not interfere with an individuals prospects for ethical agency or interests in core well being. The government, however, would not stop here but also defend each individual from discrimination by those who control access to economic resources or positions and lessen the effects of the “brute luck” disadvantages of being born in poverty or having a disability (White, 2003, p.35).
Reasonable Access vs. Dreams Deferred

According to White each citizen should have *reasonable* access to food, clothing, shelter and healthcare because these goods are necessary for both ethical agency and to avoid involuntary suffering. Democratic mutual regard requires that each citizen act in accordance with “fair reciprocity” - to make a “reasonable effort” given his talents, to “ensure” that other citizens are benefited and not burdened by his claim on what is produced by society. Failure to do this would be exploitative to others, allowing one to expect others to provide for one’s needs while not providing anything in return (White, 2003, p. 62).

Thus access to a basic income, which would provide for one’s minimum needs is conditioned on one’s willingness to contribute to society. Its important to note here that to defend this conclusion White cannot use any perfectionist considerations. It cannot be that it would be better for an individual’s objective well being that he work. That working would in any way make him a better human being. White can only justify his conditionality with respect to his foundational principle of democratic mutual regard in which individuals must be able to justify their preferred schemes for the organization of society. Since it would be impossible (according to White) for an individual to justify a society where he would be excluded from work - while others would have to provide for his needs - a work test is necessary to judge who can partake from what society has produced.
In any society certain goods by their very nature are scarce. Wealth, power and status to be meaningful concepts can only be held by a limited amount of people. Certain people by necessity will be excluded from these goods. In any society that requires some sort of cooperation to meet the needs of that society, there must be leaders who have the expert knowledge necessary to direct others to act in the best interests of society. There will be individuals with greater native endowments who can thus benefit society more than others and as a result demand in return for their greater service a larger proportion of society’s goods. Also there could be professions where the number of available positions is not enough to give everyone who wishes employment in that profession a job.

Ethical agency therefore seems thwarted by this scarcity in society. If an individual whose conception of the good requires the salary of a professional athlete but the work of a public school teacher he would be out of luck. While individuals who want to be athletes and also make an athlete’s salary would be very pleased. One could argue that the athlete deserves more income because his work is more valuable to society than that of the teacher. Needless to say this is a very controversial claim, it is not obvious which profession is more valuable to society and which therefore requires more compensation. Why is it justified for athletes to demand higher salaries than teachers when it is not obvious whether their work is really more valuable than that of teachers?

The obvious difficulty here is that teachers and athletes are not paid according to how much their work is “worth” to society in terms of making a society better or worse; they are simply paid by the processes of supply and demand. Athletes can sell their labor at a higher rate than teachers because there are far fewer qualified athletes than teachers. Also the industry that athletes belong to – sports - attracts far more money per athlete in
advertising and in ticket sales than the industry of education can get per teacher from public funds.

Additionally, individuals who are members of professions will seek indirectly or directly to limit the amount of people who enter their professions. Doctors and lawyers have an incentive to create entrance exams that limit access to their respective professions because limiting the supply of doctors and lawyers will increase the salary they can demand from their employers. Union members in demanding a certain wage that is above what would normally be paid considering the supply of workers forces employers to hire fewer workers than they normally would, thus making the union indirectly responsible for increasing involuntary unemployment.

Why would teachers ever agree to a system where athletes would be paid so much more than them for the simple reason that there are so much fewer than them? Why would those excluded from the professions or from employment by union activity ever agree to such a society? It could be said that when individuals agree to form a society they acknowledge each individuals right to use his property as he sees fit and is therefore justified in paying athletes more than teachers. Additionally ethical agency requires that people be allowed to form associations, such as unions to collectively bargain with employers with regard to wages. Unemployment and low wages could then be seen as the price for freedom.

The problem with this reasoning is that the free choices of individuals in a market economy could very well cause destitution and diminish ethical agency. Individuals left unemployed would have only charity to look for in order to avoid starvation. Many without the talents and the education necessary for preferred positions will be forced to
work in jobs that are not an expression of their free choice but simply the only alternative better than destitution. Freedom would therefore no longer be one’s right as a citizen but would simply be a function of one’s wealth and talent. No one who saw destitution as a result of such a society would agree to it as a free choice. “Democratic mutual regard” would therefore disallow such a society.

If the absolute right to property violates “democratic mutual regard”, then we are left with the same questions that we had before. Another possible solution would be to look to the reason of establishing a society in the first place. It is assumed that in a society without government it would be difficult for an individual without access to violent means to defend one’s person, family, and property to have the freedom to possess ethical agency. Individuals without property would again be left to the good will of others to survive. Society and government are therefore designed to solve these problems by protecting each person’s liberties and promoting opportunities that would be impossible otherwise.

If this is the case then the government could demand that each individual work a job that is most compatible with his talents but that is also most beneficial to the greatest freedom of all. The government could thereby ensure the most efficient use of human resources, which would result in the greatest possible production of the goods that are necessary for ethical agency and avoiding suffering. This would involve for example requiring athletes to use their extraordinary talents in fields that most need them – industries that require heavy labor, the military, etc.

Such a scheme would fit well within White’s conception of “fair reciprocity” each individual in return for his claim on the produce of society is required to provide his fair
share. Why should impersonal market forces and someone’s arbitrary choices determine their contribution and income, when the greatest freedom could be obtained otherwise? Why should writers and athletes be allowed to do work that seems like leisure to most people and then expect to be fed, clothed and housed by the working classes who do not have the same opportunities? In communist countries we have seen how educated classes have been targeted to do menial work, with the aim of “reeducation”, to get these groups to perform work that is “truly” needed by society.

How would such a society promote freedom? In a 24 hour day eight hours could be used for required work, another eight hours for sleep, and the final eight hours would be designated “leisure time”. During this period an individual can pursue his own conception of the good life. Each individual would receive an equal wage this combined with the equal leisure time would provide equal freedom for all. The teacher would earn the same amount as the athlete and both would be using his or her talents to produce the greatest possible produce for society so that during their leisure time the teacher would have an equal opportunity to pursue her dream to write a great novel while the athlete could use his time to develop his athletic skills.

A host of objections could be raised against such a scheme. Most important involves the idea that the government should decide what kind of profession an individual should be a part of in order to meet the needs of society. For freedom to mean anything an individual must have the ability to choose for himself how he would want to contribute to society. Secondly to really excel at a vocation like sports would require more time than the eight hours of leisure time they would have allotted to them. They would not have the true means necessary to have ethical agency. Third the occupations of
clergy, artists, and others deemed unnecessary or too time consuming would be endangered, thus harming religion, art and literature.

Yet if we argue that extremely talented athletes who make the NBA should not be forced to perform more useful activities, how can we force not so talented athletes to give up their preferred vocation and work in a less desirable occupation? Less talented basketball players may refuse to join a society that rewarded more talented players with riches and glory, while relegating them to the working class to be overworked and underpaid and if they refuse to work would face starvation. Cooperation to them would seem to be acceptance of a system that prevents them from living the best possible life for them - the life of a basketball player.

Jobs as Assets

Enabling the greatest equal freedom for all seems to fall short when faced with the practical problems of a world where not everyone’s dreams can come true. In order to deal with this problem another non-perfectionist -Philippe Van Parijs in Real Freedom for All has proposed that we look at jobs as assets that are granted to everyone equally. Each person has an equal right to a job and also has the right to sell his right or “asset” to others in return for the payment of a “rent” (Van Parijs, 1995, pp. 106-107).

If all the workers on a particular day tried to find a job each worker should be able to get a job at the market-clearing wage. What this means is that every worker given that he is qualified for the job and there are no additional constraints like a fair wage law will receive a job at a wage determined by the supply and demand for labor. The “market clears” every worker is hired by an employer at the going rate, no worker would be
excluded by the employer because this would reduce the supply of labor and then force the employer to pay higher wages (Van Parijs, 1995, p. 107).

In the real world, however, the labor market does not clear. Minimum wage legislation will increase the price of labor and therefore cause employers to hire fewer workers. Additionally unions may demand fair wages further increasing the price of labor and adding to the number of workers that are unemployed. Thus the higher wages that the employed receive through minimum wage legislation and unionization comes from the involuntary unemployment of workers (Van Paris, 1995, p. 107).

How is such a system justified? Van Parijs argues that if we introduce the concept of jobs as tradable assets we can work out a solution. In such a scheme we can imagine that the unemployed workers would lease to others their job assets in return for the payment of a rent. This rent is determined by the difference between a worker’s actual wage and what that wage would have been at the market-clearing wage. The rent would therefore be very large in a society with high involuntary unemployment and nothing in a society with only voluntary unemployment (Van Parijs, 1995, p.109)

What about societies with low unemployment? It would seem that a society, which had very little unemployment, would not produce the kind of rents to sustain people who were unemployed. In such a society the market-clearing wage would be rather close to the actual wage of the workers. Van Parijs responds to this possible objection by arguing that there still would be large employment rents in such a society - the rents would not come from the presence of involuntary unemployment in a society - but from a different source.
In a competitive society there are many workers who are forced to work unsatisfactory jobs at low wages. These workers would be willing and able to work in a better job at the going rate. Therefore the higher wages of workers at better paying job is the result of the exclusion of some workers from those jobs. To justify this we could argue again that those who work low paying jobs have leased their rights to better paying jobs to these workers with better jobs and are therefore entitled to an increase in their wages from the unconditional basic income made possible by these employment rents (Van Parijs, 1995, p. 109).

Professional organizations like the American Bar Association have it in their interest to limit the number of lawyers produced by law schools. The market clearing wages for lawyers would probably be much lower than the actual wages of lawyers. The lawyers owe their higher paying jobs not only to strength of character, academic excellence, high-test scores, etc. they also owe it to the fact that many people have been excluded from their field. Therefore they must compensate those low paid workers and the unemployed whose combined exclusion from their field enables their wages to be so high. Thus every individual regardless of his willingness or unwillingness to work is entitled to an unconditional basic income because his unemployment or his unsatisfactory job results in a scarcity of employees and thus raises the wages of the more fortunate. This better fortune is theft unless those with better paying jobs pay rent for the use of the job assets of others.

It seems though that Van Parijs must have a lot of confidence in the citizens who receive this unconditional basic income. Will many people shirk their duties if they feel they cannot get the jobs that they want? In a complicated society with many people
fighting for scarce positions of wealth, fame and power it seems entirely possible that a large number of people who lose the competition would rather accept the basic income rather than work at unappealing jobs. If enough people choose this route it could make an affluent economy impossible.

Productive Contribution

In response to Van Parijs’s argument for jobs as assets White envisions the image of an individual standing at the gates of a factory demanding to be let in so that he could have the opportunity to work. The demand to own jobs as assets is analogous to the unemployed worker demanding to get into the factory. Each individual should have the opportunity to meet his basic needs through work. If he has the right to work but cannot work because society cannot provide him a job he has the right to demand that he be compensated for not receiving what is morally due to him. It does not seem, however, that requiring a willingness to work as a condition for receiving the right to own a job (as a tradable asset) would be in contradiction to the principle. (White 2003, p. 158)

An individual who would not want a work requirement would have to argue that he deserves a right to jobs as assets even though he has no desire to actually work. He does not want the right because he feels that it would be unjust for him to be unemployed or that he would receive low wages without it but because he simply does not want to work. He wants to enter the factory in effect because he wants to be unemployed and live off the work of others. (White 2003, p. 158)

Such an argument would violate White’s requirement that every citizen provide a productive contribution to the society in return for his or her share of the social product.
He calls this the “basic work expectation”; everyone “is expected to perform at least some minimum quantity of civic labor” (White 2003, p. 114). As we saw earlier, however, in an actual society many individuals would have a legitimate claim that they should not be required to work because the residual injustice in society puts an unfair burden on them to do the menial labor of society. Citizens in a society, however, according to White, that is just in other respects - equality of opportunity, equal access to education and health care, nearly just distribution of wealth, etc., should still be required to work. They should work at a level that is close to the level that they would work were society completely just. They may have a lower obligation than their more talented citizens but the work requirement is still “non-negligible” (White 2003, p. 114).

It is “non-negligible” because the foundational principal of “democratic mutual regard” states that no citizen’s presence in society should be a burden on others (if he can avoid it from being so). If those who do work have to work harder to produce the goods necessary to sustain an unproductive individual, that individual’s claim on the social product unjustly harms others. What, however, is a citizen’s necessary contribution?

Let us consider an artist living in a society with a minimum work requirement who produces works of art that are sold only at the most prestigious auction houses to be bought by the most talented and wealthy members of society. This artist, however, if he could not sell his artwork would only be qualified for the most menial jobs. He is able to do such work but he is quite lazy and unwilling to do it if he can avoid it. Additionally his works will not have any lasting artistic importance and will simply be used to decorate the homes of the rich. The money that he makes by selling his works allows him to live a rather luxurious life style. A single mother with two kids takes his order at a fancy
restaurant, our not so talented basketball player has to be his door keeper and the factory workers have to continue making the minimum to produce everything he wears, eats, and drives.

Another individual living in a society with an unconditional basic income is not as talented as the artist but is equally lazy. He uses the basic income to feed and clothe himself, so that he can devote himself to producing works of art that no one appreciates and would never buy. A recent immigrant flips his burgers at McDonalds, our poor basketball player (who has a sense of civic duty) cleans the streets that he litters, and factory workers have to continue making the minimum to produce everything he wears, eats, and drives.

It seems that in both societies individuals are forced to carry the burden that others refuse to share even though they are capable of carrying that burden. It could be argued that the artist is productive because his works are sold at the auction house and therefore he contributes to the economic life of the community. The only people that are benefited by his work, however, are the people that are the most fortunate to begin with. The bulk of society receives nothing from his work but must carry most of the burden of sustaining him.

Why is it not justified then to require the rich artist to work as much as those who serve him and allow him to use his leisure time to produce his art? To do this, however, we would have to face all the problems that are associated with forced labor. The great artist could live quite lavishly without the extra money from the required work. He would have to be forced therefore to get a regular job such a notion would be contradictory to the central tenets of liberalism. The poor artist on the other hand in a society with a work
requirement is not strictly *forced* to work (he would not go to jail for example), however, but he would face the prospect of possibly starving to death if he did not work.

It could be argued that the great artist is paying taxes and is therefore contributing to society. To the extent though that his work only contributes to decorating the homes of wealthy members of society it would make more sense to argue that the rich pay his taxes when they purchase his works. He would not have any money to buy anything let alone pay taxes if his works did not please the rich. His labor does not contribute in anyway to reducing the burden of menial work on the poorer classes or increasing freedom for all. The taxes that would be lost by requiring him to work a regular job could be recouped by simply increasing the taxes on the rich that they would in effect have paid anyway by buying his works.

Why is the service he provides for the rich not considered contributing to society? He is doing something for someone even though it is just for the rich. The reason is that the whole justification for requiring people to work in the first place is because it would be wrong for someone to demand a portion of society’s product if his demand increased the burden of work on others in society while he did not provide any labor of his own to compensate for the increased burden. He gets the best of both worlds he does not have to carry the burden of keeping society working while at the same time receiving even more than a basic income - he receives a life of luxury.

The presence, therefore, of individuals in the society who can shirk their responsibility to provide for the common good because they have talents that are marketable to the rich and famous refutes White’s notion that individuals must make a productive contribution to society. Those low talented surfers off Malibu can always
argue that their more talented brethren (who are paid to surf) are simply shirking their duty to provide a productive contribution in order to live the good life. Again the only solution that justifies a work requirement is a uniform mandate on all people to work jobs that are essential to the freedom of all. Either that or we abolish the work requirement and establish the universal basic income.

Work Preferences

White characterizes Van Parijs’ argument for the universal basic income as treating the decision to work as being similar to the decision to choose a religion or prefer the New York Yankees to the Boston Red Sox. It is just as arbitrary to prefer Yankees fans to Red Sox fans, as it is to prefer those who are willing to work to those who are not. White responds to this by arguing that what is at stake when people refuse to work is not arbitrary preferences like that for baseball teams but a question of justice. It is not perfectionist or biased according to white to prohibit preferences that are unjust. In this case it is not wrong to prohibit those who want to be parasites on society from doing so.

White cites Gijs van Donselaar’s analysis of the unconditional basic income to criticize Van Parijs argument for jobs as assets. To illustrate the problem van Donselaar offers another example on the famous equally endowed couple of “crazy” and “lazy”. Crazy is an individual who is set on increasing his wealth through hard work and self-reliance. Lazy on the other hand would be content to receive a basic income from the government while he sat at home and did nothing. Crazy’s preference is for work, while Lazy’s preference is for laziness (White, 2003, p. 159)
Instead of offering jobs as assets to each individual we can envision that society apportions to both individuals two acres of land with four acres in total. Without Crazy, Lazy would work one acre of land and reap the profit from that. Whereas Crazy without the presence of Lazy would work three acres of land, Crazy therefore has an “independent interest” in three acres of land and Lazy has an “independent interest” in one (White, 2003, p. 159).

In keeping with Van Parijs notion of endowing every citizen with an equal right to a job as an asset, both Crazy and Lazy are apportioned by the government two acres of land. Lazy could then lease one acre of land to Crazy for a share of what Crazy produces. Lazy is therefore better off and Crazy worse off than they would have been had their counterpart not existed. By demanding that there be an equal apportionment of land regardless of an individual’s interest to work the land, a scarcity is created that is not “inherent in the situation”. This scarcity Lazy can exploit to the disadvantage of Crazy.

So what “applies to land’ also applies to job assets and to the “parasitic rents that an equal division of tradable job assets would allow the lifestyle non-worker to extract from harder-working citizens”. The right to jobs as assets should therefore be distributed “in proportion to citizens’ willingness to work” (White, 2003, p. 160).

White goes even further by arguing that in an egalitarian society the equal distribution of jobs as assets is in effect contrary to the “spirit of solidarity”. Those who would want society’s job assets not with an interest in working but with the hope of “gate keeping the assets” and allowing others access for a price are not “standing in a relationship of solidarity with their fellow citizens” because they are basically manipulating their fellow citizens into allowing their own exploitation. Solidarity is best
served according to White when there is “equal access to work for those with equal willingness to work” (White, 2003, p. 160).

This argument does not take into account the fact that unemployment whether it is voluntary or involuntary increases the income of those who are employed. Consider an employer who is required by a minimum wage law to pay every worker ten dollars an hour can only hire seven workers out of ten who applied for a job. Suppose that there were five other able bodied individuals who simply did not apply for the job. They for whatever reason prefer not to work. Both their voluntary unemployment and the unemployment of the three applicants who were rejected are responsible for the relatively high wages of those who were hired. If the minimum wage law and other external constraints like unions were abolished the employer could hire all ten applicants at the market-clearing and thus lower wage. In this case it is crucial that there be no requirement to work because such a requirement would further depress the wages of the employed because it would increase the supply of workers.

The wages of the employed are therefore dependent on those who are unemployed. According to Van Parijs to exclude the voluntarily unemployed from receiving the basic income would be to break the requirement for liberal neutrality on visions of the good life. It would be rewarding those who want to work for having “expensive tastes” for “scarce resources”, since both their unemployment and the unemployment of those who prefer to spend their time simply playing basketball in the school yard are equally responsible for the high wages of the employed (Van Parijs, 1995, pp. 109-110).

In the case of the Crazy-Lazy example we could introduce the presence of an additional number of landless peasants. If all the peasants were apportioned land
according to their willingness to work an excessive amount of crops would be produced and the price of the crop would fall below the subsistence level. A number of peasants would have to be excluded to retain higher prices. Those who are excluded deserve some compensation since it is their exclusion that gives crazy and lazy their relatively higher wealth. Their motivation to work has nothing to do with the final desired prices of crops and therefore there is no “unbiased” justification for excluding those who are happy that they are not employed (Van Parijs, 1995, p. 110).

Fairness?

One final example… Imagine that 5 ballet dancers are to be selected from a group of six. The five who are chosen will be paid handsomely but the one who is not selected is required to mop the dance floor at the minimum wage. There are no other sources of employment (at the moment) in this society and the ballet is so constructed that a sixth dancer would ruin the ballet. The dancers are equally qualified for the dance so they are selected randomly – with obviously one dancer rejected.

The rejected dancer refuses to mop the floor thus forcing the ballet company to select someone else. The ballet company chooses from among two other unemployed workers, selecting one and rejecting the other. In this case then we would have two unemployed individuals – the unemployed janitor and the unemployed dancer. Another janitorial job opens up and the unemployed janitor takes the job uncontested by the rejected dancer who is more qualified for the janitorial job and would have gotten the job had she competed for it. This process continues with the dancer basically becoming
voluntarily unemployed while a series of unemployed janitors receive jobs that could have been filled by the dancer.

Do we require the dancer to take the next janitorial job when it opens up or do we give her an unconditional basic income? If we force her to work by taking away her unemployment checks, we would be saying that for no other reason other than the fact that she was on the wrong end of luck she should be required to take a menial job when others get to live out there dreams even though they do not deserve it any more than she does. She could argue that the least that could be done would be to grant her an unconditional basic income so that she could do ballet in more informal settings for her own personal satisfaction. The other dancers could not argue that she is being unreasonable because if they were in her situation they would see the inherent injustice in their exclusion and would not want to accept menial labor either because it would go against their own vision of the good life.

The heart of the issue therefore is that in any hierarchical society not everyone’s dreams can come true. Certain individuals through brute luck (because of a lack of talent, poor motivation from parents, initial inequality, and other factors outside of ones control) will not be able to obtain the scarce positions and occupations that they desire. In fact their exclusion makes the high position and wealth of the more fortunate possible. The question then becomes why is it just for them to be required to do the more menial and less fulfilling jobs of society. Why does solidarity require them to be forced to do society’s essential but demeaning work while others get to live out the full expression of their humanity – to live out their dreams when they do not deserve it more? Finally why should they do so when their more fortunate brethren if they were in their position (the
position of the excluded) would demand in the same way that they do – for an unconditional basic income, that will free them to pursue at least some version of their dreams?

Comprehensive Theories of the Good

To answer these questions I believe it is necessary to return to comprehensive conceptions of the good. Intuitively it seems repulsive that individuals should be allowed to live off the public dollar while others work long hard hours to keep society running. This is why Rawls and White seek to make non-perfectionism compatible with welfare work requirements. This project as we have seen is bound to fail. A hierarchical world will cause many losers who will justifiably demand redress for the unfair condition. The task is to come up with principles of justice that acknowledges this fundamental unfairness while at the same time requiring work.

To begin with, however, the non-perfectionism of Rawls and White cannot escape the entanglements of a comprehensive moral doctrine. As we have seen their problem stems from Kant’s inability to show why individuals should be reasonable. Why should they not place duties on others that they are not willing to carry themselves? Additionally, the original position is limited to individuals who already agree that the liberties and resources of society should not be distributed in an arbitrary manner. Rawls justifies this limitation by arguing that there must be an “overlapping consensus” between individuals for a successful society to form.

According to Joseph Raz in “Facing Diversity: The Case of Epistemic Abstinence”, Rawls is committed to a “strongly autonomous political theory” meaning that the theory
does not have to find its justification in any non-political moral considerations. Weakly autonomous theories are part of a comprehensive conception of the good that accepts “the existence of irreducibly many intrinsic goods, virtues and values”. Since Rawls’ theory rejects the use of comprehensive conceptions of the good in the justification of political morality, his theory would have to be considered a strongly autonomous theory. (Raz, 1990, p. 22).

If we had a conflict of values between Rawls’ principles and an individual’s own conception of the good, which set of principles would hold? A person, for example, who believes that religion x should be the state religion would argue that Rawls’ principles of justice conflict with his religious values. In such a situation, which set of values should be considered more important? Rawls would argue that his principles of justice should be the rule in this case because values that conflict with his principles are conflicting with the “very conditions that make fair social cooperation possible on a footing of mutual respect” (Raz, 1990, p. 23).

Raz presents a dilemma for Rawls’ view: if the principles of justice are necessary only in that they make “fair social cooperation possible” it could be argued that one should be allowed to practice values that are in conflict with these principles so long as they do not interfere with the goals of fair social cooperation. The government, for example, could promote work as an important part of a good person’s life, thus promoting a comprehensive conception of the good and violating Rawls’ principles of justice but would still be promoting fair social cooperation (Raz, 1990, p. 24).

On the other hand, Rawls’ could argue that fair social cooperation entails adherence to his principles of justice. Therefore, the government would be unjust in promoting work
as part of a good life because such an action would be unfair to those who did not consider work to be essential to a good life. Thus the principles of justice are always supreme because any conflicting principles would be necessarily unfair. Rawls here though is begging the question because he has not shown why his conception of justice should always be supreme regardless of other moral considerations (such as the moral integrity of citizens). To give an explanation of this, however, he would have to provide an account of a comprehensive conception of the good that showed why his principles were the best for a society, but such an explanation would require him to give up his commitment to a strongly autonomous theory (Raz, 1990, p. 24). Either way then Raz shows that this dilemma forces Rawls to accept a comprehensive conception of the good.

Non-neutral Anti-perfectionism

Thus, the non-perfectionist dream of total neutrality between conceptions of the good is a project that is bound to fail, it must be at least weakly autonomous and thus related to a certain conception of the good. This conception of the good is a rather controversial one, that states we must tolerate vastly different lifestyles no matter how corrosive those lifestyles are to the moral ecology of our society.

That this conception of the good should be favored by what comes out of the original position should not be surprising according to George because it is in the very nature of the veil of ignorance that it is not neutral towards conceptions of the good. According to George, a rational individual does not follow a conception of the good because it is his but because it is a correct conception of the good. Therefore he will give up his conception of the good if he is convinced that it is wrong and will replace it with
another conception. The individuals in Rawls’ original position, however, are “radically self-interested” they do not value conceptions of the good qua “right” because they do not know what that conception is, they seek, however, to preserve it because it is theirs (George, 1993, p.136).

Such action could only be rational if we had already rejected the notion that conceptions of the good had a rational objective basis. If they had such a basis it would be clearly irrational for individuals to want to preserve their conception of the good even if it was wrong. However, if there is no objective truth to the idea that a conception could be wrong or right, then individuals do not hold conceptions of the good for rational reasons but because they seek to satisfy irrational wants (George, 1993, p. 137).

Someone who acts based on reason, however, would be able to provide an objective account that would show that a certain action was good because it had effects that were worthy of wanting. As we have seen from Macintyre’s account such objective reasons are found in a teleological account of the good. By rejecting this account, non-perfectionists have accepted their own conception of the good, one that states that individuals are doing well when they are able to do what they please so long as this does not “interfere with the rights of others” (George, 1993, p. 138).

Even if we conclude, however, that Rawls is not neutral on conceptions of the good, but favors the liberal non-perfectionist conception of the good, more is needed to justify work requirements. Rawls’ non-perfectionism prevents him from arguing that an individual who refuses to work is living a deficient life, to justify enforcing work then he must show that such an individual is interfering with the rights of others. As I have
shown, however, this account fails. How then do we justify enforcing the duty to work, if it seems that both non-perfectionists and perfectionists agree that it should be enforced?

Justifying Perfectionism and Justifying Work Requirements

The answer I believe, is to be found by returning to the ancient teleological conception of the good. Practical reasonableness and democratic mutual regard are not neutral concepts that are acceptable by all groups, we accept them because they are essential to the formation of a good society. Individuals must be willing to share the burdens that they want to place on others. They must not seek to impose institutions on others but should seek consensus by some fair decision calculus. These values are important because we feel that a community that is not based on fear and violence but mutual agreement is impossible without them. We value community as a good in itself and crucial to the formation of good individuals. We value good individuals because this is the highest goal of human beings- to be virtuous, to be happy, to live the best life possible.

How do we know what is the best life possible? It is not within the scope of this essay to argue about a final teleological conception of the good. However, if we argue that individuals act from reasons and not irrational wants, then we are in a position to judge whether they are acting from the right reasons. A teleological conception of the good that justifies work would have to argue then that part of the true end of human beings is to participate in social cooperation which means being a part of the labor market. It also should show that a person would not be good if he expected the society to provide for him while he refused to do his part to contribute to that society.
We can see an example of such a conception of the good from Aristotle. Human good according to him makes life self-sufficient which means that the life is “choice worthy” and “lacking nothing”. Such self-sufficiency is not just for the “solitary person” but what suffices for family and for fellow citizens because man is a “political animal” (Aristotle, Nic. Eth. VII. 8. 1097b). An individual’s good then cannot be separated from the larger community that he is a part of. He has a duty to seek a life that is not only choice worthy for himself but also for the larger society. Therefore he has a duty to do his part to cooperate with others in meeting the needs of society. If this means he must forego the life of his dreams for required work, he will still achieve the true end of humans as “political” animals.

What about the unequal burdens of society? What about the rich artist? I would argue that to the extent that he does nothing to share in the burdens of society he is living a life of vice. A moral community would do its part in promoting a vision of society as a common endeavor with a common good to encourage individuals like the rich artist to do his part- like for example teaching art to poor children. A progressive taxation system would be justified in making it easier for those who are less fortunate to have a better chance to achieve their telos and would serve as a necessary contribution of the more fortunate in the needs of their society. Society would then not only facilitate the well being of individuals but would also expect the full devotion of its citizens to the common good of the society.

Non-perfectionism as we have seen, however, could never compel an individual to give up his selfish desires, because it provides no standard that could prove that these desires are not worthy of respect. Thus we must reject non-perfectionism in order to find
the true justification for requiring work. This justification is found in an objective
standard of the good that encourages individuals to partake in the needs of a good society.
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