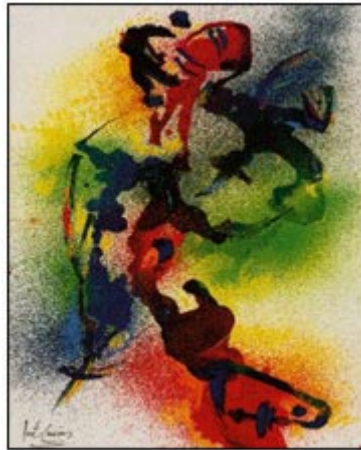


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A Post-Productivist Future for Social Democracy?

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The purpose of this article is to contrast productivism with post-productivism and explore the extent to which social democrats should support the latter. It offers a definition of post-productivism, explaining this in terms of the 'reproductive value' of care and sustainability. The paper then sketches the limits to social democracy and indicates why post-productivist solutions might therefore be appropriate. It concludes by speculating on the implications for social policy.

Social Democratic Futures

What possible futures for social democracy are on offer? We are now all too familiar with the Third Way or the 'new social democracy' (Finlayson, 2003) and as one of those who has critiqued it extensively elsewhere I will not be dealing with here (Fitzpatrick, 2002a, 2003a). Another alternative is to revive what Third Wayers (Giddens, 2001; Heffernan & Chadwick, 2003) constructed as 'old' social democracy, i.e. the attachment to nationalism, statism, corporatism, tax-and-spend redistribution, outcome equality, demand management, passive welfare, citizenship rights and universalism. Putting aside the allegation that this is at best a simplification and at worst a caricature of older versions of social democracy (C. Pierson, 2001) I will be assuming that a return to the social democracy which prevailed in the four decades after WW2 is not desirable for reasons that should become clear.

For many this leaves us with the task of imagining a social democracy which is more egalitarian than the Third Way but which nevertheless roots itself in present-day realities. Some insist that this involves appealing to commonplace understandings of social membership: the idea that proper membership involves making active contributions to one's society through work – though 'work' is not necessarily limited to paid employment. White (2003: 18) has provided an impressive defence of reciprocity:

citizens who actually claim the high minimum share of the social product necessarily available to them...have an obligation to make a decent productive contribution, proportional to ability, to the community in return.

However, reciprocity must be *fair* in that the 'background conditions' have to be socially egalitarian if an ethic of obligation is not to load more unjust burdens upon the least advantaged. This is a powerful idea but since I have critiqued it elsewhere (Fitzpatrick, 2003b) I will also be leaving this to one side.

Another reality that is allegedly unavoidable is globalisation and in opposition to those who equate globalisation with neoliberal capitalism some insist that globalisation can be shaped according to social democratic principles and aims (Held & McGrew, 2002: Ch.9). Once we have established that globalisation does not necessarily sound the death knell of social democracy (Stiglitz, 2002), even if it does make life harder for high-spending welfare states (P. Pierson, 2001), then we can imagine a social democratisation of global markets converging with the global-orientation of social democratic movements to produce a new form of politics whose pragmatism is nevertheless more egalitarian than the Third Way (Monbiot, 2003).

However, a successful expansion of the geographical scope of social democracy depends upon being clear about what kind of social democracy we want. The purpose of this article is to open up a much deeper contrast than those to which the Held, McGrew et al draw attention.

The contrast I have in mind is that between a productivist and a post-productivist social democracy (cf. Goodin, 2001). A succinct defence of the former is provided by Midgely and Tang (2001; cf. Bowles & Gintis, 1998; Brown & Lauder, 2001) when they contend that social democrats have to beat conservatives at their own game by shaping capitalism so that (1) it generates greater wealth and growth than under laissez faire regimes, but (2) without abandoning the fair distributions which are essential to social democracy and appeal to most people's innate sense of decency and humanity. The history of social democracy is therefore the history of productivist attempts to balance (1) and (2) in a variety of national, political and cultural contexts. What might therefore be called the 'new productivism' (Fitzpatrick, forthcoming: Ch.1) is the attempt to rejoin (1) and (2) in a socioeconomic environment that has been pulling them apart since the 1970s. For Third Wayers this means avoiding too egalitarian an interpretation of 'fair distribution', though other new productivists retain more ambition in this respect (Esping-Andersen, 2002).

So, what can possibly be wrong with productivism? Given its legacy, its commonsense appeal and its potential for social progressiveness why bother opening up another conceptual division in a Centre-Left politics that is already rife with ideological cleavages? The purpose of this article is not necessarily to make a knock-down argument for post-productivism but to elaborate upon the contrast introduced in the previous paragraph and to suggest why we should not automatically launch ourselves into a productivist future. I begin by defining productivism and then exploring its implications for social democracy and social policy.

Defining Productivism

Productivism is not the same as productivity. Productivity refers to increases in output per work-hour that are achieved by (a) doing more for the same, e.g. by investing in capital stock, skills and training, or changing working practices, or (b) doing the same for less, e.g. by cutting real wages, or (c) some combination of (a) and (b). Increases in efficiency and productivity are therefore crucial to the achievement of GDP growth, where GDP measures total output across a given economic territory, and such growth may be channelled into either private or public forms of consumption depending upon the preferred levels of taxation and expenditure. Growth therefore allows borrowing and taxation to be kept at levels that are economically and politically acceptable and so is popular with governments that are committed to state welfare, i.e. the public consumption of social goods. So productivity is key to the positive sum strategies of social democratic capitalism.

Productivism is the ideological fetishisation of productivity growth where the latter takes on the quality of an end rather than a means. This is not to suggest that productivity becomes simply an end-in-itself since there 'deeper' goals that productivity and growth are always designed to serve: for social democrats this goal involves fair distributions, for conservatives it involves social stability and for market liberals it involves possessive individualism. However, by taking on the quality of an end the drive for ever-greater productivity reconfigures these goals so that they, themselves, are interpreted in terms of their contribution to GDP growth. Despite the fashion for decommmodification, for example, distributions are largely defined by

social democratic parties as fair or unfair in relation to economic contributions, hence the social democratic emphasis upon redistribution by and through employment. Productivism therefore denotes the values and perceptions through which the means-end relationship is rendered indistinct: for productivity to serve deeper goals those goals must serve the processes of productivity growth; one consequence of which is that perceptions of negative externalities become purblind, e.g. social democrats are adept at identifying the negativities of free markets but have been much slower to factor the negative externalities of economic growth *per se* into their vision of public goods (see below). So, productivism is the institutional, discursive and psychological process by which social goals are subordinated to the domains of productivity growth.

For the Right this is not necessarily a problem since the figure of *homo economicus* dominates their ideas anyway. But for the Left's historic project of freedom from economic necessity productivism is much more problematic. In the twentieth century productivism was a means by which the reformist Left gained entrance to the capitalist and democratic club by demonstrating that social equality and individual liberty could be conjoined, whether through Keynesian or, more recently, supply side solutions. That state welfare can and does assist economic growth is still the main argument deployed against the anti-statist Right (e.g. Gough, 2000: Ch.8). Yet while its productivist appeals have enabled social democracy to become socially and politically established, they have also undermined its ability to recognise the limits to productivism and evolve a new political economics accordingly. To specify those limits I need to define two forms of value (Fitzpatrick, 2003a: Chs. 4-5): emotional and ecological.

First, there is the kind of emotional value expressed in care and for which the much sought-after work-life balance is an obvious condition (Guest, 2002). Carework creates economic (or exchange) value, in that it involves the performance of activity that neither the capitalist market nor the state have either the inclination or the ability to remunerate *in full*, yet economic value is not its primary rationale. We do not have children in order to populate the future economy, or look after us in old age; we do not care for elderly relatives in order to make a profit. These are potential consequences of carework but cannot, without contradicting the meaning of *care*, be their motivating rationale. Some care can and should be performed as waged activity, and should be factored much more closely into social and economic policies than at present, but most care will always remain informal, performed for reasons of emotional belonging.

Second, there is the ecological value of the environment. Greens have long pointed out that economic value depends upon and feeds off an environmental substructure (Daly, 1996; Douthwaite, 1999). The resources we mine and the ecosystem we pollute are the origins of economic value. Locke's definition of property, as the mixing of labour with the fruits of the earth, gave rise to the labour theory of value where labour is implicitly defined as 'active' and nature as 'passive' so that, whether subsequently cloaked in capitalist or socialist costume, the nature that labour converts into commodities is pushed into the background. As a result economic orthodoxy relates productivity to labour rather than to natural resources (Bleischwitz, 2001). For Greens, by contrast, the environment's value may be quantified to some extent (Pearce & Barbier, 2000) but ultimately transcends the economic (Daly, 1997). So while it is certainly necessary to 'Green' the economy even a Green economy could not perform all of the work of sustainability that needs to be done. For this, a much wider conception of social activity and participation is required, one that sets the economic in an environmental context rather than the other way around.

We therefore have two forms of value, emotional and environmental, that are related to, but might be said to underpin, the economic value that remains central to contemporary societies. If this is the case then we potentially have reference points against which productivism can be judged. By redefining productivity as the transformation of (a) emotional and natural resources into (b) sources of economic wealth, we can see that productivism is that which assesses (a) according to the value of (b), whereas what I will call 'post-productivism' says that once the pursuit of economic wealth becomes an unsustainable goal then (b) must be assessed according to the values of (a). The emotional and the environmental are not, therefore, *different* forms of value but the tectonic strata upon which economic value is dependent and against which it must be measured. So, we already have some indication why emotional and ecological values constitute limits to the economic and so to productivism.

For the sake of convenience let me place emotional and ecological value under the joint heading of 'reproduction'. Reproductive value refers to the emotional and ecological foundations of economic value, that upon which economic value is founded but which it can never fully incorporate or commodify since care and sustainability imply forms of activity so extensive that they can never be completely quantified or reduced to economic criteria. Reproductive value and economic value are therefore related to one another ambiguously. Economic value depends upon the reproduction of its conditions but cannot acknowledge this dependency since no economy is wealthy enough to fully compensate for the emotional and ecological costs that it creates: the ethics of affluence and growth are undermined the moment we render visible the foundations upon which they rest because it is these foundations which they are gradually eroding. Reproductive value is the ultimate source of economic value yet it is the destructive effects of affluence and growth which now provide us with the reflexive skills and resources needed to preserve reproductive activity. Reproductive and economic values therefore push both away from and towards one another.

Productivism is that which would subsume reproduction within the sphere of production, insisting that the costs of pursuing ever-higher levels of economic wealth *can* be incorporated within the existing political economy, e.g. by insisting that carework and sustainability are job- and therefore growth-friendly. Post-productivism is that which would subsume production within the spheres of reproduction, insisting that those costs are beyond the capacity of the employment society to fully recognise and absorb so that we must alter our conceptions of value and so of affluence, growth and work. Post-productivism is therefore a doctrine of 'reproductivity' whereby economic growth is justified if and only if it can be demonstrated that the emotional and ecological sources of production are enhanced. Reproductivity does not, then, deny the importance of productivity but subjects it to 'non-productivist' criteria, i.e. it is opposed to the ideology of productivism but not to productivity *per se* since productivity growth *may* be crucial to the maintenance of reproductive value, though the extent to which this is the case cannot be determined as a theoretical *a priori*.

We have therefore identified a potential faultline in social democratic politics: between those who support productivism and those who are drawn to the values of reproductivity in the belief that productivist solutions are exhausting themselves. Let me now illustrate what is at stake in this contrast.

Reproductivity and the Limits of Social Democracy

As already noted many on the Left advocate a productivist future for social democracy (Huber & Stephens, 2001). ‘Wage earner feminism’ prizes Orloff’s (1993) right to commodification and says that gender equality is best delivered through dual breadwinning households; ecological modernisation (Mol & Sonnenfeld, 2000) insist that Green reforms are inefficacious unless they promote productive activity. However, others advocate what we here call post-productivism on the grounds that productivism undermines the sources of its own value and so is ultimately self-defeating. Some feminists point to the disadvantages of dual breadwinning, e.g. that it predicated gender equality upon the repertoires of masculinity (Fraser, 1997); many Greens argue that ecological modernisation is a short-term solution at best (Fitzpatrick with Caldwell, 2001); the postindustrial Left calls for approaches that do not try to beat capitalism at its own game (Little, 1998).

The strongest case for a productivist social democracy can be found within those nations committed to moderate to high levels of equality since it is here that the balance mentioned earlier – between growth and fair distributions – continues to be most effectively maintained.

Egalitarian social democracies are attractive to feminist commentators, although the incompleteness of the social democratic record is not ignored. Plantenga *et al* (1999) note that the Netherlands idealises the equal sharing of time between waged and unwaged work and between men and women (OECD, 2002). However, although women’s labour market participation has grown the countervailing increase in men’s care participation has been more limited and so women are still the secondary earners in a ‘one-and-a-half-earner’ model (Lewis, 2001). The Dutch system salutes part-time employment as the means of combining employment and care but it is primarily women who take such jobs. Policies still favour breadwinning and thus the privatisation and feminisation of care. According to Warren (2000) Denmark, too, pulls away from the male breadwinner model but only half successfully as unwaged work remains underemphasized and because the substitute for *male* breadwinning is regarded as *dual* breadwinning then considerable remnants of male breadwinning nevertheless remain as women are concentrated away from the core jobs that men have little incentive to vacate (OECD, 2002). There is a similar pattern visible in Sweden: high rates of female participation in the labour market combined with generous childcare and parental leave policies. The price, though, is a labour market with some of the most sexually segregated divisions to be found anywhere with women grouped into public sector jobs and the one-and-a-half model visible here also (Sainsbury, 1999; Bergmark & Palme, 2003).

Is the incomplete record of social democracy due to policy failures that await rectification or might those policies be perfectly consistent with the productivist logic that underpins them? Productivism demands either lots of waged breadwinning or lots of unwaged caregiving (or preferably both): the former facilitates economic growth since improvements in output are easier to achieve through formal activity; the latter is consistent with economic growth so long as employment levels are reasonably high. Neoliberal and social democratic economies both depend upon high rates of breadwinning, though the former prefers low-wage jobs in the private sector whereas the latter prefers high-wage jobs in the public one. What the productivist logic cannot countenance is lots of *remunerated caregiving* since this seems to subtract from growth by being neither inexpensive nor oriented to productivity increases. In a productivist economy, then, employment *must* be promoted over care if productivity is to grow.

So the ambivalent successes and failures of productivist social democracy are no accident. Whereas social democracy is able to pay women to enter the labour market, and so expand the very caregiving services that those women need, there are limits to which men can be paid to leave it since this would strain social expenditure to bursting point. This is not to decry social democracy's record on gender equality, nor to predict that future improvements will not be made, but it is to observe that there are productivist limits to the feminist agenda.

Similarly, evidence also suggests that social democratic societies like Sweden are the Greenest (Lafferty, 2001). But because of the stress upon international market competitiveness the emphasis has been placed upon technological, end-of-the-pipe fixes, top-down managerialism rather than grassroots democracy, a win-win philosophy that avoids the difficult questions of trade-off and a legacy whereby Swedish industry has developed through environmental exploitation (Jamison & Baark, 1999; Sverrisson, 2001). Environmental concerns have not been integrated into the wider array of economic, social and welfare issues, unless to justify a 'business as usual' approach (Eckerberg, 2000, 2001). Jamison & Baark (1999: 217) find that Denmark's record is better but that, even here, environmental policies have not been integrated in the social lifeworld, such that they are easily abandoned when they become too costly – a risk also noticeable in Finland (Niemi-Iilahti, 2001). In the Netherlands and Norway, the environment tends to be brought into the decision-making picture only when it benefits, but does not challenge, economic orthodoxy, e.g. job creation in the waste management industries (van Muijen, 2000; Langhelle, 2000).

So while the social democratic record is impressive its incompleteness may be due to the limits of productivism rather than to defects in policy making that merely require an administrative fix. If so, then there is a question mark over whether the solution to the problems of productivism is yet more productivism. In terms of both caregiving and sustainability, social democracies have arguably gone further than other countries in incorporating reproductive values into their socioeconomic institutions and policies. Yet they are bumping up against the limits of productivism because the dominance of economic value makes it harder to achieve more than modest (though still welcome) forms of gender equality and sustainability. The Centre-Left may, therefore, face a choice between seeking a productivist future and a post-productivist one. In the final section I indicate what the implications of this for social policy might be.

Post-Productivist Social Policy

The points made below are obviously incomplete without either a political economics of reproductivity to give it substance or a political strategy to give it feasibility. Nevertheless, the following three areas give some indication of the direction in which we might travel.

In his discussion of post-productivism Goodin (2001) offers a typological definition of post-productivism as 'welfare without work'. This is not a helpful formulation since it makes no sense to aim for a workless society. In truth what Goodin supports is not worklessness *per se* but a politics of resource autonomy, the resource in question being available in two currencies: income and time. This means correcting imbalances in the existing distribution of resources between employed and unemployed, men and women, affluent and non-affluent.

A politics of working-time reductions has long been proposed as at least a partial solution to unemployment (e.g. Gorz, 1989) since, assuming production costs and output are stable, the time freed up can be used to employ more people (cf. Little, 2002).¹ Furthermore, and as many commentators have suggested, gender imbalances require a greater equilibrium between homelife and worklife and a redistribution of carework from women to men (Guest, 2002). But it is the broader divisions of affluence which present even more of a problem. Challenging the culture of overwork means encouraging many of those who are time rich and income poor to converge upon those who are time poor and income rich, and *vice versa*.² As always, though, desire is unlikely to translate into social change unless government channels preferences and actions in the appropriate direction. Among other things this might suggest more imaginative employment policies, e.g. where employers are obliged to replace wage increments with increments of time above a stipulated level of the pay scale; and it suggests the establishment of time banks and time credit schemes to accompany the new fashion for endowment funds, e.g. baby bonds, and tax credits.

The trickier problem is in converging those who are time and income poor upon those who are time and income rich. If we contradict the last quarter century of welfare reform and assume that the problem lies primarily with the latter rather than the former then what new combination of sticks and carrots might we conceive? In addition to the kind of progressive income tax levels that New Labour has abandoned even taking about one possible solution awaiting a future government is to tax time by introducing different ages of compulsory retirement. To put it simply, the richer you are the longer you have to work. If this sounds off the wall it is no more outrageous, and considerably fairer, than the present situation where a single retirement age is being slowly ratcheted up, forcing those on the lowest incomes (and so with the shortest longevity) to work longer for their inadequate pensions. In other words, the taxation of time already prevails but in a regressive rather than progressive form. Obviously, we can expect many of the rich to oppose such policies and withhold their compliance, but surely a society which has long been obsessed with the assumed defections and non-compliance of the poor has the experience to devise a scheme that can cope with this!

The freeing of time potentially leads in a post-productivist direction since while society continues to *grow* it grows by conserving a finite resource (time) rather than by consuming natural resources in infinite pursuit of materialist satisfaction. I say 'potentially' because free time does not, by itself, guarantee the enhancement of reproductive values. This, too, requires policies to encourage the right sorts of activities and discourage the wrong ones. The *sine qua non* here is a shift away from the dominance within social policies of paid work, since while paid work can be made compatible with emotional and environmental necessities (as argued above) the latter may ultimately require a greater displacement of the former than productivist social democrats can contemplate. In itself, obviously, a shift from formal into informal economies is no more of a guarantee – the 'third sector' may also be emotionally and ecologically damaging, depending upon its socioeconomic context – but the shift at least symbolises that the wage relation is only one of a number of socially valuable relations. This may hint at a politics of 'civic minima' (Fitzpatrick, 2003b) where welfare systems become multi-tiered and multi-gated, i.e. capable of facilitating a wider diversity of participatory activity than implied by the injunction to learn-earn-spend-save-retire. In a post-productivist economy you do not have to 'pay' men to leave the labour market since the divisions between formal and informal activities are less pronounced. Something like an unconditional income will not deliver this kind of

system by itself but may underpin the kind of economic diversity upon which a range of conditional schemes could flourish (Fitzpatrick, 1999).

Finally, Goodin (2003) also hints that post-productivism implies a more thoroughgoing democratisation of society. Insisting that inputs (reasons, motivations, reflection) are as important to the democratic process as outputs (counting votes) Goodin explores how and why deliberation can improve social understanding and so contribute to democratic legitimacy. He interprets deliberation as an imaginative process that takes place largely within our heads, as acts of creative empathy by which we project ourselves into the perspectives of others and consider social and political questions with reference to an internalised multitude of voices (cf Dryzek, 2000). This 'democratic deliberation within' retains the rationale of deliberative democracy but provides a more realistic basis for accommodating the beliefs and preferences of others.

I will not repeat the critiques of this approach that I have made elsewhere (Fitzpatrick, 2003c) but Goodin does at least suggest that considerable bridges exist between post-productivism and democratisation. Most obviously, deliberative democracy requires that we subject social principles, norms and goals to greater scrutiny than at present, offering a greater voice to the post-materialist desires that are, too often, either silenced or sublimated into pseudo-materialist activities. And if Goodin underestimates the potential for the deliberative reform of institutions then the scope for democratisation of welfare institutions cannot be overlooked. To some extent those who would ground reform in the experiences and expressed needs of service users (Beresford, 2001) are pointing in this direction, though I have elsewhere suggested that a 'welfare democracy' requires much more than improvements in the learning capacity of administrators and administrative systems, as welcome as this would be (Fitzpatrick, 2002b).

Whatever else they may imply post-productivist social policies therefore incorporate a politics of free time, civic minima and discursive deliberation. Whether or not social democracy has a post-productivist future may therefore depend to a considerable extent upon whether social policies can be turned away from our current obsessions with employment, market competition, new managerialism, workfare and possessive consumerism.

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¹ Though the recent French experience is a sobering reminder of how and why this proposal can be co-opted.

² This characterisation is obviously crude and ignores the distinction between quantities and quality of income and time.