

## **IN FURTHER PRAISE OF IDLENESS<sup>1</sup>**

The following remarks are addressed to academic philosophers, though others may also find them instructive. What I have to say is neither new nor original. Others have made my points in other contexts. But they bear contemplating here. My topic is working culture in academic philosophy, specifically: the large number of hours one is expected to work. I will argue that this is unjust and needs to change.

### The facts

The facts of working life in academic philosophy are simple: there is always too much to do. Each element of the job – teaching, including the pastoral care of students; administration; and research – could expand to take up all the time available. In addition, there are competing pressures to prioritise each of these elements over the others.

Jobs in academia are still gained primarily on the basis of one's research. The ability to teach, and willingness and the capacity to carry out administrative work, are also important. But it's one's research that makes or breaks a job application. Once in post, gaining tenure or a permanent post, and being promoted requires publications and the successful acquisition of grant money. The UK's 'Research Excellence Framework' (REF) – a periodic, national assessment of the quality of everyone's research, which determines the amount of research funding allocated to one's department – exerts further pressure on us to spend our time on research. As UK academics will know, the REF now also includes a mark for the 'impact' of the department's research on the culture at large, beyond academia. This has led to a new sort of work, parasitic on conducting research, wherein one must cast around for a non-academic partner who will take up one's ideas, and do so during the REF assessment period. Most UK grant applications also now require an explanation of how one is going to ensure that the research one proposes to conduct will have impact. Being a successful researcher also requires one to travel around, presenting one's work at

conferences, workshops, research seminars, and to anyone else who will listen. Then there are tasks such as reviewing journal submissions and book proposals, assessing book manuscripts, running journals, organising conferences, workshops, and other research meetings. These tasks are not, strictly speaking, compulsory. But if one wants one's work to be published, someone will have to review it, and it's thus only fair that each of us take on a certain amount of refereeing work. Similarly, if one wants to present one's work at conferences and so on, someone has got to organise them. And of course, it does not hurt to have any of these activities listed on one's CV.

There is also the scope to spend all one's time engaged in teaching-related activities. Again, there is pressure to do just this. For the conscientious amongst us, there is the sheer sense of responsibility for the young minds we have been paid to educate. For others, there are the periodic assessments of teaching quality. Much has been said in the recent UK media about the 'new context' wherein students must now pay up to £9,000 a year for a university education, and the new importance this must place on teaching. (Although, personally, and just for the record, it's a poor teacher who is swayed by considerations of how much one's students are paying.) But whatever the motivating factor, the tasks associated with teaching are legion. Writing a new course takes months, as one must design the syllabus, read and digest the relevant literature, and then find a way to communicate the essential points to one's students. Once written, any course can be endlessly revised and updated. Assessments must be devised. Course materials – booklets, reading lists, webpages, reading packs, etc. – must be prepared. Classes must be given. Student queries must be answered, by email and telephone. Meetings must be held with individual students who require further help, or who wish to talk through their ideas. Assessments must be assessed. Feedback on assessment must be provided. In addition, some of one's students will encounter difficulties that interfere with their work – illness, personal problems, and so forth. Helping them with these things can also take up a lot of time.

The third component of the job – at least in the UK – is administration. This is constituted by the tasks that must be completed to keep the department up and running. The pressure here is obvious (although it has to be said – some folk are more susceptible to it than others): failure to carry out administrative work means that the department will grind to a halt. Continued failure to do so will eventually mean that the department – and one's job – will disappear. My own role for the last few years has been admissions tutor. I set entry criteria; read syllabuses every time an exam board designs a new qualification; scrutinise applications; interview applicants; answer queries by telephone and email; meet and talk to interested parties at open days, campus tour days, and on an *ad hoc* basis for those who cannot attend any of the open days; read and respond to the odd government consultation; organise school liaison activities; etc. If I failed to carry out my duties, we would have no students to teach, and the university would make my colleagues and me redundant. Needless to say, dealing with admissions matters takes up an enormous amount of time. My colleagues dealing with other administrative duties are similarly encumbered.

No doubt others will have much to add to the list of pressures and tasks I have outlined above. But I will mention just one, more general pressure here. Academia is a highly competitive field. There are too few jobs to go round. Getting in and getting on thus requires one to stand out, which means extra pressure to do all one's tasks well.

Unsurprisingly, the fact that there is always too much work to do, and tremendous pressure to do it, has an effect on the working culture in academic philosophy. It scorns the hard-won benefits obtained by unions past, who fought for work-free weekends, evenings and holidays. Instead, there is a culture of working more than nine to five, Monday to Friday. Most academic philosophers I know (and these days, I know quite a few), also work in the evenings and at the weekends. This is not just something that they do during those busy times of year such as the exam period. It's the norm, all year round. Many academics even work when they are on annual leave. I will call this, with no apology, the 'culture of over-

work'. Not only do academic philosophers work all the time, many consider this to be a good thing to do. Some even claim to enjoy it. Academic philosophers often brag to one another about how much time they spend doing their work. No doubt there are many reasons why this is so. Perhaps they think it demonstrates commitment to the job, or that one's subject comes naturally to one. Perhaps they feel a need to justify being paid to read and write about such arcane matters as the reference of 'that'. I don't know. The important upshot, however, is that the amount of work one is expected to complete is determined by the amount that others get done. Since the norm is to work week days, in the evenings and at the weekends – and as explained above, there is *always* more work that one can do – the expected workload is in line with this practice.

#### An initial worry

Before I present my main argument for the claim that the working culture disadvantages people in certain ways, I want to deal with a difficulty that may immediately strike the reader. A career in academic philosophy is one of the best jobs our society has to offer. Academic philosophers in full-time, permanent positions<sup>2</sup> are immeasurably better off than folks working for minimum wage in fast food outlets, or those who are homeless, or people in other places across the globe, such as subsistence farmers, or those whose job is to collect 'night soil'<sup>3</sup> and spread it on the fields, and so on. Given the extremely privileged position occupied by academic philosophers, one might find it obscene to claim – as I do here – that we suffer disadvantage.

However, this difficulty is not compelling. It is true that academic philosophers are immeasurably better off than other folks both in the UK and elsewhere. But one group's disadvantages are not diminished by the fact that other groups are more greatly disadvantaged. An arthritic person who finds it difficult to navigate the stairs to her home does not undergo a miraculous easing of her ailment when another person is confined to a

wheelchair and finds coping with stairs doubly difficult. It follows that any disadvantages brought about by working culture in academic philosophy do not evaporate or diminish in the face of the greater disadvantages suffered by other folks. Of course, considerations about the comparative level of disadvantage one faces may alter one's *attitude* towards it. It may bring one to be thankful for small (or, indeed, greater) mercies. One may resolve to bear one's burdens cheerfully. One's disadvantage may come to play a less important role in one's life. One may even come to see it as trivial. To return to the analogy offered above, the arthritic person who finds it difficult to walk up the stairs to her home will continue to find this difficult. But reflecting on the greater difficulties experienced by others may lead her to view her ailment as insignificant; to focus on the things she is still able to do, rather than the obstacles she faces; etc. I take it that our attitude to any disadvantages associated with a career in our field should include recognition of the fact that we, as academic philosophers, occupy a very privileged position. But I also take it that the disadvantages I am about to identify are not trivial and should not be dismissed.

### The problems

There are deep problems with the culture of over-work. For the reasons I am about to present, the culture of over-work in academic philosophy needs to change.

The first problem is that it is largely incompatible with caring responsibilities. As the name suggests, these are duties one may have to care for others. They include caring for children, disabled people, elderly people, and those suffering from illness. Discharging these responsibilities tends to involve a large number of different tasks. These can include (but are not limited to): providing love and companionship; providing food and clothing; attending to bodily needs such as washing, dressing, feeding, and administering medication; organising the person's finances; liaising with health, social and other services; in the case of children, teaching them about the world and equipping them with various life skills. It should be clear

from this list that one can discharge one's responsibilities to a greater or lesser degree, by undertaking more or fewer of the tasks required, and/or spending more or less time undertaking them. We might hold that one can discharge one's responsibilities in some minimal sense by undertaking fewer of the tasks and spending less time doing them. But by definition, this will be less than adequate. For example, one might hold that I have discharged my responsibilities towards my dog in some very minimal sense if I provide him with food, water, and access to the backyard so that he can go to the toilet, and spend an hour or two with him every day. However, I will not have *fully* - i.e., adequately - discharged my responsibilities to him unless I also take him for a walk every day, spend time playing with him, provide companionship for more than two hours a day, and also buy him toys to keep him occupied when I am not there.

I will use the term 'primary carer' to refer to the person who takes on all, or the bulk, of the caring responsibilities for someone. I will use the term 'joint carer' to refer to someone who shares the responsibilities of caring for someone equally with others. I will use the term 'non-primary carer' to refer to someone who takes on a smaller share of the caring responsibilities. Being a primary or joint carer will require one to spend a significant amount of one's evenings and weekends carrying out one's caring tasks. It follows that academic philosophy's culture of over-work, which requires one to spend one's evenings and weekends engaged in academic work, means that holding a full-time position in academic philosophy is largely incompatible with being either a primary or a joint carer. One can really only take on the role of non-primary carer. Usually, this means sharing responsibility with a partner, or paying someone to take on the bulk of the relevant tasks. I will argue that this is unjust.

First – as noted above – permanent jobs in academic philosophy are 'good' jobs. They are well-paid. Whilst I have heard more than one academic philosopher bemoaning their pay packet, let us not forget that in 2010, around 85% of UK academic were paid an

annual full-time salary of £30,870 or more; and just under 50% were paid an annual full-time salary of £41,489 or more.<sup>4</sup> To put this in context, in 2010, approximately 69% of the UK population who were in full-time work were earning less than £30,870, and approximately 86% of the UK population who were in full-time work were earning less than £41,489. Thus whilst there were a few folks in the UK who were earning vastly more money than academics (e.g., bank executives), academics - including academic philosophers - were nevertheless amongst the top earners.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the UK's academic wages are not the highest. In 2012, the average salaries for academics working in Canada, Italy, South Africa, India, the US, and Saudi Arabia were higher than those in the UK.<sup>6</sup> Jobs in academic philosophy also come with a good pension. In the UK, it's one of the few jobs that still provides a final salary scheme. In the US, there is also the added benefit of health insurance. Add to this, the fact that academic philosophers, along with academics working in other disciplines, command a certain amount of social respect: it's a position that confers an amount of privilege and authority (anyone who, upon completing their PhD, has changed their title on their bank account to 'Dr.' will know what I am talking about). A permanent academic position in philosophy brings with it a large amount of job security and opportunities for career progression. Last, but not least, work in academic philosophy can be immensely rewarding. Whilst philosophy does not interest everyone, for those who are drawn to the subject it is, in some respects, the ideal job. One is paid to spend time thinking and writing about ideas that interest one, and teaching others about them. One has a lot of control over how one divides up one's tasks, and where one works. There is much scope for developing one's skills and ample opportunity to engage in activities that afford great personal satisfaction and a sense of achievement.

The second significant point to note is the importance of family life to human well-being, which is importantly connected to justice. A person's well-being is what is good for a person. It concerns what makes their life go well for them. Many different theorists have

emphasised the importance of well-being in theories of justice, arguing that a just society is one that promotes and protects the well-being of its members, providing them with opportunities to live a life that goes well for them.<sup>7</sup> It is certainly clear that any plausible theory of justice cannot claim that well-being does not matter. Since space here is restricted, I will take it for granted that a just society will be one whose institutional practices promote and protect people's well-being. The norms governing work, including academic work, form part of a society's institutional practices. Justice thus requires that the norms governing work in philosophy should promote and protect the well-being of academic philosophers. Theories of well-being are commonly divided into three types.<sup>8</sup> Hedonist theories hold that one's life goes well if one undergoes positive mental states that outweigh any negative ones – one feels more pleasure than pain, crudely speaking. Desire-fulfilment theories claim that well-being consists in satisfying one's desires. Objective-list accounts of well-being hold that it is constituted by a set of objective factors. Typically, these will include such things as friendship and autonomy, which cannot be properly captured simply in terms of things that cause an individual pleasure, or that involve satisfying her desires.

There are grounds for holding that social life is an intrinsic component of well-being. We are social creatures, the vast majority of whom benefit on many levels from interacting with others, and developing close relationships with them. We generally find it pleasurable to spend time with others. Moreover, the pleasure we gain from our leisure activities is usually enhanced through sharing them with others.<sup>9</sup> Spending time with others is also something most of us desire to do. Objective list conceptions of well-being are more complicated. It must be explained in virtue of what something is good for a person, and so belongs on the list. An option in this regard is to claim that a thing is good for a person where it perfects, or allows an individual to develop, some aspect of human nature.<sup>10</sup> One might argue that as social creatures, opportunities to partake in social life are good for a person because they allow him to develop or perfect an aspect of his human nature.

Even if one denies that social life is intrinsic to well-being, it is certainly instrumental. Close, harmonious relationships with others tend to allow for the development of positive interpersonal traits such as 'trust in other people, tolerance of diversity, and [adherence to] norms of reciprocity'.<sup>11</sup> They also 'facilitate exchanges of information and collective action'.<sup>12</sup> These traits enable people to build stronger, more supportive social networks, which enable their members to weather crises more effectively and maintain good mental health. The interpersonal traits developed through close, harmonious personal relationships with others, and the exchanges of information and potential for collective action that they allow, have an important effect on wider society. For example, they enable greater participation in democratic processes; more supportive communities that take care of their members; and a corresponding decrease in crime.<sup>13</sup> The benefits conferred by personal relationships – time spent in pleasurable activities; greater mental health and the ability to deal with crises effectively; a harmonious and supportive society – are all either intrinsically or instrumentally important to human well-being. The personal relationships in question extend beyond those we may have with family members, but since relations with family members are potentially (although not inevitably), some of our closest ones, it is unsurprising that an adequate amount of time spent with one's family is important for the majority of people's well-being.<sup>14</sup>

The fact that work in academic philosophy is largely incompatible with caring responsibilities is part of a larger pattern, whereby the best jobs (where 'best' is defined along the lines sketched above) require long working hours and are thus largely incompatible with caring responsibilities. The effect this has is that where a family consists of two partners, it makes sense for one person to take on the bulk of the caring responsibilities, whilst the other becomes the main breadwinner. Since the better jobs are largely incompatible with the role of primary carer, the person who takes on this role is more likely to work in a job that attracts lower wages, has fewer benefits such as healthcare

and pension, is of lower social status, and involves fewer opportunities for skill acquisition and development. Conversely, the person who takes on the role of breadwinner will have much reduced opportunities to engage in family life, and so reduced scope to gain the benefits of spending time with family, and the positive impact on one's well-being that this confers.

I take it that there is nothing inevitable about our working practices in general. In particular, the culture of over-work in academic philosophy is not necessary to the field. It is not required for the production of excellent work in philosophy. It is not dictated by any natural laws. It can be changed. Philosophy's culture of over-work means that many people thinking of entering the field, or deciding whether or not to stay in it, are faced with a choice between developing a successful career in academic philosophy or taking on the role of primary carer. Whilst it is true that there are certain advantages to both options, each also brings with it, certain significant *disadvantages*. A career in academic philosophy allows precious little time for family life, whilst the role of primary carer cuts one off from the benefits of a career in the field. It is the culture of over-work that makes this choice necessary. I take it that social structures that unnecessarily disadvantage people are unjust. Since there is no good reason for maintaining the culture of over-work, it is unjust that people should be faced with this choice.

In response, one might try to argue that the sacrifices and benefits associated with each option balance each other out, so that neither option confers an overall disadvantage. But it's implausible to suppose that advantages and costs can be added up in this way. There are, e.g., advantages to having food (it provides essential nutrients for the body), and there are advantages to having water (it's essential for one's bodily processes to function). Yet the benefits and disadvantages of having food but no water, or water but no food, do not balance each other out so that if everyone has just one, then no-one has an overall disadvantage! A closely allied response is that, as we are so frequently told, one cannot have

everything. The choice between career or family is thus a reasonable one to have to make. But the obvious rejoinder is to ask *why* one cannot have everything in this context. Here, 'having everything' means achieving a satisfactory balance between one's career and one's family life, and since the culture of over-work is not inevitable, there is no good reason why this balance cannot be achieved. To force people to continue to choose between a career in academic philosophy and taking on the role of primary carer is thus unjust.

The injustice is compounded by the fact that there is a gendered dimension to the wider pattern of which academic philosophy is a part. In heterosexual relationships, which are still the predominant sort in the UK and in many other places, it is more often the woman who takes on the bulk of the caring responsibilities, both for children and for older/disabled/sick people, whilst the man becomes the main breadwinner.<sup>15</sup> The result is that more women work in jobs that attract lower wages, fewer benefits such as healthcare and pensions, are of lower social status, and offer fewer opportunities for skill acquisition and development. Dependency on a male wage-earner also renders women more vulnerable to domestic violence, insofar as financial dependency makes it more difficult to escape an abusive situation. If a couple gets divorced, the woman is more likely to become impoverished, as court settlements tend to divide the family's wealth in accordance with the relative amounts of paid work each person has undertaken. Mothers are also more likely to be awarded custody of children. Women in this situation must still carry out their responsibilities of care - in fact, they will now have more care work to do, since they are no longer sharing any of it with a partner - and thus still face a significant obstacle to taking on one of society's better jobs. At the same time, they lack the same level of financial support they were previously receiving from the male breadwinner.<sup>16</sup> Conversely, more men have reduced opportunities to engage in family life as they must work long hours to support their families. If a couple gets divorced, the situation is compounded as mothers are more likely to be awarded custody of children, leaving men with even fewer opportunities to spend time

with them. A society that is structured in such a way that one's gender means that one is less able to gain a good job and more likely to end up disempowered and impoverished, or less able to engage fully in family life and reap the benefits this brings, is deeply unjust.

These are old arguments that have been put forward many times before (although not, to my knowledge, in the context of current norms governing work in academic philosophy), and a familiar objection to them can once again be raised. Whilst it is true that women still tend to take on more caring responsibilities than men, and men are more likely than women to take on the role of main breadwinner, with each being disadvantaged in the ways outlined above, this is because they *choose* to do so. Women's inferior situation when it comes to paid work, and men's reduced engagement in family life, are thus the result of individuals' choices, and this is not a matter of injustice. It follows that there is no need for any general reformation of work practices, nor is there any need for reform in the specific case of academic philosophy.

However, where one social group tends to do x more than another, an explanation in terms of individuals' choices should be a last resort. The fact that it is members of *this* social group and not *that* one who tend to choose to do x is something that stands in *prima facie* need of explanation. Of course, it may turn out that there is no underlying factor that explains this pattern, but this has to be shown, and cannot simply be assumed. It follows that competing explanations must first be ruled out before we can accept one that appeals solely to individuals' choices.

An obvious explanation for why women tend to take on the bulk of caring responsibilities, whilst men tend to take on the role of main breadwinner, is the existence of gender norms that link caring for others with femininity, and financially supporting one's family with masculinity. The existence of such norms raises problems for the view that the gendered division of labour is merely a matter of individual choice, and as such, there is no need for any reform of working practices in philosophy or elsewhere. It may well be that

women choose to take on the role of primary carer more often than men, and men choose to be the main breadwinner more often than women. But one's choices are always constrained by the options available to one. One's options will be determined in part, by social norms and expectations, which are beyond one's individual control. The presumption that women will shoulder the bulk of caring responsibilities means that when the need to care for someone arises, it is female academics (or would-be academics) rather than male philosophers, who are more likely to be faced with choosing between a career in academic philosophy or taking on the role of primary carer. Moreover, since it is assumed that this task will fall to women rather than to men, a woman faced with this choice may often be making it in a context where it is assumed that she is the only candidate for this role. If she does not take it on, either no-one will, or the family will have to arrange for the necessary tasks to be undertaken by a professional carer. The woman is likely to find the former option morally repugnant, whilst the latter may be unaffordable, or otherwise unattractive. Similarly, many men desire to spend more time with their families – 82% of men in full-time work in the UK expressed this desire.<sup>17</sup> However, the fact that women are still expected to be the primary carers means that workplace policies enabling men to take on more care responsibilities are not nearly so well-developed or effectively implemented as those aimed at women.<sup>18</sup> The fact that it is harder for men to take on the role of primary or joint carer means that it makes more financial sense for the man to take on the role of family breadwinner. Thus whilst it may be true that men and women *choose* to take on the role of main breadwinner and primary carer, respectively, they do not choose the social context which places this choice before them, and it is facts about this social context which explain the gendered division of labour.

Moreover, even if there were no gender dimension to the division between breadwinners and carers, the fact would remain that people are having to choose between a career in academic philosophy or taking on the role of primary carer, and as I have argued,

both options confer significant disadvantages. Since social structures that unnecessarily disadvantage people are unjust, and since there is no good reason for maintaining the culture of over-work necessitating the choice, it is unjust that people should be faced with this choice. Working practices in academic philosophy need to change.

Of course, not all (would-be) academic philosophers have any caring responsibilities. One might suppose, from my argument so far, that only those shouldering such burdens should be exempt from the culture of over-work. But this is not my view. There is another significant reason why I think the culture of over-work should change: the norms governing working practices in academic philosophy do not allow for what I consider to be an adequate amount of leisure time, i.e., time outside working hours spent – not on work – but on recreational activities of one’s own choosing. I take it that it is reasonable to demand leisure time on the grounds that leisure is essential for well-being, and well-being is importantly connected to justice.

A case can be made for holding that leisure is an intrinsic component of well-being, no matter which conception of well-being one endorses. People’s leisure activities tend to bring them pleasure. People generally desire to engage in various sorts of recreational activities, such as playing in bands, skateboarding, decorating their homes, spending time with friends, and so on. Turning to objective list conceptions of well-being, I noted earlier that one might hold that a thing is good for a person – and belongs on the objective list – where it perfects, or allows an individual to develop, some aspect of human nature. If one holds that play is a part of human nature, then one might hold that opportunities to engage in play, i.e., leisure time, are good for a person as they allow her to develop an aspect of her human nature.

Even if one balks at the claim that leisure is an intrinsic component of well-being, it is indisputable that it is instrumentally essential for one’s life to go well. Health is an intrinsic component of well-being, no matter which theory of well-being one adopts, and leisure time

is important for health. Numerous studies have demonstrated that working long hours has a negative impact on human health. It has been associated with increased risk of diabetes,<sup>19</sup> cardiovascular disease,<sup>20</sup> hypertension,<sup>21</sup> chronic infections,<sup>22</sup> and depression.<sup>23</sup> A study conducted by the Mental Health Foundation established that people who work long hours are subject to increased work-related stress.<sup>24</sup> The correlation between stress and illness is well-established. (It may explain – at least in part – the findings listed above.) To give just a few examples, Spurgeon and colleagues found a direct correlation between prolonged work-related stress and increased risk of mental health problems.<sup>25</sup> Jacobs and Charles discovered that children suffering from cancer had often been subjected to higher levels of stress prior to the onset of their illness than those experienced by healthy children.<sup>26</sup> Cohen and colleagues found that stress rendered people more likely to develop colds.<sup>27</sup> A study conducted by Rawson and colleagues on college students established a correlation between stress and illness.<sup>28</sup> Some very recent research conducted by Unternaehrer and colleagues provided evidence in favour of a link between stress and increased risk of both mental and physical illness by showing that stress alters the activity of certain genes known to have a role in controlling stress.<sup>29</sup> The effects on health are compounded by the fact that people work longer hours at the expense of participating in other activities, such as: exercise; quality time with a partner; friends and social activities; hobbies; and entertainment. Moreover, the other activities that drop out of life when one works long hours have been shown to promote good mental health, helping people recover more quickly from, and increasing their resilience to mental health problems. In addition, there is a correlation between working long hours and substantially increased risk of occupational injury – an effect that is not due to an association between longer working hours and riskier jobs.<sup>30</sup> Working shorter hours enhances one's health, and to work shorter hours is to have time outside work to spend on recreational activities, i.e., leisure time. Thus leisure is instrumentally essential for well-being as it enhances one's health.

At this point, one might wonder how much leisure time is essential for well-being. This is an empirical question, and answering it in full is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, there are reasons to think that the amount of leisure time I have demanded here – evenings and weekends – is justified. (Indeed, it is very likely that my demand is too modest. But I will not try to establish that here.) The demand that one’s evenings and weekends be free from academic work is the demand for an eight-hour working day, or forty-hour working week. On the whole, the studies that demonstrate an association between long working hours and poor mental and physical health look at people working sixty or more hours a week. The working culture in academic philosophy means that people will regularly notch up sixty or more hours a week. Since working sixty or more hours a week increases one’s chances of illness or injury, there are grounds for demanding a reduction in the amount of hours one is expected to spend on academic work. Moreover, the reduction must be significant enough to make a difference, by which I mean that it must be a large enough reduction to provide individuals with sufficient time to relax, spend time with their loved ones, and/or pursue whichever recreational activities give them enjoyment. I take it that whilst a reduction of one or two hours would clearly be too small, there is no determinate answer to the question of what constitutes a sufficiently large reduction in working hours. My demand for a *forty*-hour (rather than, say, a thirty-five or twenty-hour) working week is thus, in a sense, arbitrary. However, many different labour movements around the world have fought for the eight-hour day, and it is in line with what the international Labour Organisation – the United Nations agency concerned with international labour standards – considers to be acceptable working hours. Furthermore, it is modest, when compared to the standards suggested by others. Russell, e.g., famously argued for a four-hour working day as standard.<sup>31</sup> More recently, the New Economics Foundation – a UK think tank – has suggested that twenty-one hours of work per week will leave us all happier and healthier.<sup>32</sup> The upshot of these considerations is that the leisure time afforded by a

forty-hour working week can be thought of as essential for well-being. If others want to argue for a further reduction in working hours, that is fine by me.

One might respond that, for many academic philosophers, engaging in leisure activities does not increase their well-being. Instead, they gain more reward and satisfaction from working long hours. Their well-being is thus promoted, not by the forty-hour working week that I favour, but by the culture of over-work. For those people, the change I am proposing would therefore be unjust. It is, of course, *possible* that many academic philosophers are of this ilk. However, a satisfactory theory of well-being must be about people's *actual* preferences. Absent any reason for thinking that academic philosophers are significantly different from other folks, the research that establishes a link between adequate leisure time and well-being can be taken to apply to academic philosophers too. Thus even if it could be shown that some academic philosophers' well-being is best promoted by the culture of over-work, I take it that the majority will benefit from a change to current working practices. Neither should this be considered a tyranny of the majority. I am not asking people to give up academic philosophy altogether, simply to restrict the hours they spend engaging in it. It is not clear to me that thus restricting the hours people spend working will have a significant negative impact on the well-being of those who enjoy working longer hours. Moreover, what I am arguing needs to change is the culture of over-work, which *expects* people to spend all their time engaged in academic work, and *rewards* them if they do. If it were no longer expected that people worked such long hours, and the people who chose to do so were not rewarded for so doing, I would have no problem with people spending their leisure time engaged in academic work. (Although I must admit that I am deeply sceptical about the possibility of unhitching expectations and rewards from practice in this way.)

One might object at this point that the culture of over-work is not unique to academic philosophy. Other good jobs in our society – such as lawyer, doctor, CEO, etc. –

have similar working conditions. There seems to be no reason why academic philosophers should have more favourable working conditions than these other jobs. However, even though this is true, the objection is not compelling. The fact that other good jobs in our society are also characterised by the culture of over-work does *not* mean that there should be no reform of this culture in academic philosophy. Instead, reform is needed in these other professions too. Like academic philosophy, people are disadvantaged in the ways outlined by having to choose between a career in these fields, or taking on the roles of primary or joint carer. These jobs also fail to properly promote people's well-being by providing inadequate leisure time. The fact that other good jobs in our society suffer from the same problems as academic philosophy does not make these problems disappear. Indeed, it makes them more pressing. Furthermore, it is plausible to think that reforming working culture in one field will help reform it in others. Ending the culture of over-work in academic philosophy is thus likely to aid in ending it elsewhere too.

#### The solution?

The matter is, in one sense, very simple: the culture of over-work needs to be reformed and a forty-hour working week instituted as the norm. In practice, things are more complicated.

Reforming the culture of over-work will involve changing expectations about workload, and what is demanded of academic philosophers by university managers. Given the immediate urgency of teaching and administrative duties, the only point of 'give' in many people's schedules is research. If academic philosophers are to continue teaching to the best of their abilities, carrying out their administrative tasks efficiently, and producing excellent research, some adjustment must be made to either the teaching and/or the administrative load.

The rewards for partaking in the culture of over-work must also be removed. These rewards include: gaining entry to the profession; progressing within it; obtaining research

funding allowing one uninterrupted periods of time to engage in the projects that interest one, and furthering one's career prospects in the process; and achieving international fame and glory for one's philosophical work. Unhitching these rewards from the culture of over-work will involve changes to the way that applications for jobs, promotion, and research funding are handled. Those sitting on committees assessing such applications must somehow ensure that over-work is not valued. They must, in other words, form a conception of how much someone can reasonably be expected to achieve, working a forty-hour week, and then evaluate people's applications accordingly, so the applications of those who have achieved more through over-work are not rated more highly. To some extent, this will be a matter of valuing quality over quantity. Since it is already recognised that people work at different speeds – some folks seemingly publish a paper a week, whilst others (such as myself) scratch away revising some paragraph over the course of several months – committees already wrestle with the problem of weighing quality against quantity, when judging philosophical work. Thus the change to their procedures that I am advocating may not be as great as it first seems. Nevertheless, it is clear that making this change would not be very easy. Applications must be judged fairly. It is compelling to think that of two candidates whose profiles are the same, except that one has published a book and five papers, whilst the other has published two papers, the former has to be rated more highly.

In the case of career progression, I have often heard people remark – sometimes with astonishment, as if it had never occurred to them to consider the gendered history of the academy – on the fact that the time most crucial to developing one's career strangely coincides with one's prime reproductive years (a problem that is most pressing for those of us with ovaries). There are unspoken rules concerning a person's 'sell-by date' – the number of years that may reasonably elapse between obtaining one's PhD and gaining an academic position; the length of time it should take one to obtain sufficient research funding, publish sufficient work, and so on to be considered a leader in one's field; etc. This phenomenon

contributes to the culture of over-work as people work all the hours providence sends to establish themselves before starting families. A way to mitigate this effect would be to alter expectations about career trajectory. This is already happening to some extent, with many institutions recognising breaks in one's career caused by having children. However, these measures do not yet go far enough, as they fail to make proper allowances for the continuing impact of caring responsibilities on one's academic career.

It is sometimes claimed that the situation can be rectified by allowing more flexible working conditions, such as: working from home; the possibility of switching to part-time work; the ability to organise one's own schedule so that one can fit the designated number of work hours around one's other commitments. Whilst these are all good measures that should be generally available, as far as possible, it is not clear that they will be sufficient to resolve the problems I have identified with academic philosophy's culture of over-work. Working from home, and flexible working hours are already *de rigeur* in most philosophy departments. Working from home cuts down on time spent commuting, and allows one to engage in some limited supervision of children and dependent relatives. However, caring for dependent others typically demands more interaction than this, which is incompatible with engaging in academic work. One cannot write a paper, and at the very same time, wash one's elderly aunt. One can, of course, *think* about the paper one is writing or *talk* about it with one's elderly aunt whilst washing her, but this is not the same thing as actually committing one's thoughts to the page. Similarly, one cannot teach one's child multiplication tables, or the niceties of etiquette, whilst reading – at the very same time – the latest paper on Aristotelian metaphysics. The most one can do is attempt to engage in both tasks during the same period, turning one's attention from one to the other and back again. Needless to say, this will hinder completion of both. The capacity to organise one's own time is one of the privileges of work in academic philosophy. One can stay up all night writing about Hannah Arendt if one so wishes, then spend the next day in bed. Whilst this does make it

easier to organise one's schedule around caring for others, the problem is that one must still work a large number of hours, during which, one will be unable to undertake caring responsibilities. Part-time work is obviously far more conducive to taking on the role of primary or joint carer. However, I cannot help thinking that this measure fails to get to the heart of the issue. Part-time workers gain fewer career benefits – their wages are smaller, career progression is often more difficult, and so on. Given that there is no inevitability to the culture of over-work, it is unclear to me why people should have to bear the costs in reduced career benefits, in order to solve the dilemma of balancing work and family/leisure time.

The culture of over-work persists primarily because academic philosophers work long hours. If all of us started to work a forty-hour week, expectations about workload made by university managers would have to alter. Applications for jobs, promotions, and research funding would all reflect what can be achieved working such hours, and committees evaluating these applications would not be faced with the difficult task of unhitching reward from over-work. Since the culture of over-work is unjust, academic philosophers each have a duty to work no more than forty hours a week. Reform begins with us. Collective action is important, or else some colleagues will end up shouldering an increased burden caused by others' refusal to work evenings and weekends. Each academic philosopher must therefore become a militant idler, and spread the word as widely as possible.

### Conclusion

Academic philosophy is characterised by a culture of over-work. This is unjust for two important reasons: it forces many people to choose between a career in academic philosophy and taking on the role of primary carer, and it does not allow for adequate time away from work to spend on leisure activities. The culture of over-work in academic philosophy thus needs to change. Individual philosophers therefore have a duty to partake in

collective action, putting down their pens and closing their laptops, once the forty-hour week is done.

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<sup>1</sup> I'd like to thank [names removed to preserve anonymity] for kindly reading an earlier draft of this paper and providing very helpful suggestions.

<sup>2</sup> Ironically, the same cannot be said of most temporary positions in academic philosophy. Some temporary lecturers are paid by the hour. Time spent on preparation and marking is not properly acknowledged. Temporary lecturers may have to travel long distances to reach the workplace – which eats further into their paltry wages. Other temporary staff are nominally employed for the year, but receive no pay during the long summer holiday. Temporary staff typically have a larger-than-normal teaching load, and may also find themselves overburdened with administrative work. This leaves them little time for research, thus making it difficult to reach the next rung of the ladder and secure a permanent position. The treatment of temporary lecturers is scandalous and needs to be reformed. See British Philosophical Association, *Improving Careers: Philosophers in Non-Permanent Employment in the UK* (British Philosophical Association, 2010). Retrieved from <http://www.bpa.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/phillips-improving-careers.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> “Night soil” is human excrement. It is still collected and used as fertilizer in some parts of India, despite a law banning the practice. Those who collect it belong to the lowest strata of society, so low they are not even considered to be part of the caste system. See F. Wilson, *Dalit Empowerment* (New Delhi: ISPCK, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> UK. Higher Education Statistics Agency. 2012. Retrieved from [http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=2429&Itemid=278](http://www.hesa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=2429&Itemid=278)

<sup>5</sup> UK Government Equalities Office. National Equality Panel Report 60. *An Anatomy of Economic Inequality in the UK*, 2010. Retrieved from <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/28344/1/CASereport60.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> P. Altbach, L. Reisberg, M. Yudkevich, G. Androushchak, I. Pacheco. *Paying the Professoriate: A Global Comparison of Compensation and Contracts* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>7</sup> The connection is perhaps most prominent in the capability approach pioneered by Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum. See, e.g., A. Sen, “Capability and Well-being,” in M. Nussbaum and A. Sen,

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eds., *The Quality of Life*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), and M. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: the Capabilities Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> The tripartite division is offered in D. Parfit, *Reasons and Persons*, reprint with corrections (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987). It is not free from criticism. A particularly illuminating discussion is G. Fletcher, "A Fresh Start for the Objective-List Theory of Well-Being," *Utilitas* 25, no. 2 (June 2013): 206—220. The worries raised have no impact on the discussion here, so I set them aside.

<sup>9</sup> D. Kahneman, A. B. Krueger, "Developments in the Measure of Subjective Well-Being," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 20, no. 1 (2006): 19—20.

<sup>10</sup> An example of this sort of theory can be found in T. Hurka, *Perfectionism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) which proposes that things are good for a person if they allow her to perfect human nature.

<sup>11</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-Operation, *How's Life? Measuring Well-Being* (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2011), 170.

<sup>12</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-Operation, *How's Life? Measuring Well-Being*, 170.

<sup>13</sup> R. Putnam, *Bowling Alone* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2001). D. Halpern, *Social Capital* (Oxford: Polity Press, 2004).

<sup>14</sup> Organisation for Economic Co-Operation, *How's Life? Measuring Well-Being*, 124.

<sup>15</sup> Working Families, *Working and Fathers: Combining Family Life and Work* (London: Working Families, 2011). Retrieved from [http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/admin/uploads/WF\\_WorkingAndFathers-Report-FINAL.pdf](http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/admin/uploads/WF_WorkingAndFathers-Report-FINAL.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> J. Williams, *Unbending Gender* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>17</sup> A. Park, R. Curtice, K. Thomson, M. Phillips, M. Johnson, *British Social Attitudes, the 23<sup>rd</sup> Report: Perspectives on a Changing Society* (London: the National Centre for Social Research, 2007).

<sup>18</sup> Working Families, *Working and Fathers: Combining Family Life and Work*.

<sup>19</sup> N. Kawakami, S. Araki, N. Takatsuka, "Overtime, psychosocial working conditions, and occurrence of non-insulin dependent diabetes mellitus in Japanese men," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 53 (1999): 359—63.

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