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## Reply to Schlothfeldt

*Abstract:* Recognition is an important function of labour, as Schlothfeldt claims, but only under given capitalist conditions. It is the very point of the introduction of basic income, if embedded in a suitable education system, that it would allow people to receive recognition from all kinds of activities they regard as meaningful rather than from stultifying wage labour.

I am grateful that Schlothfeldt presents my position correctly, and agree with his analysis that my position rests on “the central premise that labor is in general a burden which people would prefer to be freed from”. I also am happy to read that if “the premise is true, I would agree that people should get [...] a basic income so as to guarantee that no one is excluded from the process of shaping the environment they live in” (113f.). So we can concentrate on the question whether the premise is true.

Schlothfeldt argues that it is not because “it doesn’t do justice to the importance labor has for the worker”. For proving that it has importance for the worker he points to “an essential function of labor: the recognition linked to employment, already expressed in remuneration, which is entirely lacking in the case of a basic income” (114). He also points to this function of recognition when he answers his “thought experiment” (115). He is right that this function is essential, but curiously does not consider that the labor that has this function is the labor in the present capitalist system. Moreover, he leaves it open how the function of recognition is compatible with his recognition that labor is in general a burden for the laborer.

According to my experience, descendants of worker families do not differ from descendants of aristocratic families in preferring a life of self-chosen activity to that of a labor that is forced upon them by a labor market more and more arbitrary and unreliable. For sure, my experience is only subjective and accidental. But whose experience in our controversy is not?

Anyway, for replacing subjective experience with a more reliable judge we better turn to history rather than to purportedly objective experience claimed by statistical or demoscopic data. Free men in Athens and other Greek poleis had no problem at all in finding complete social recognition for activities for which even the idea of a remuneration by some employer is ridiculous. Still it

is to their freedom from labor that we owe science and philosophy. Schlotfeld's distinction between "a hobby philosopher" and "a professional one" would have appeared to them very strange. Nor had the masses of peasants and herdsmen a problem with social recognition although, like the overwhelming majority of mankind in the past, they had no employment. If some people today miss social recognition when they lack employment, this is certainly not the normal case that we should accept as a model for a better society.

What I think is too often overlooked in discussions of the economic situation of modern society is the simple fact pointed to already by Hegel that its problems do not spring from an insufficiency of production, as has been the case in premodern societies, but on the contrary from overproduction (Hegel 1970, §245). This fact becomes again obvious today when governments are spending enormous sums of money for stimulating consumption, as it was obvious in the economic practice of deficit spending in the years after the great crisis of 1929. Though the crises are triggered by financial problems, they would not have the disastrous consequences they do without the basic fact that modern technology again and again replaces workers and employees with machines. Modern technology has the power of creating superabundance, but it will produce unemployment rather than superabundance as long as we consider it a condition of a good society that everyone is employed in a job that takes most of their energy.

It is true and has also been pointed to by Hegel that modern society lives on the idea that everyone's property must be 'earned' by their own work (Hegel 1970, §245). If people cannot consider themselves to be contributing to the riches of their society they will feel humiliated. But as Hegel perhaps did not yet understand clearly enough, this is a problem of exclusion not from economic production but from any kind of socially recognized work. So if activity in non-economic spheres, such as art, science, sport and even non-political religious activity, is socially recognized, everyone will have a chance of contributing to the riches of their society.

Basic income is certainly not a sufficient condition to reach such a state, as there needs to be a framework of education that gives everyone opportunity to detect their specific talents by which they can contribute to the riches of their society. But if such a framework is taken into account, it is a promising condition. At least it is more promising than the alternatives developed till today to adapt society to modern technology and its promise of superabundance.

## Bibliography

Hegel, G. W. F. (1970), *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts*, Frankfurt