

# Power, Activity and Human Flourishing

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Activity theory is a theory of human flourishing. 'Human flourishing' is the usual English translation of the Greek word *eudemonia*, the central concept of Aristotle's ethics. As a current of scientific thinking, activity theory has the great merit that its central concept – 'collaborative project', also often referred to as 'an activity' – is equally a descriptive, explanatory and *normative* concept.

'Human flourishing' refers to the enjoyment of a *good life*, something which bears little relation to the consumption of material goods, is little concerned with rights, but rather with the expansion of a person's capacity for enjoyment. As Aristotle showed, human flourishing is meaningful only in the context of the *collaborative* creation of a good life for *all* human beings. So activity theory is a scientific theory which is simultaneously an ethical theory. We not only *see* the world as made up of collaborative projects, and *use* collaborative projects to promote human flourishing, but we also *advocate* collaboration as the norm for secular life. The way all people *ought* to deal with one another is to *collaborate* with each other in projects.

What I would like to reflect on in this essay is the question of how we see situations where the norm of collaboration goes wrong, and people find themselves trapped in projects toxic to their own health and that of others. In particular I want to tackle the problem of abuse of power, a topic which cannot even be clearly framed so long as ethical and analytical concepts are at odds with one another.

## Collaborative project as a unit of social life

When economists build their science on the utilitarian assumption of an independent, individual economic agent who makes rational decisions to maximise their own utility, they take it that the norms of utilitarianism are universally adhered to by the economic actors. In the event that the subjects of a community do not act as individuals maximising their own utility, then the science fails. Corrections such as including delayed or incomplete information do not change the underlying ethical problem. More importantly, governments and firms which make policy on the basis of economic science, and therefore utilitarian ethics, are acting so as to *foster* this ethos in the community, with all the consequences in terms of inequality and social disintegration.

At the very root of modern society is the ethical principle known as the Golden Rule. This principle is found in all the great religions of the world and was used by Kant in his derivation of secular ethics. This implicit 'social contract' is expressed in the Christian Bible thus:

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.

Luke 6:31

But the Critical Theorist, Agnes Heller (1987), showed that this maxim is deficient in our postmodern times, for it is based on an untenable presumption of cultural homogeneity. Another person may fairly demand *not* to be treated in the same way you want to be treated. Unless there is some real interaction with the other person, however, this qualification is empty. As Seyla Benhabib (1996) has shown, ethical maxims which treat of relations with an abstract other can offer no real guidance. One's actions in relation to some other have to be taken in connection with the practical relations one has with that other. activity theory begins from the assumption of collaborative rather than individual action, so in the light of these considerations, the appropriate maxim is:

What we do, is decided by you and me.

So, in the light of the criticism of the Golden Rule just given, we take this practical relation to be the project in which you and I are, in one way or another, doing something together. The revised Golden Rule then simply reads as the well-known norms of collaboration.

Collaboration is a concrete relation whose norms differ widely according to the kind of project involved, but in every case these norms are robust and well known, and rooted in the self-concept of the shared project. In some cases the norms of collaboration strictly require joint decision-making, in other cases, customer/service provider norms suffice, and in other cases the norms of line management prevail. But it remains the case that the norms of collaboration are facts, norms of modern social life, not just the assumptions of a social theory.

Consequently, by taking collaborative projects as our unit of analysis we can do *realistic* science, and insofar as an object of scientific investigation departs from this assumption, it is to that extent also a departure from the relevant ethical norms. In part, this dependence on the reality of ethical norms is the motivation behind the current reflections on abuse of power.

We also take 'projects' rather than 'social groups' as *units of analysis*. That is, rather than seeing a community as a mosaic of groups of various kinds – ethnic groups, age groups, occupational groups, voters, consumers, etc. – we see the social fabric as woven of *projects*.

This has a number of implications. First, it means we do not take subjects as nonentities with contingent attributes attached (gender, occupation, ethnicity, etc.) by means of which an observer can pigeonhole people into various groups. We see social life as made up of people pursuing common ends, i.e., projects, and the community as we find it is a work in progress. This society, with its laws, customs, land, human beings, etc., is all created and shaped by past projects and kept alive by the projects we pursue today. Every individual human life is itself a collaborative project.

Second, although bureaucrats and statisticians prefer the pigeonholing approach to analysis, the project approach is an eminently suitable lens through which to view society for those of us who are interested in *change* and who are less interested in people as consumers and voters than in people as agents shaping their own lives and the lives of others through participation in projects.

Being a person is not about what you have, or even so much about what you do, but rather what you aspire to do, and especially what you aspire to do with others. So we see a social formation as flourishing more or less successfully, because we understand it through the same norms by means of which people pursue their *own* life projects.

When we talk of projects, however, we do not have in mind only the planned responses to a situation which are normally what is referred to as projects. When a project resonates with a broader community it becomes a *social movement*. And to the degree that a social movement becomes successful, and manages to objectify its aims in the laws and customs of the wider community, it becomes an *institution*. And as an institution makes its way into the language and consciousness of the entire community it becomes simply a *concept* alongside others, an inseparable part of the whole culture. We see all these social formations as stages in the lifecycle of a project and as such we take them all as projects. Things can go wrong in the life of a project where an institution has degenerated to be no more than a vehicle for individual self-aggrandisement, or in a social movement which has failed to embed itself in the broader society and make the transition to institutionalisation. That is, in the case of social scandals, abuse of various kinds and corruption, we are generally concerned with the developmental pathology of projects. It is especially those projects which have embedded themselves and are taken for granted as concepts which are no longer the real motivation of activity, which are the ubiquitous sources of injustice.

From what has been said, it is clear that projects are the *means* for changing the world, as well as being what the human world is made up of – the world process. Projects are the one and only means by which human beings can manifest their will, change the world they live in and attain self-determination. What we and those who have gone before us create in the course of struggling for freedom are concepts, now simply part of the language, and projects which have become institutionalised in the form of routinised practices sustained by both external rewards, such as wages and social status, as well as internal rewards such as self-realisation and promotion of the social good. In the course of the development of these projects, both internally and under the impact of external developments, problems, crises, injustices and conflicts arise. These are not only

the inevitable outcome of the institutionalisation of projects, but also the very conditions from which new projects are launched, 'correctives', which modify the innovations made by earlier generations. Further, it turns out that no matter how ossified and bureaucratised a project may have become, there is always at its heart a principle, a *mission* for which purpose it was founded. Although in day-to-day life this mission is usually pushed to the background (and indeed may harbour unresolved contradictions), while decisions are made and motivations derived from regular, well-established subordinate or particular concepts or practices, it remains always there as a kind of court of last resort. A project which has become institutionalised in taken-for-granted, routinised forms of practice can be 'reawakened' when its fundamental tenets are called into question by contradictions and failures in its operation, and challenged by a new social movement. The 'principle' which was championed by a social movement before becoming institutionalised is often objectified in the form of some kind of 'historic compromise', like the constitution of a new nation, a peace treaty or an agreement signed to end a strike. The 'reawakening' of an institution means bringing this principle back into question in the light of new problems. Instances of this process are the intervention of HIV/AIDS activists in the medical research project and the intervention of the Women's Liberation Movements into *all* the institutions of modern society.

### **The abuse of power**

As remarked above, a social movement is successful only insofar as its mission is objectified; that is, its demands are legislated or simply adopted as custom and practice in the community at large and 'mainstreamed'. If a social movement exhausts its mission, but does not dissolve, then it lives on as a kind of vestige or sect.

A woman may get involved in the women's movement in the first place to get a pay rise or better childcare, but they do not make a lifetime commitment to the women's movement for those immediate motives. Those are privileges that will more likely be enjoyed by her daughter. But if she is lucky enough to reap the fruits of her struggle, it will have been a heavy price to pay. In the main, except at the last moment or where lives are literally on the line, people participate in social movements *on principle*, for the future benefit of others, not themselves, though perhaps others like themselves.

Under these circumstances, a social movement goes awry only when the objective itself becomes malign. For example, when the Communist Party of the Philippines under José Maria Sison turned on itself in a frenzy of witch-hunting, this was the almost inevitable outcome of a much earlier decision of the CPP to leave Manila and go into the countryside to build a guerrilla army of displaced urban intellectuals. Shining Path in Peru, led by Abimael Guzmán (President Gonzalo), is another classic example. Having been established as a peasant-based movement to fight for a revolutionary communist state, Sendero Luminoso degenerated, and ended up murdering the leaders of social movements, farmers and trade unionists of the Peruvian left. In the 1960s, inspired by the Revolutions in China and Cuba but finding the road to socialism by normal political means blocked, a section of the urban intelligentsia in almost every country took this dead-end road. Since 1959, only in Nicaragua and Nepal could this strategy boast some success. This was a project which was appealing in the 1960s. It was an ideal, a concept which seemed to a certain social layer to respond to the injustices of the times. However, it developed through interaction with the unfolding world situation such that it had either to be abandoned as untenable, or adapt itself to the changing situation, as in the case of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC). Otherwise, the result was degeneration, isolation and growing irrelevance or pathological dysfunction. No concept can remain as it was at birth; it either grows in response to the experience of its own impact on the world, or it rationalises its difficulties and becomes weaker.

This is the first type of pathology I want to address. The root cause lies in the very founding of the project, in what turns out to have been a misconception. Projects always have a powerful inertia. All blows and sceptical attacks are absorbed by revisions and rationalisations of the basic premise, so far as is possible without a fundamental abandonment of its mission. This resistance to

scepticism and criticism is necessary for the maintenance and development of any movement, but can also prove to be its downfall.

The original insight which launches a social movement is always a leap of faith, and its future destiny cannot be predicted. A social movement which has missed a fork in the road is doomed, and if spirited internal critique of the founding principle cannot restore sense, then it is best to get off the bus as soon as possible.

But there is a second type of pathology which is not quite the same. In this case, the project does not so much take a wrong turn, as simply fail to notice when its time has passed and it has outlived itself.

There is a tide in the affairs of men.  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.

Julius Caesar, Act 4

Such a project is a halfway house to becoming an institution. Actually, it is neither social movement nor institution. It offers no prospect of resolving the injustice which motivated its founding (the internal rewards offered to those who join a living social movement), and having failed to institutionalise itself, it generally does not have the resources to offer significant external rewards. Being Secretary of the Moe branch of the Australian Socialist League does not attract a wage. As a result, the entire project operates on dreams and various kinds of self-deception. Lacking the resources for real internal or external rewards, such bureaucratised social movements generally offer soft, inessential rewards (friendship, mutual aid, solace, hope, etc.) for the often arduous demands placed upon participants.

The leaders of such projects do not in any normal sense of the word wield power. They have power only in relation to participants of their group for whom the leaders symbolise the ideal to which the project is oriented. The power exerted by a leader over a member of such a project may be nothing or it may be life and death. The mystique by means of which this *puissance* exerts itself is entirely dependent on the subject's commitment to and belief in the project's proximate ideal. By 'proximate ideal' I mean the ideal with which the particular project invests itself, its 'brand', as opposed to the more remote 'abstract ideal' (such as Christianity or Socialism). The moment a participant is 'disillusioned' that power loses its mystique, even while possibly exerting itself indirectly through others. The underlying source of the pathology which is manifested in small religious or socialist sects is the illusory character of the proximate ideal which sustains itself by ever more illusory and erroneous perceptions and rationalisations. Generally speaking such ideals are sustained by a kind of circular logic which can be broken only by trauma. While the logic of a concept has a circular character, for an ideal which has become institutionalised within a community which enjoys openness, this circularity is always infected by the liberalism of the general community. It is not institutionalised, merely ossified. But when a sect becomes *isolated* and then in turn rationalises this isolation ("everyone is against us") the logic becomes a *closed* circle. Its mystique can be broken only to the extent that ties with the community at large continue.

More significant however is the project which has successfully completed its social movement phase, merged itself with the community at large and transformed itself into an institution, whether this is a finite institution such as the Education Department, or a ubiquitous institution such as the patriarchy. In general, the rules and norms of an institution are the special or particular principles of the ideal which the institution serves. But on the other hand, being institutionalised means that the project becomes itself a special or particular principle of the self-concept of the community as a whole. Consequently, an institution is able to muster the resources to maintain its activity by external rewards such as the wages upon which its employees rely for a living, lucrative salaries and high social status and privileges for the top dogs. The phenomena which manifest themselves in

small sects are then not only normalised, but greatly expanded in scale. Here we can have in mind not only small sects but institutions like the Catholic Church or the Chinese Communist Party.

Institutions therefore become bastions for the inequality and injustices characteristic of the society at large. They also grant themselves and their upper layers immunity from criticism. I recall a recent case of an incompetent surgeon who was killing patients in a Queensland hospital, while nurses were doing their best to steer vulnerable patients clear of him, but were unable to expose him because of his superior status.

The 'thick ethos' which obtains within institutions differs from the 'thin ethos' which pervades the general community. "Equals should be treated equally and unequals unequally" (Heller, 1987). The CEO and the base level worker should deal with each other as equals if they meet in the street, but at work one is paid ten times more than and gives orders to the other, a relationship which could be reversed on the football field. The norms governing these relations in an activity setting are instantiations of the concept upon which the institution was founded. The very idea of a hospital was founded on the principle of the autonomy and moral superiority of a doctor and the traditionally female service role of nurses. When hospitals were created, the concept of health care they objectified took on a great deal of the hierarchical character of the society of that time, and it has been slower to change than the general community. To change this hierarchical ethos requires the intervention of a social movement with a different concept of health care, and which can challenge the basis upon which the institution was founded. A social movement which addressed the ethos within a hospital with an abstract demand for egalitarianism would be unlikely to be successful. To bring about change in an institution, a social movement must address its critique to the institution's core mission, from which its norms and rule flow. The Women's Health Movement and the Consumer Health Movement did so on the basis of a conception of health care in which the carer entered into a collaborative relationship with the patient.

The trade unions are a strange and difficult hybrid of social movement and institution, one could say an 'institutionalised social movement'. Because the conditions of wage labour mean that the conflict between labour and capital is permanent, the mission of the trade unions can never be exhausted short of the socialist utopia, so they can never be merged into the community at large. As Trotsky remarked:

... one sees very clearly how absurd it is to oppose as two different principles trade union organisation and state organisation. In England more than anywhere else, the state rests upon the back of the working class which constitutes the overwhelming majority of the population of the country. The mechanism is such that the bureaucracy is based directly on the workers, and the state indirectly, by the intermediary of the trade union bureaucracy.

Trotsky, 1930

The kind of permanent armistice through which fundamental conflicts underlying the state are contained mean that no institution lacks internal contradictions, and these contradictions break out from time to time. However, the days are long past when the trade unions confronted the state as an alien force. But with a mass membership, the trade unions offer all the 'temptations' of an institution: jobs for the boys, good salaries, and so on, and with the day-to-day business of unions – getting an extra penny on the wage, defending individuals before disciplinary hearings, and so on – the sharp emotions and principles which motivate the new trade union official are soon worn smooth by bureaucratic drudgery, not to mention the experience, novel for the newly elected delegate, of seeing the working situation 'from above', so to speak.

Reflecting on the quandary facing socialist parties and trade unions, and other social movements and semi-institutions defending the interests of the permanently oppressed, we can see the space for a permanent social movement. It is not an impossibility, but such projects can surely only survive by constant renewal, continuously revisiting their guiding principles and finding how to give expression to them in the existing conditions.

### ***Institutions***

The Church is an institution which is also not properly either an institution (unless the Church is established) nor a sect (unless it is a marginal religion). The Catholic Church is now 1,700 years old and operates according to rigid norms, up to and including papal infallibility, maintaining its homogeneity despite operating in every country in the world. But the Catholic Church is not a small sect which can isolate its mass membership from the general community. On the contrary, it is deeply embedded in every aspect of social life. Such a contradictory situation obliges the Church to actively defend its privileged position with respect to the norms of the wider communities. The mystique of religion means that the symbolic power acquired by the leader of any institution or social movement is considerably amplified, so the priest wields more than the power of life and death over the most devoted of his flock, and in the case of children, this power is almost unlimited, both because of the reliance of the child upon adult care and the fact that the mystique envelops the child's family. For this reason, sexual abuse perpetrated within the Church is should be categorised as incestuous rape.

The recent exposure of sexual abuse within the Catholic Church has been most intense in countries where the general community enjoys a liberal ethos. This may be the result of the difficulty the Church experiences in insulating itself from the thin ethos of post-industrial liberal societies. The mystique of the Church hierarchy is continuously undermined by the liberal ethos in which members are immersed every day. The clergy itself does tend to be insulated and disciplined against this exposure however. The evidence seems to be that it is by appeal to the norms of the wider community and by invoking its powers (police, courts, welfare services, etc.) that this abuse can be combated. It is unlikely that critique of Catholic doctrine can help. Of course the Church does not directly condone child abuse, but the closed and strongly hierarchical character of its organisation and the powerful mystique of papal infallibility is probably the main reason that systematic sexual abuse has been more pervasive within the Catholic Church than anywhere else. Catholics should be more like Protestants, one might say, but the past 500 years have shown this to be unlikely. In any case, it seems that *wherever* children are cared for by adults, there is abuse. While the Catholic Church has remained meaningful to its flock over millennia, as integral to a moral life, for those who have made their lives within the church hierarchy it is the organisational norms which predominate over the obligation to save souls. Equally, the fine words of the constitution have little practical meaning to the citizen outside of their practical expression in everyday life. Admittedly, wherever there are children there will be sexual predators. The only protection is public visibility.

The other site for the abuse of power in relation to women and children is the family. Families vary widely of course, and child abuse and domestic violence are by no means the norm. But where social conditions support a powerful role for the head of the household, and leave members of a family at the economic and legal mercy of the head of the household without the option of leaving or seeking the help of the police, then the father may acquire a powerful mystique which licenses abuse. Each family is a project, but a project which may be closely tied to the personal project of its head as it was in times when the father enjoyed legal coverture over his wife and children, not to mention servants and tenants. Whether a patriarchal family is mirroring relations in the general community or is insulated from the general community, this little system of activity is for its members a self-concept, in which the subordinate members conceive themselves as subordinate concepts of the concept instantiated by the father figure. In this situation, the wife and children are but the limbs on the body of the father. What enjoys the approval of the father is good. Up to a point this is not in itself pathological. The little boy who works like a Trojan running errands for his father is not necessarily exploited thereby. And what counts as abuse or exploitation is historically variable. The young girl seduced by an older boy may suffer more than a young boy seduced by an older woman, not so much because of the nature of the action itself, but because of the community which stigmatises the girl and lionises the male victim.

In all the above cases, the general rule is that it is only your collaborator who can *really* hurt you. One way or another, the norms of collaboration can be violated by utilising the mystique offered by playing a senior role in a project so as to exploit junior collaborators. Ancient projects

like the patriarchy, which are deeply embedded in communities, have sedimented themselves in the form of concepts which normalise that which, when seen from a distance, is obviously exploitative and abusive.

### *Firms*

Turning now to the most characteristic creature which inhabits the terrain of liberal capitalism – the capitalist firm. Although the firm grows in egalitarian liberal soil it is far from liberal or collaborative within its own ranks. A firm is a project whose mission is the expansion of the proportion of social labour (i.e., value) it subsumes and generally operates a regime of uncompromising top-down dictatorship worthy of the most byzantine authoritarian dictatorship. Although norms of collaboration may apply within the board of directors or among co-workers on the shop floor, these collaborative relations are subsumed within the ethos of top-down direction.

Despite all the efforts of trade unions and socialists down the centuries to inculcate in workers the ethos of *class* solidarity, it is generally the case that employees of a firm to a greater or lesser extent 'identify' with the firm and often the entire industry, enjoying its successes and failure as their own, and take the hierarchy embedded in the firm's line management as legitimate. In this sense a firm is a project like any other.

This fact leads to surprising kinds of pathology. For decades, senior executives of asbestos manufacturers have known full well that their product was killing people, but have lied and fabricated scientific evidence to cover this up. So successful have they been in perpetrating this myth that many of them, together with their wives and children, have themselves fallen victim to asbestosis or mesothelioma. In the overwhelming majority of cases, base level operatives who are daily exposed to lethal doses of fibre have kept on working with the material despite information widely available in the public domain, including TV and newspapers, making it clear that by doing so they were condemning themselves to an agonising death. But these workers *believed* in their firms; they trusted the managers who were lying through their teeth, while regarding medical scientists and their union representatives, who were telling them the truth, as scaremongers. The same is true of the citizenry in the company towns where asbestos has been mined. It is said that townspeople in the US often regard the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) as public enemy number one.

Now it is often supposed that monetary interest explains this suicidal blindness. If this were the case then it is a misplaced self-interest, because the price always ends up being far too high. But the evidence of risk-taking behaviour across a range of situations (Lightfoot, 1997) tells us that this kind of utilitarian calculation explains nothing. People on the whole do what they deem to be right and honourable. And what is right and honourable is determined in great measure by the terms of the project they are committed to and their position within that project.

We know that soldiers fight and die for their country, but it is always surprising when we see low-paid manual workers dying for their company. But this is what commitment to a project entails.

Generally speaking, the rights and privileges a person enjoys flow from their social position which may derive from their family and upbringing or may be determined by contingent attributes such as gender, physique or racial type. An individual's fortune and the extent of their freedom and opportunity for self-realisation is determined by those projects into which they are accepted as participants and the *place assigned to them* within those projects. While a person's contingent attributes in themselves pose no barrier to their flourishing, people tend to be judged and assigned to social positions (treated) according to what may be quite inessential attributes. The interpellation of a person to an inappropriate social position is called *misrecognition*. For example, being able to get only a menial manual job is no injustice in itself, but if this restriction is to do with race or gender then this is an injustice, as is the low pay and social status which goes along with performing that menial, poorly paid job.

So there are two issues implicated in the problem of justice outside those problems discussed above in connection with the failure of the norms of collaboration within projects, viz., (1) the mis/recognition of subjects according to contingent attributes, and (2) the maintenance of social

positions whose occupants will enjoy markedly different social status and opportunities for self-realisation. The first is the problem of the construction of the human subject and the second is mainly a problem of political economy.

### **The human subject**

There are in social philosophy two theories of the nature of the human subject. According to the theory credited to Kant, the subject is just a point, a nothing, to which attributes are attached – a person is their gender, age, nationality, occupation, favourite colour, etc., and nothing else beyond. The person has preferences and needs, but they do not exist ‘for the sake of something else (to use Aristotle’s phrase). The other theory can be credited to Hegel and sees the subject as a kind of puzzle which is forever seeking to discover and define itself, and change the society in which they live so as to foster human flourishing. Activity theory stands in the Hegelian tradition, and is consistent with narrative and developmental theories of the self. A person is not born a sovereign individual. On the contrary, life is an ongoing struggle for identity and self-determination. So the self is not given at the start, but, to use Aristotle’s phrase, is what the individual is ‘moving toward’. As to power, the point is this: as a nothing with predicates attached, the subject is at the mercy of their interlocutors – there is nothing underneath those contingent inessential attributes. When they are interpellated into a subject position, they are *subjected* (in that curious, contradictory sense that the English language has preserved). From the Hegelian point of view, essential subject is what the subject is moving towards, and can never be finally and irrevocably determined.

The Kantian subject, on the other hand, can be understood by the methods of Set Theory: labelled and sorted into boxes, as is the routine in political analysis in the US, and institutionalised such as in electoral systems based on large geographical electorates. Kant promoted the ideal of self-determination, but conceived of self-determination in the shape of autonomous individuals.

From the standpoint of activity theory, a subject makes themselves by means of activity in projects collaborating with other people. But this is not to deny that misrecognition and interpellation are real phenomena. But they are not actions which are essential to the human condition, they are products of entrenched hierarchical institutions, either as remnants of pre-modern society, or in the form of *bureaucracy* – routinised procedures for dealing with large numbers of impersonal relations in conflict-ridden social situations.

### **Political economy**

According to liberal thinkers like Robert Nozick (1974), inequalities of wealth which are outcomes of the operation of a free market cannot be unjust, any more than someone who dies of an incurable genetic illness can be deemed to have suffered an injustice. It’s just the way things are, and for Nozick redistribution is tantamount to theft. He sees no essential difference between progressive taxation and Robin Hood.

But this so-called free market is a myth. Every system of distribution, whether a neoliberal market economy, a regulated welfare state economy or a peasant commune, is a product of human beings collaborating in projects, shaping the mode of their collaboration, just as much as they are shaping the product being distributed and the human beings producing them. No system of distribution and exchange just happens, it is *produced*, just as the legal and political systems which regulate them are produced.

Then there are the questions of justice and power attaching to the *production* of distributive institutions themselves. The moral issue arises in the social and political processes by means of which the relevant mode of distribution is formed and maintained. Injustice is in the first place something inherited from the past, a past to which people are connected through the projects to which they are committed, including families, nations, professions, and so on. To the extent that collaborators in a project enjoy the benefits of past activity which privilege them to the cost of other collaborators within a wider project (e.g., other citizens of a country who do not belong to a

privileged profession), they have a moral obligation to utilise any opportunity which arises within their collaboration to rectify that injustice. Not to do so is an abuse of power.

There can be no doubt that the capitalist economy is the vehicle for the production and maintenance of *puissance*, placing powerful projects into the hands of a few whilst funnelling fortunes into the pockets of a tiny minority. Pierre Bourdieu (1984, see Chapter 24, this volume) has shown that power in contemporary society is a sum of monetary wealth and what he calls cultural capital and social capital. The power and independence a class fraction enjoys thanks to the distinctions it maintains relative to other class fractions is nonetheless 'cashed in' through political economy. James Coleman's (1990, see Chapter 21, this volume) version of political economy, in which the basic value is a promise to return a favour, not necessarily embodied in cash, may be a necessary extension of political economy to encompass such forms of obligation. But either way, within capitalist societies, power is a function of wealth (a broader category than 'money' or 'capital', one which could encompass Bourdieu's and Coleman's concepts of 'capital'), and a considerable portion of that power is utilised to *maintain* a political economy which preserves that concentration of power and wealth. There is no obvious answer to the big question of "What is to be Done?" in respect to this situation of self-serving wealth and power. All that can be said is that the institutions which maintain this situation can be changed only by collaborative projects, and it is at least an open question whether such revolutionary projects should constitute themselves as parties or fronts or alliances or any of the various historical forms of radical subjectivity (Blunden, 2009). I tend to believe that there is merit in identifying as a project and being conscious of everything that that entails.

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