EDICIONES COMPLUTENSE

Las Torres de Lucca. Revista internacional de filosofía política
ISSN: 2255-3827 • e-ISSN: 2255-3827

ARTÍCULOS

Neoliberal values and the workplace: a way forward through capabilities and care

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https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/ltdl.93247 Recibido: 24/12/2023 • Aceptado: 22/10/2024 • Publicado: 13/01/2025

ENG **Abstract:** The neoliberal reality of the past 40 years has caused changes in the workplace, restricting people's freedom and compromising their well-being, often not allowing them to develop their human abilities in the way they choose to. This paper focuses on a neglected aspect of neoliberalism that contributes to this problem: the orientation of the core values of neoliberalism. I contend that the value system of neoliberalism is structured on what can be characterized as 'male' values, and this leads to a fragmentation of the labour experience, altering the lived experience of work for the vast majority of people. I argue that to reverse this state of affairs, a fundamental shift in our values is required that goes beyond just implementing policies and changing wage relations. Some important insights for this shift can be found in the capabilities approach and the ethics of care.
Keywords: Neoliberalism, Care Ethics, Capabilities approach, work, labour, values.

ES Valores neoliberales y lugar de trabajo: un camino a seguir a través de las capacidades y el cuidado

Resumen: La realidad neoliberal de los últimos 40 años ha provocado cambios en el lugar de trabajo que han restringido la libertad de las personas y han comprometido su bienestar, impidiéndoles a menudo desarrollar sus capacidades humanas de la manera que ellas eligen. Este artículo se centra en un aspecto descuidado del neoliberalismo que contribuye a este problema: la orientación de los valores centrales del neoliberalismo. Mi argumento es que el sistema de valores del neoliberalismo está estructurado sobre lo que puede caracterizarse como valores 'masculinos' y esto conduce a una fragmentación de la experiencia laboral que altera la experiencia vivida del trabajo para la gran mayoría de las personas. Sostengo que para revertir este estado de cosas se requiere un cambio fundamental en nuestros valores que vaya más allá de la mera implementación de políticas y el cambio de las relaciones salariales. Algunas ideas importantes para este cambio pueden encontrarse en el enfoque de las capacidades y la ética del cuidado.
Palabras clave: Neoliberalismo, ética del cuidado, enfoque de las capacidades, trabajo, mano de obra, valores.

How to cite/Cómo citar: Vintiadis, Elly (2025). Neoliberal values and the workplace: a way forward through capabilities and care. *Las Torres de Lucca 14*(1), 99-110. https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/ltdl.93247

Acknowledgements: I owe great thanks to Marianna Vintiadis, who not only enlightened me on the thought of Adam Smith but also introduced me to the passages quoted in this paper. Thank you also to Giovanni Dosi, who, along with Marianna Vintiadis, have discussed these issues with me over the years and often helped me understand aspects of problems that I initially did not see.

In a world that for the past four decades has followed a neoliberal economic and political model, we face a bleak reality of economic crises, spiraling inequality and an unprecedented environmental crisis. One of the things that has changed is the workplace, where work conditions have come to restrict our freedom and

compromise our well-being, often not allowing us to develop our human abilities in the way we see fit. This paper will focus on a neglected aspect of neoliberalism that, as I will argue, contributes to this problem: the orientation of the core values of neoliberalism.

In the first two parts of the paper, I will lay out the basic tenets of neoliberalism and argue that the value system of neoliberalism as an ordering principle of the social system is structured on what can be characterized as 'male' values, e.g., competitiveness, autonomy and pursuit of individual success. In the next (third) section, I will discuss how, beyond its other consequences, neoliberalism has changed the workplace leading to a fragmentation of the labour experience where the lived reality of the majority is very different from that of the elite few and the burdens lifted from some towards a life of more opportunity and freedom are placed on the shoulders of others leading to increased inequality and a decreased quality of life. In the two sections after that, I will address this problem based on the capabilities approach and the ethics of care and will conclude by arguing that to reverse this state of affairs, a fundamental shift in our values is required, which goes beyond just implementing policies and changing wage relations.

Neoliberalism

Though the term neoliberalism is notoriously hard to pin down, at its core lies the idea that an unregulated market economy is the best way to achieve individual freedom, justice and economic growth (Parekh & Wilcox, 2020). The central idea is that market self-regulation through the introduction of free trade policies increases opportunities for innovation, prosperity, and trade for businesses and individuals.

In the welfare state capitalism of the post-war era, many governments tried to reduce inequalities by nationalizing public utilities and introducing social welfare policies. On their part, workers unionized and achieved increases in wages (Judt, 2010). However, with the shift to neoliberal economics that aims to make the private sector more efficient and profitable, social spending was reduced, tax reductions for large business owners were introduced, trade unions were rendered effectively powerless, and deregulation and privatization of public assets were encouraged and promoted (Harvey, 2005).

Neoliberalism can also be identified with political conservatism, and though it draws on ideas rooted in 18th century liberalism, where equality and autonomy are the highest ideals, these ideals are, arguably, misunderstood by proponents of the neoliberal approach. Still, the core of traditional liberal economic thought lies in the foundations of neoliberalism. Firstly, people should be as free from government interference as possible in order to be able to pursue their interests, and secondly, the free individual who transacts voluntarily with other free individuals remains the proper unit of analysis. One thing that distinguishes neoliberalism from liberalism, however, is that its scope is much broader, applying to areas that were not traditionally considered part of the economic domain, like healthcare and education. This ties to another aspect of neoliberalism which is that the state increasingly offloads responsibilities to families, in the sense that what families can provide, possibly through more work, the state does not need to provide. In the case of education in the US, for example, students depend on their families for opportunities, which not only compromises their autonomy (if parents pay for college, they have a say in what and where you study) but also sustains existing inequalities. In the context of care work, this has contributed to the care crisis with care becoming privatized and commodified and social welfare being minimized, leaving families and communities to shoulder the burden of care in one way or another (Fraser, 2016). In this state of what Harvey (2005) calls the *commodification of everything* under neoliberalism, the market-based rationale of competition becomes the organizing principle for all spheres of social life as well as the guiding principle in the allocation of all goods, including labour and the labourer himself. One's labour, as well as the lived experience of the worker, has instrumental value only insofar as it affects the commodity produced.

However, despite the fact that the neoliberal narrative is supposed to fall back on economic liberalism, this is not exactly the case. In fact, the type of labour market that Adam Smith envisioned when he proposed the free-market economy was one where the power of individual agents was equal. This is a fundamental tenet of competition theory: no one should be able to control the market (or the rules that regulate it) on their own. Instead, competition occurs in markets that are regulated by a set of rules respected by equal competing agents. So, though neoliberalism strongly promotes the idea of a diminished state role in unregulated markets in which competition rules and opportunities abound, the truth is that markets are regulated and operate within set parameters. The real question, therefore, is what these regulations and parameters are, who sets them, and who ultimately gains from them. This is something that Adam Smith understood very well because he recognized that class differences lead to power differences, which in turn lead to rules that favor wealthy capitalists. As he put it, 'the masters combine',[1] and this gives rise to a significantly different labour market from the level playing field that the neoliberal narrative suggests.

[1] "...The masters... can combine much more easily: and the law, besides, authorises, or at least does not prohibit, their combinations, while it prohibits those of the workmen. We have no acts of parliament against combining to lower the price of work, but many against combining to raise it. In all such disputes, the masters can hold out much longer. A landlord, a farmer, a master manufacturer, or merchant ... could generally live a year or two upon the stocks, which they have already acquired. Many workmen could not subsist ...without employment. In the long run, the workman may be as necessary to his master as his master is to him; but the necessity is not so immediate. We rarely hear, it has been said, of the combinations of masters, though frequently of those of workmen. But whoever imagines, upon this account, that masters rarely combine, is as ignorant of the world as of the subject. Masters are always and everywhere in a sort of tacit, but constant and uniform, combination, not to raise the wages of labour above their actual rate. [...] We seldom, indeed, hear of this combination, because it is the usual, and, one may say, the natural state of things, which nobody ever hears of [....] Whenever the legislature attempts to regulate the differences between masters and their workmen, its counsellors are always the masters. [...] When masters combine together, in order to reduce the wages of their

More recently, Hyman (2001) has argued that the 'visible hand' that today moves marketization and takes apart social regulation are powerful multinational corporations. Indeed, one can go as far as to say that neoliberalism is not about free markets but, rather, about the free reign of capital, and a key feature of monopoly capitalism is lobbying to change the rules and to reduce the powers of those in charge of making sure the rules are observed. Thatcher, one of the most (in)famous proponents of neoliberalism who is renowned for her deregulating of the financial industry and for rendering trade unions powerless, said that "there is no such thing as society. There are men and women and children and there are families" thus essentially putting forward the picture of the citizen as an individual consumer who is part of a society made up of bounded, atomized individuals (Littler, 2017). The view expressed by Thatcher is the key break with the classical tradition, where free markets were conceived as existing within the context of a society whose rules were prioritized and followed.

One can also argue that neoliberalism has not increased competition but has reduced it and has created a new breed of entrepreneur: one who sets up a company with the aim that it will be bought out by one of the giants. The company has become a commodity, and the entrepreneur has been separated from his creation. That is, part of what neoliberalism has done is to ensure that there are fewer rules and that no agency in reality has the power to enforce them –you cannot reconcile today's market giants like Facebook, Amazon, and Walmart with traditional competition theory. Indeed, it has even been suggested that restoring power and wealth to the elite is the reason why neoliberalism emerged (Harvey, 2005).

The values of neoliberalism

It has been argued that neoliberalism does not have a set of identifiable central values that it puts forward. Vallier (2021), for instance, argues that Friedman does not advocate for any particular ethos because, since no one knows what makes up a *good life*, this is something that each person should pursue on their own. This sounds like Mill's (1978) liberal and very progressive idea of 'experiments in living', according to which we should be open to different forms of life to see what diverse choices in life can contribute to society. However, identifying this view with Friedman's reductionist and individualist ideas would be a mistake.

Within the framework of neoliberalism, the acquisition of goods is linked to social status and wealth, and these, in turn, are tied to success. Even though the neoliberal narrative is not always presented in monetary terms directly, it is alternatively presented in terms of self-actualization: we can all be the best versions of ourselves through personal initiative, drive, and a strong work ethic. Everyone has the chance to move up the social ladder; all we have to do is go for it, and the best one will win. This is why stories like that of the rise to fame and fortune of professional basketball player Giannis Antetokoumpo are favourites –he is a purported counterexample to anyone who says that opportunity does not exist or is not equal for everyone. If he could make it with everything working against him, then anyone can, and so if you are poor, it is your fault. Like Nike's imperative, there is no excuse: Just Do It.

The values of neoliberalism may also initially appear gender-neutral, but they are not. Under neoliberalism, success is correlated with the values of individualism, autonomy, competitiveness, and excellence. The traits of neoliberal agents, who are seen as autonomous and self-contained entities distinct from rival individuals, also reflect these values. These, however, are the kinds of traits that have historically been connected to masculinity.[2] Stereotypically, while women and femininity are connected to subjectivity, passivity, dependence, intuitiveness, and weakness, men are seen as autonomous, objective, decisive, knowledgeable and strong (Lloyd, 1984; Kimmel et al., 2005). The idea of man as a provider and a rational decision-maker is also part of the ideal of masculinity, since women have historically been viewed as creatures of emotion rather than reason (Lloyd, 1984; Rooney, 1991). These connections are not, of course, exclusive to neoliberalism, but the significance of the masculine foundations of the neoliberal conception of the agent is twofold. First, by internalizing such ideas, we are led to a particular view of human interaction that has material consequences in terms of how we think it is natural to interact with each other, but also in terms of how we structure our institutions and policies. Second, conceiving agents in this way disregards or downplays the reality faced by many, even most, people worldwide.

Obviously, seeing the different genders as monolithic groups reinforces sexist beliefs since, as there is no one way to be a man, there is no one way to be a woman either. Nonetheless, each of us is a part of a web of practices and relations that, in some sense, mold our ways of being. For instance, the way our societies are currently structured, and to a large extent have been historically structured,[3] women's lives frequently

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workmen, they commonly enter into a private bond or agreement, not to give more than a certain wage, under a certain penalty. Were the workmen to enter into a contrary combination of the same kind, not to accept of a certain wage, under a certain penalty, the law would punish them very severely; and, if it dealt impartially, it would treat the masters in the same manner." (Smith, 1976, pp. 83-84, 158)

2 In the remainder of the paper I will talk of male values (or masculine values/traits), sometimes placing them in scare quotes. I use scare quotes to emphasize that there is no essentialist understanding of their association with masculinity in the view presented in this paper; these values/traits are not male in and of themselves but are such to the extent that they are stereotypically associated with men rather than women.

3 Since my argument is not about the origins or the conditions of possibility of capitalism, the question whether the values of patriarchy predated or were a result of capitalism is beyond the scope of this paper. The advent of neoliberalism found these values in place and my claim is that neoliberalism not only promotes –in the workplace and society at large– a value system that has been traditionally understood to be 'masculine', but it is also fed by it. Though this might seem circular, it is not; it just means that the two are interconnected in the maintenance of the system in a positive feedback loop.

put them in a position that result in different gender roles and behavioural inclinations. Even though men sometimes contribute, women are the ones expected to care for children, people in need, and the elderly, and to maintain households and social ties (Fraser, 2016). We thus participate in activities that require empathy, cooperation, and selflessness because of our social role as caregivers, and, as a result, we frequently concentrate on practical matters, interpersonal relationships, and the greater good. We are therefore more likely to view the world in this way. That is not to say that gender norms cannot be broken but this is the reality for many women around the world for whom it is unlikely that the notion that people are fundamentally autonomous and self-serving, as the neoliberal narrative wants us to believe, will be plausible. In this sense, the neoliberal view seems to ignore or overlook the life of those who depend on, or have duties to care for others. Moreover, seeing human interaction in terms of individualism, competition and independence can lead to inequalities because it becomes easy to objectify other people and develop a distorted sense of responsibility (Williams, 1993). If the goal of neoliberalism is to promote equality, liberty, and autonomy, however, then these ideals should apply to everyone, and, ultimately, this becomes a question of inclusivity and, also, power.

Talking of power immediately leads us to patriarchy, and patriarchy promotes what I have called 'masculine values', so there is a very real sense in which neoliberalism and patriarchy are linked. Federici (2014) has put forward a historical argument proposing that the emerging capitalist class during the transition to capitalism needed to put women in the margins of real (paid) work in order to control the conditions of reproduction of the working class, which means that women had to be policed in many ways, because without the reproduction of the working-class, accumulation of wealth on the part of capitalists is not possible. Maria Mies (1982; 2022) has argued that capitalism is a form of patriarchy and that unpaid labour and the 'housewifization' of women were necessary conditions for the capital accumulation required by capitalism. Historically, masculine traits were reserved for men while women had to remain at home. The wife working at home allowed the man of the house to be the wage labourer making the housewife's (unpaid) work an integral cog in the capitalist machine. This relation between production and reproduction is retained in the male breadwinner model and its connection to the sexual division of labour and the ensuing unequal pay, part-time work, broken career paths, unpaid labour in the home and domestic violence that it meant for women (Pascall, 2008).

With neoliberalism, however, these values come to underlie all human interaction and are thus also introduced in the workplace, which women are increasingly encouraged, and often required, to join. In this sense, women must now also embody these values, though in many ways, they are still policed as to how much, where, and how they are allowed to exhibit them (Manne, 2018). The division of labour that kept women at home is now replaced by the neoliberal requirement to get both men and women into wage work, changing what Mies sees as a fixed relation of man, the paid producer, and woman, the (unpaid) housewife. Today women are not only breadwinners (and workers) but also sometimes the sole breadwinners in a household (Wang et al., 2013; Crompton, 1999). However, as we shall see, these neoliberal changes come at a cost in how workers experience their work life and also in how it affects families.

Neoliberalism in the workplace

With the emphasis on profit maximisation and efficiency and a focus on male values, changing employment practices under neoliberalism have changed work relationships, workplace power balances, and people's lived experience in the workplace dramatically.

To begin with, there is increasingly an expectation worldwide for workers to overwork, meaning that they will frequently work overtime without being compensated for the additional time they put in, or they will be expected to work much harder and under much more pressure during their regular work hours (Telford & Briggs, 2022; Murray, 2020; Mayer & Noiseux, 2015). Performance targets and quotas have been introduced as performance indicators that must be met, and in certain industries, workers are even required to wear performance devices (Telford & Briggs, 2022; Moore & Joyce, 2020). If workers fail to satisfy these expectations, they risk losing their jobs (Bloodworth, 2019). The result is that working additional hours or accepting the status quo of putting extra effort during regular business hours has become the norm and, as such, a requirement for continued employment, which increases employment insecurity and is, arguably, a form of worker exploitation (Bloodworth, 2019; Mayer & Noiseux, 2015; Moore & Joyce, 2020).

Moreover, in the neoliberal framework, guidelines and directives are developed by managers and technocrats rather than by experts on the job, frequently going against common sense and preventing the actual experts from taking independent initiative when difficult situations arise. Previously, there was more collaboration between management and staff and more meaningful involvement of employees to address questions and issues that arose in the workplace daily. Employees feel more powerless as a result, and this is an example of how the impact of neoliberalism is now being felt in domains that were not previously part of the economic sphere, affecting both the lived experience of work and the quality of work. One instance, familiar to the author, is the education sector, where the weight of increased paperwork and bureaucracy, administrative responsibilities and roles placed on teachers outside of their regular duties, coupled with the expectation that academics have a scholarly impact, have made matters unnecessarily complicated and detracts from the essence of what the work should be about: the work teachers do with their students, and time for research, among other things. At the same time, the commodification of education alters the nature of the student-teacher relationship –the student becomes the service user to whom the teacher must cater, thus further imposing additional demands on the latter's time and labour.

To add to this is the emergence and constant expansion of the so-called *gig economy* where regular employees are replaced by independent contractors. Corporations present such jobs as opportunities to

work flexible hours unconstrained by a 9-5 schedule, 'to be your own boss', and to maintain a good work-life balance. However, this friendly-worker rhetoric is hollow: these jobs usually come with precarious contracts, no benefits, no workplace protection, no paid time off for holidays, sick leave, etc., and are often low-paying, meaning that workers end up working multiple jobs. This is essentially a way for a company to reduce expenses while lowering its risk and liability at the expense of workers whose labour is completely devalued. The gig economy overwhelmingly employs young, un-skilled workers, often from migrant or other disadvantaged backgrounds, who work long hours alone, remain invisible and have no real prospects.

The changing labour conditions under neoliberalism take their toll on workers' wellbeing. When you are constantly monitored or constantly expected to be available and productive, the workplace becomes highly competitive, and the pressure is immense and can be exhausting. Empirical research shows that this has led to an increase in physical and psychological distress, including increased levels of stress, anxiety, feelings of burnout and loss of control, and depression (Cederstrom & Fleming, 2012; Murray, 2020; Telford & Briggs, 2022). The excessive work hours that diminish the time available to socialise and relax, the negative work environment, and exhausting workloads also affect the balance between work and private life, affecting the time spent with partners and family as well as the quality of these relationships (Telford & Briggs, 2022; Murray, 2020; Fleming, 2019). In this sense, employees build their personal lives around their work life and their employers, rather than the other way around. To add to this, the culture of competitiveness requires that you portray yourself in the best light possible, but this has as a consequence that vulnerabilities must often be hidden from employers. As a consequence, people who have particular needs (e.g., mental health issues) often conceal them in the workplace so as not to compromise employability. The insensitivity to the self-esteem and dignity of the most vulnerable groups means that their needs go unmet, thus putting them at a further disadvantage in the workplace (Bal, 2017).

Another factor that is not often addressed is how the job market is linked to the housing market, and thus to the real estate market. In the neoliberal market, authorities have shifted from a logic of providing affordable housing to a logic of competition and competing attractiveness between cities. This leads to policies that exacerbate gentrification by unregulated development, no regulation of rental prices, etc. making spatial factors another element that affects inequalities of opportunity (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2023). For instance, public transport services are often not reliable in poor areas or areas in which minorities predominantly live because they are not very profitable for the companies that manage them. This makes it more difficult for people from these areas to reach their jobs easily or to have access to job opportunities (Pritchard et al., 2019). Also, when transport is difficult, unaffordable, time-consuming and access to it is difficult, people with disabilities are affected because transport is vital for access to work, putting this group at an additional disadvantage (Wolff & Shalit, 2023).

The basic argument of neoliberalism is that markets can regulate themselves in ways that governments cannot do and that if markets are free from government intervention, the emerging capitalism is the natural form for societies to take. In this sense, markets allow things to develop naturally, and whatever inequalities and hierarchies emerge can be seen as the natural outcome of those natural processes. The narrative is that a self-regulating market ensures meritocracy: we can all succeed if we put in enough effort, everyone gets what they deserve, and failure (just as success) is individualised. The price of freedom is responsibility, and ultimately, poverty is seen as a personal and moral fault. This, in turn, immediately pitches us against each other –to be better, stronger, more creative and more productive than those around us, thus creating new forms of social division (Littler, 2017). In addition, whenever we limit competition (through taxation, by re-establishing unions, by protecting the environment, etc.) that is seen as a limit to liberty (Parekh & Wilcox, 2020).

However, portraying the world as a level playing field that offers equal opportunity to whoever grabs it ignores the complexity of human life and capitalism, the structural inequalities that pervade it, the hierarchies that exist, and, ultimately, the interplay of economic and political power (Dosi et al., 2020). It also ignores that where you start from has an enormous effect on how far you can go, regardless of your degree of talent or how much you work (McNamee & Miller, 2009; Blanden et al., 2004; Bukodi et al., 2015). In fact, research shows that meritocracy does not exist in today's society and that, in the end, the vast majority of those who can reap the benefits of this system are the ones who are best prepared as a result of their privilege (Littler, 2013; 2017). In other words, naturalising the forces of the market and politics obscures the existence of systemic advantage and disadvantage and the many ways in which privilege –such as education, inheritance, and class– works. Similarly, talking of merit abstractly ignores its relation to gender, race, and class and the fact that it is a concept that has historically been used to privilege the already privileged, mostly wealthy white males (Littler, 2017). Opportunity is not the same for everyone, and much of success is not about natural endowment or the natural way things work but about circumstances: people have different abilities, live in dissimilar conditions, have different mothers, meet diverse people along the way, etc.

In the end, upon closer inspection of the complexities of the labour market, it becomes clear that neoliberal policies disproportionally impact the most vulnerable members of society, have led to crises (Stiglitz, 2002; Dosi & Virgillito, 2019; Ostry et al., 2016) and have resulted in the global wealth disparity between the rich and the poor, which is larger today than it ever has been since the Gilded Age in the US and Victorian era in the UK (Dorling, 2014). In neoliberalism, people with families and ambitions, who have pride and dignity, are treated like machines. Their work is turned into a quantifiable metric of numbers, they are not meaningfully involved in important aspects of their work that affect them, and they only have instrumental value insofar as they produce goods or services. Ultimately, there is a contradiction at the heart of neoliberalism. Friedman (2017) claimed that central to his theory was freedom, but it becomes apparent that to be competitive and survive in this system, agents must serve a market that dehumanises them and compromises their dignity.

They thus have to compromise their individual freedom, which is a basic value in the neoliberal narrative. Friedman's freedom is for the big capitalists, not for the workers.

The Capabilities Approach

If we want to change things for the better, we need to move beyond the idea that there are no alternatives to the neoliberalist model of capitalism and beyond false dilemmas of the kind that it is either the neoliberal model or a turn to the Marxist left and work towards a new paradigm. Instead of passively accepting the essentially exploitative conditions in the workplace that make us feel powerless, we need to think differently from neoliberalism's distorted view of work and human wellbeing. This requires a shift of emphasis from markets, productivity and individualism to an emphasis on the individual's intrinsic worth, their responsibility towards others and people's right to have a genuine opportunity to thrive. We also need to reconsider what success amounts to. The aim of a democratic society is human flourishing and people being free to pursue goals that are important to them, not efficiency and profit. So, measuring success narrowly in terms of the accumulation of wealth as we do in the business world will simply not do.

Such a way of thinking can be found in Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's *capabilities approach*. At the centre of this view are three main concepts: functionings, capabilities, and substantive freedom. Functionings are the different things that are important to a person's life, states of 'being and doing', like having shelter or getting married. A capability is a person's actual ability to accomplish the functions that she values, and substantive freedom is the genuine chance one has to live the life that one values and has reason to value (Sen, 1999). The core idea of the capabilities approach is that measures of well-being should be based on an individual's ability to access the goods that are essential for his flourishing instead of on wealth accumulation of per capita GNP. This is because a country's economic growth does not always translate into an improvement in the general standard of living of its citizens, and this also means that simply securing rights for people on paper is insufficient. Often, through no fault of our own, due to our different circumstances, we differ in our capacity to transform resources into functioning, and this leads to inequalities. Examples could be conventions that prevent women from going to school, women internalising the roles that are imposed upon them by a patriarchal society, or the inability to move freely because of physical disability that prevents one from accomplishing one's goals (Sen, 2002). So, for people to be in a position where they can materially exercise their rights, we need to address the possible obstacles that may impede a person from doing so (Nussbaum, 2000, p. 227). Therefore, in a just society social policy should be geared towards giving people access to resources that allow them to pursue the life that they value and have chosen (Sen, 2002).. This, in turn, implies that whatever costs might be involved in seizing an opportunity must be reasonable for the agent to bear, and it must be reasonable for us to expect the agent to seize this opportunity (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2007).

Through the notions of capabilities, functionings, and substantive freedom, this account recognises that our circumstances, and thus our needs, vary, but also that we value and want different things. In this sense, the capabilities approach may appear to support neoliberal individualist attitudes. Nevertheless, that is untrue because, at the same time, it acknowledges that a person's capabilities are shaped by multiple elements –such as their immediate social context and relationships, like their family and their community and its policies, as well as their global context, which includes things like the consequences of climate change. This perspective, therefore, has a multifaceted nature, even though it focuses on the individual, considering how one's environment shapes one's capabilities. One could say that in this sense, there is a move from traditionally 'male' values to more 'feminine' ones. The capabilities approach also considers human diversity since it allows individuals to place value on things other than the accumulation of goods, economic efficiency or profit. For instance, whereas a working mother might prioritise flexibility, a disabled person may prioritise autonomy (Burchardt, 2004; Yerkes et al., 2017).

Returning to Giannis Antetokoumpo, though no one can deny his work ethic, he also has an extraordinary talent, and without that, luck and support from his community (as he always stresses), he might still have been a stateless, undocumented immigrant in Greece (because though markets are allowed to flow freely under neoliberalism, labour is not). So his story does not show that we can all make it if we only work enough, but only that people have different access to opportunities for reasons that are beyond their control, like their level of talent, the community they are surrounded by, or the place of origin of their parents. This lack of ability to convert resources to functionings through no fault of one's own is important to keep in mind when we evaluate the welfare of underprivileged groups like illegal immigrants, people with disabilities, or women, but also when it comes to individual differences within the same group.

To apply the capabilities approach to work relations, we need to see what it is that we want people to be capable of when it comes to work. Clearly, at the subsistence level, one wants to be able to put food on the table, but once we move beyond that, other things become important. One wants a paycheck that one can live off with dignity, a schedule that allows one to pursue interests other than work, and a certain stability. To be satisfied, people also need to feel seen and valued and, if possible, perform meaningful work. Of course, life is not perfect, and not all jobs in a lifetime will fulfil all these criteria, but one should not be expected to work one's entire life without them.

The capabilities approach focuses on the quality of life that an individual can actually achieve, and, as such, it focuses on questions like whether one can have meaningful work that allows him to sustain himself and his family and that allows him to be satisfied and develop through his work. Both Sen and Nussbaum acknowledge that work is important for the well-being of individuals beyond just financial reasons; it has subjective significance, it is a vehicle of self-worth and empowerment. It also has value because work is rewarding

when it allows or helps you to grow, and personal development has intrinsic value. Ultimately, the core of the capabilities approach is that people should have the capabilities to be free to choose what they want to be and do. Therefore, a system that makes workers have to choose between making enough money to support their families and having time to give their families the care and attention necessary is unacceptable. A holistic approach requires that we find a way to allow us to do both without having to choose which of the two to compromise.

To do this, we also need to recognise that work is not limited to paid labour but includes unpaid activities that must be part of our assessment of people's well-being. Nussbaum lists the ability to play and enjoy recreational activities as an essential element of human life. Women who work the 'second shift' may lack the energy to play or may want to play but lack the time (Nussbaum, 2000). As a result, they lose out on the chance to be part of the life of their community, a community that can also give them a chance to grow personally and professionally. Being deprived of the opportunity to be part of a community deprives you of a social network and, thus social capital, and this makes social mobility even more difficult (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2023). In this way, poverty can also be non-monetary, referring to the lack of certain fundamental capabilities that limit one's opportunities (Sen, 2002). One example is time poverty: if one works two jobs and is exhausted, or if one's commute is very long, that leaves no time for leisure and blocks access to certain goods (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2023). Low salaries obviously compromise the functioning of affiliation because they do not allow you to go out or enjoy cultural activities, and it also makes finding a partner more difficult. Even to enjoy free recreational activities, you need to have time, so people working double shifts, night shifts or low paying jobs that start early in the morning do not have the luxury to enjoy leisure time (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2023). Resources are therefore important, but they are only valuable as means to desired functionings that need to not only be available but also affordable, meaning that their importance lies in how they enable capabilities.

When Nussbaum discusses capabilities, she refers to the sense of control, bodily health and integrity, the ability to play, and the possibility of affiliation. The ability to interact, coexist, and act for others is necessary for the latter. Legally speaking, this means that employees must have the ability and right to act collectively when it serves their best interests. Without this possibility, employers possess immense power over workers who, alone, are often confronted with job offers and conditions that they must either accept or remain without a job. For governments to counterbalance the power of the wage relations system, markets must include mechanisms that protect those with less bargaining power (Dukes & Streeck, 2023). These can include welfare reforms, setting up unions and the right to collective bargaining and can be made to apply even to those working in the gig economy. Even though markets have changed, and it may not be possible to work one or two jobs for one's entire life as people often did in the past –or, if it is, it may not be an option that the younger generations value – people still expect fair compensation and stable working condition at the jobs they hold (Dukes & Streeck, 2023). At the workplace, the functioning of affiliation translates to having the time and space to engage in productive interactions with coworkers (Dukes & Streeck, 2023). Laws must also be in place to protect worker's physical and mental health. These include laws establishing equality in the workplace, protecting workers from sexual harassment and exploitation but also laws that establish limits on work hours so that individuals have time to relax, socialise, build a family and properly take care of their loved ones. When it comes to spatial factors that affect the capacity of affiliation, Wolff and de-Shalit (2023) discuss ways to make transport easier. Making cities bicycle-friendly by securing easy and safe riding and storage of bikes is one suggestion, subsidised transport is another. Such measures not only allow people access to work (especially for people in poorer areas away from the city centre) but also increase their ability for social networking by saving them time.

What the neoliberal perspective tends to ignore is that a working relationship like all relationships is bilateral and requires limits and boundaries. Once this is considered, to remain true to the liberal idea of equality of opportunity, limits on certain things are required, as well as institutional support for widely shared opportunity. It thus becomes evident why certain measures that by neoliberal standards are restrictions on freedom are required to uphold the fundamental principles on which neoliberalism was founded and to ensure that everyone has access to opportunities and freedoms. Enacting laws to safeguard the environment, for example, is vital because a healthy environment is essential to securing the capabilities of people, not only today but in the future as well (as the destruction of the environment becomes what Wolff and de-Shalit (2007) call a *corrosive disadvantage*) and trade unions are necessary to secure living wages that are necessary for the achievement of functionings –after all, you cannot be free if your voice is silenced. By establishing such limits, we are, of course limiting the freedom of employers to impose any work conditions they want with the rationale that they maximise profit, but we are doing so with an ultimate goal in mind: protecting the freedom of workers to prioritise their interests without being forced to make impossible and dehumanising choices. As such, we are protecting substantive human freedom.

People have aspirations, they want to grow, and for that, opportunities are required, including opportunities for people to help themselves. Efficiency-driven thinking creates a competitive environment for both individuals and groups, and this leads to a world where there is little sense of community, belonging, and interdependence, making it harder to collaborate and cooperate. However, we are not independent from others and being part of a community is essential to our well-being. As in the case of the environment, we are all part of an economic and social ecosystem, and this ecosystem needs to be strengthened by re-building a sense of community that allows people to flourish and democracy to work. This relates to neoliberalism's break from a tradition wherein agents were conceived as working within a whole –within a society that sets the rules of the game. In contrast, when 'there is no such thing as society' but only individuals, agents decide on rules in a social and moral vacuum, which can lead to a loss of identity and polarization. The key point is to allow people

who feel currently disconnected from their work to find dignity and purpose in it again. For this, social policies and restructuring wage relations are important, but they will not suffice. We also need a new model of human interaction in addition to a more realistic view of the opportunity landscape to restore what has been lost from society and fortify social bonds. A way to do this is to prioritise the more accurate yet conventionally more 'feminine', relational understanding of humans as interdependent and interconnected rather than privileging the traditionally 'masculine' idea of man as distinct, autonomous and in competition with others. The ethics of care allows us to do just that.

The Ethics of Care

Care ethics prioritises our responsibilities to others and advocates that care should be at the centre of our thinking about how to live. It is an approach that brings the disconnected, self-interested and independent agent into the real world (Gilligan, 1982), where caring is understood as

> a species activity that includes everything that we do to maintain, continue, and repair our 'world' so that we can live in it as well as possible. That world includes our bodies, ourselves, and our environment, all of which we seek to interweave in a complex, life-sustaining web (Fisher & Tronto, 1991, p. 40).

In contrast to traditional ethical theories of the 18th and 19th centuries, which understood human interaction in terms of reason and autonomy and required us to think in terms of formal relations that were abstract rather than in terms of the realities of life in the world, care ethics recognises that humans are emotional and social beings whose lives are intricately connected to, and dependent upon, the lives of others.

Care ethics is sometimes regarded as a 'feminine' or feminist ethic since, historically, women have been the ones primarily responsible for providing care. However, since at some point in our lives, everyone is taken care of and is called to take care of others, it can also be viewed as a theory based on a universal experience. Our existence is not only intertwined with the existence of others but also dependent on others. Yet our ethical and economic theories downplay or ignore this common experience, equating the characteristics of their ideal agent with the stereotypical traits of the 'ideal male'. In the context of neoliberalism and the internalisation of 'male values', caring for one another has thus been largely pushed aside (Rottenberg, 2018). Care ethics requires that we bring it back while not expecting the same or equal input from everyone but only that each contributes to the degree that is appropriate to his or her context. This is because, just as with the capabilities approach, according to which it would be a mistake to assign the same capabilities to everyone, central to care ethics is the idea that not all people are equal in their abilities and that people make choices in the background of inequality. It is, therefore, crucial to keep in mind that people live in contexts that to a large degree influence their capabilities, so requiring that all parties engage in the same way is unjust.

The shift towards an ethics of care thus reminds us that we are dependent creatures that need care to flourish. It also calls our attention to moral concerns that transcend the market but have a significant impact on the lives of real people, such as those related to children, disability, housework, etc. Instead of celebrating independence, pathologising dependence, and focusing on economic growth and individuality –the pillars of neoliberalism– care ethics focuses on our inevitable interdependence (Tronto, 1993; 2013). It also frowns upon the neoliberal tendency to increasingly offload the responsibility of care from the state to individuals.

This contrasts with the distinction made within neoliberalism between the market and the family. This distinction is misleading because, firstly, today, both men and women work, and so the family is an institution of the labour market. Second, since childcare (re)produces the human capital needed to maintain the system, the family is a necessary element of the market, and housework is necessary for the process of capital accumulation (Federici, 1975; Longino, 1993; Malos, 1975; Mies, 2022). This underlies the 'social contradiction' inherent in capitalism that Nancy Fraser (2016) has argued grounds a crisis tendency: social reproduction is necessary to support production, and thus the socioeconomic system, but the socioeconomic structure undermines the very social reproduction on which it depends. More importantly, within this dichotomy, paid labour (and thus work done in the 'masculine' public sphere) is prioritised since production is calculated based on financially remunerated labour. As social reproduction theorists have emphasized, although domestic labour contributes to the economy and maintains labour power, it is excluded because it is not compensated, making those who perform it invisible and disadvantaged (Longino, 1993; Federici, 2004).[4] This is nowhere clearer than in the domestic care sector. The deeply ingrained prejudice that some jobs are inherently worth less because of the types of people who do them (women, people of colour, immigrants) is ironic, of course, because care work is becoming more important due to today's ageing populations and the current care crisis. While this invisible work that we depend on and take for granted is viewed as unskilled, it is very difficult, occasionally dangerous, physically and emotionally taxing, and cannot be automated. In the end, the resulting commodification of care leads to further inequalities. Firstly, because women predominantly take up domestic labour since unpaid care work is usually considered to be women's responsibility, and paid work is men's responsibility. Secondly, because to fill the 'care gap' non-whites increasingly take on paid domestic work that whites do not want and, thirdly, because people in developing countries tend to take on jobs that people in developed countries reject while transferring their caring responsibilities to poorer individuals

[4] This applies not only to domestic labour in the sense of taking care of the home and the family, but to work done at home more generally. A case in point is Mies' (1982) classic case study of lace workers in Narsapur on which her notion of *housewifization* is grounded. The lace workers worked full time but because they worked from home they were considered merely housewives and their work was attributed to men who were in charge of the business.

extending the global care chains (Fraser, 2016)[5]. Ultimately, the dichotomy between the market and the family results in a distortion of the picture of labour in society and, as a result, leads to inadequate policies towards the invisible work that is done and the invisible people who do it (Longino, 1993; Malos, 1975; Mies, 2022).

In terms of social policies, for the workplace to expand people's capabilities and afford genuine growth opportunities and for groups that have been largely ignored within the neoliberal framework to be protected, we need to prioritise social care and focus on human connections. This means that we need policies that acknowledge that people are entitled to care and that address the care that different people need (Held, 2007; Nussbaum, 2000; Kittay, 2021). Such policies will have to include provision, regulation, and funding by the government for various forms of care work (including the rights of domestic workers and migrants) and social services, free daycare, flexible working arrangements, improved child support policies, healthcare etc. (Nussbaum, 2000a; Held, 2007). Wolff and de-Shalit (2023) also propose night care for the children of parents who work at night (bakers, truck drivers, nurses, etc.) –a measure that they rightly observe is rarely discussed in social policy. Caring relations also have a spatial factor that must not be neglected. For instance, when parents have to drive their kids to school every day, this can make it difficult (e.g., because of unpredictable traffic) to arrive at work on time every day, thus causing problems at work. Because this responsibility often falls on women, this can also make them look less reliable and keep them back from advancing in their work (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2023). A shift in gender roles could change that, making men also share this burden, but there is also the alternative of placing schools closer to places in the city occupied by young families or placing daycare centers close to where parents work. This would slow things down, increasing worker's quality of life while also fostering a sense of community (Wolff & de-Shalit, 2023).

Ultimately, however, to achieve genuine change, a shift in values is required. For many, the problem at the core of the sexual division of labour is due to determinants like the breadwinner model or women's housewifization. Therefore, in such views, what ultimately has to change are wage relationships, over and above the value system that underpins these practices. But this puts the cart before the horse when it comes to the problems that arise at the workplace under neoliberalism that this paper discusses. For example, with the decline of the breadwinner model, policies for working parents focus on keeping children longer at school in order to make it easier for parents to work. But this is not making work family-friendly, it is the opposite, it makes families employment-friendly. Similarly, getting women out of the role of the housewife, though incredibly important, puts women in the workforce (with all that ensues from that). In both cases, despite changes in wage relationships, what is being promoted is one set of values over another and what we are in effect doing is restructuring the family around a double breadwinner model which remains a male-oriented one when it comes to its underlying values. However, these changes have not made the labour experience better for people, and despite the changing wage relations, people's views about gender relations persist (Medved, 2016; Parker & Stepler, 2017). In other words, the requirement (and need) to include women in the labour force in the competitive and individualistic framework of neoliberalism can be seen as a way to maintain the dominance of male values in a modernised form. It is important, therefore, to remember that promoting social care is not a full-proof strategy for the simple reason that precisely because of deeply ingrained gendered patterns of care, women may rely more on such policies than men, even if the policies are gender-neutral. This can lead to reinforcing traditional gender roles and widening the gender gap (Blair & Posmanick, 2023; Thomas, 2021).

In this sense, the new status quo of neoliberalism suggests that the (male) breadwinner model, or Meis' housewifization, is not the only source of the problems that arise in the world of work characteristic of neoliberalism. This is not to say that such determinants have not played a role historically in leading up to the current status quo, but it is to say that capitalism is incredibly self-reforming, and so even moving beyond such wage relations, the problems facing work conditions (for everyone, not just women) under neoliberalism persist. This is because the system always remains oriented towards the same male values and enhances their scope. In the end, change requires shifting gender norms so that our policies and institutions allow for values other than the traditionally 'masculine' ones and that, for instance, the assumption that women's lives should become similar to men's lives is not what we mean by 'gender equality.' When it comes to supporting parents, subsidising childcare to enable people to work is one option, but another, which is in line with the argument made in this paper, is to provide them with resources that allow them to choose what best suits their lives. So, instead of bringing women's lives closer to men's, we could introduce options that bring men's lives closer to women's[6], keeping in mind that at the end of the day, what is needed is a realignment of values that will allow us to reclaim aspects of our life and work that we have currently lost or are in the process of losing.

Conclusion

Neoliberalism promised individual freedom, growth and prosperity for all. What it has delivered instead is inequality and precarity. To achieve a change of the status quo, we need to acknowledge that we are all part

5 This is part of work in social reproduction theory by theorists like Silvia Federici and Maria Mies that goes beyond how gender relations relate to forms of oppression in capitalism and includes other forms of oppression like race, sexuality and colonialism. Though Mies argued that the housewifization of women is a necessary component of capitalism, the changes in the nuclear family that have come about as a result of neoliberalism suggest that this is not necessarily the case. However, though not all women must be in the house, members of other marginalized groups are still required to take their place in order for the system to work.

6 I am grateful to Richard Reeves for drawing my attention to the points in this paragraph at the "Opportunity after Neoliberalism" conference of the Brookings Institution in February 2023. This paper is an elaboration on and extension of a paper delivered at that conference.

of a community and that work is one of the forces that connects us to that community. In turn, through the community, our work allows us to grow and advance. Our policies must reflect the fact that people do not only have instrumental value but also intrinsic worth and must allow for dignity in the workplace and beyond, all in a manner that is socially (and environmentally) sustainable.

In this paper, I have argued that to do this, we need to move beyond the typically 'masculine' ways of relating to one another promoted by neoliberalism, and embrace traits, skills and abilities that have traditionally been perceived as more feminine**.** I have centred my approach on the notion of capabilities and care and have argued that an alternative to promoting a culture of employment is to move beyond a logic of market-based efficiency and develop policies that promote social arrangements that would increase people's substantive freedom –something that requires people having the option to choose the kind of life, and work pattern, they value without having to compromise too much in the process. More importantly, what I have proposed is that the problem is ultimately a problem of deeply ingrained values that persist despite the changes in wage relations in the past two centuries and that these values are what ultimately needs to change in order for things to take a turn to the better. Besides proposing certain policies and the direction that we must change towards, I have not answered the question of how this shift will take place. If I am right in this, the shift required will ultimately have to run much deeper than merely at the level of social policy.

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