

Social and Private Goods: The Duality Of Unpaid Internships

MORRISON, Andrew <<http://orcid.org/0000-0002-6700-6875>>

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REVIEW ARTICLE



Social and private goods: the duality of unpaid internships

Andrew Morrison

Sheffield Institute of Education, Sheffield Hallam University, Sheffield, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland

ABSTRACT

This review paper offers a political philosophy perspective on the place that unpaid internships occupy within the UK's graduate labour market. By reviewing a range of sociologically-oriented academic and sources, the paper concludes that we lack an understanding of the deeper historical and philosophical roots of the contentions surrounding this area of work. To address this, the review locates unremunerated internships at the intersections of two opposing liberal philosophies in relation to work: an egalitarian and pluralist strain wherein a job is a key social good; classic political economy in which an individual's labour is a private good. The paper argues that this contending duality is the origin both of the criticisms that unpaid internships attract for perpetuating social elitism and their persistence in the face of such criticisms.

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Internships; labour; social good; private good

Introduction

By drawing from principles of political philosophy, this paper seeks to offer a novel understanding of the position of unpaid internships within the UK's graduate labour market that goes beyond the predominantly sociological frames of the academic literature on this subject. The paper begins by reviewing a broad range of sources from this literature. It is noted that the criticisms that these studies make of such internships for causing key professional areas to be socially elitist and exclusionary have hitherto been largely framed in terms of their injurious effects on social mobility or on workforce diversity. Similarly, the rise of unremunerated internships has frequently been discussed as one of the outcomes of neoliberalism and the emergence of a growing 'precariat' (Standing, 2016). This paper does not discount such arguments but seeks to go beyond them.

A political philosophy perspective is applied wherein it is concluded that both the controversy that surrounds unpaid internships, and their persistence in the face of such controversy, derive from their position at the nexus of two contending philosophies in relation to employment: firstly, a tradition of liberal egalitarianism and of liberal pluralism whereby a job is a key social good; secondly, classic liberal political economy wherein an

CONTACT Andrew Morrison  a.morrison@shu.ac.uk

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individual's labour is held to be a private good which they may dispose of as they wish within the terms of an arrangement freely entered into with an employer.

The purpose here is to highlight the ambivalent position, or what the paper terms the 'dual-nature', of unpaid internships as simultaneously social and private goods. This paper is, thus, able to shift the terms of the debate around unremunerated internships and place them within a deeper historical and philosophical context. Finally, while the present focus is upon the UK, concerns about unpaid internships are present in other advanced economies and consequently much of this discussion may usefully be applied more internationally.

Unpaid internships: debates and contentions

The unpaid labour of unremunerated internships should be viewed within the wider context of unwaged work and its relations with waged work. Today's unpaid internships have their antecedents in the apprenticeships of the past which were usually unwaged in return for the apprentice's residential craft tuition by the master (Sennett, 2009: 58). In contemporary society, household labour, which remains heavily gendered, is unpaid but facilitates paid work. And, for Weghman (2015: 600), it is in their different relationships to paid work that an unremunerated internship may be distinguished from a volunteering role: while the former is undertaken in the hope of obtaining paid employment, the latter is an altruistic donation of time made without thought of career advancement; a second key distinguishing characteristic is their level of formality: while an unpaid intern is in a pseudo-employee role with relatively formalised responsibilities and hours, a volunteer has (or should have) much greater latitude in those respects.

An internship may last from six weeks to 12 months but is typically around three months (Owens & Stuart, 2016, p. 700). Figures for the number of graduates in the UK undertaking internships vary significantly. Using data from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) statutory survey, Hunt and Scott (2020, p. 468) extrapolate a sum of 23–31,000 interns. Towards, the other end of the scale, however, the Sutton Trust report as many as 70,000 at any time (Montacute, 2018, p. 1). Figures for the proportion of internships which are unpaid vary quite widely and there is both geographical and sectoral variance (Cullinane & Montacute, 2018; Roberts, 2017; Sutton Trust, 2019). Nevertheless, the headline figures are all high from around a third (Taylor, Marsh, Nicol, & Broadbent, 2017: 91) to seventy percent (Cullinane & Montacute, 2018: 3).

As indicated, unpaid internships have attracted some high-profile criticism in the UK, but their legal status remains ambiguous. The National Minimum Wage Act 1998 explicitly excluded from its provisions persons engaging in '*work experience for a continuous or non-continuous period which exceeds four weeks*'. In the absence of specific legislation, the nearest current substitute for employers and interns is government guidelines to clarify National Minimum Wage legislation. These indicate that an intern is eligible for the National Minimum Wage if they are classed as a 'worker' (wherein the key stipulation is to have a written contract) or if they have a promise of a contract of future work. Crucially, though, an intern may not receive the National Minimum Wage if they fall under the broad category of 'voluntary' worker (gov.uk).

Unpaid internships are particularly common in certain professional areas, particularly the media, law, digital, and cultural and creative industries (CCIs) and many UK-based

academic studies have focused upon these sectors (Siebert & Wilson, 2013; Percival & Hesmondhalgh, 2014; Randle, Forson, & Calveley, 2015; Samdanis & Lee, 2019; Brook, O'Brien, & Taylor, 2020). This type of sectoral focus is also broadly reflected in the North American based academic literature, where unpaid internships are an even more structurally-rooted feature of the graduate labour market (Frenette, 2013; Shade & Jacobson, 2015; Jacobson & Regan Shade, 2018). However, internships in other sectors of the UK graduate labour market have also been the subject of critical academic attention, for example, the voluntary or 'Third Sector' (Weghman, 2015; Leonard, Halford, & Bruce, 2016), environmental and conservation organisations (Vercammen, Park, Goddard, Lyons-White, & Knight, 2020), museums and galleries (Holmes, 2006) and higher education (Forkert & Lopes, 2015).

Certain key themes emerge from the UK-based and North American academic literature. One theme is that an apparent 'oversupply' of graduates in relation to the number of paid entry-level positions has created a pool of free labour from which organisations can readily draw. This is most apparent in highly competitive sectors such as the media and CCI where entry-routes also tend to be unstructured (Frenette, 2013; Shade & Jacobson, 2015). However, a lack of alignment between graduate supply and industry demand is apparent across sectors (Weghman, 2015; Leonard et al., 2016; Vercammen et al., 2020; Holmes, 2006; Forkert & Lopes, 2015). As an extension of this theme, it has been noted that relatively few unpaid internships translate into paid employment, a feature that is particularly the case for the more elite-entry media and CCIs. For example, Siebert and Wilson (2013: 715) found that only forty-five percent of their unpaid intern respondents had subsequently found paid work within the music industry. Another theme is the gendered nature of unpaid work in these sectors. Here, Jacobson and Shade (2018: 322) report that women occupy seventy-seven percent of unpaid internships in the USA, a fact which they ascribe to a historical devaluing of the labour provided by women.

Unpaid internships offer a 'foot in the door' and work experience to those able to undertake them. However, this raises the issue of social class inequalities. Here, the focus within the literature has been upon how unpaid internships inhibit social mobility by restricting entry to certain key professional sectors to those with sufficient economic capital to undertake them (Brook et al., 2020; Randle et al., 2015; Vercammen et al., 2020; Holmes, 2006; Leonard et al., 2016). Finally, there is the theme of 'representativeness'. Elite and powerful professions must better reflect the composition of the wider social community in which they are embedded because this enables them to better serve society (Holmes, 2006; Leonard et al., 2016; Siebert & Wilson, 2013). However, this latter argument features in a less explicit way than the others and, it may be argued, is the least well theorised. Where such arguments are made, they tend to appear under the rubric of 'diversity', the benefits of which are implied rather than fully explored. The following section discusses what this paper believes to be the underlying philosophical principles of the 'representativeness' critique from the academic literature.

The paper explores these principles by reference to the theories of liberal egalitarianism and liberal pluralism. There are different strands and traditions of both, and they can also sit in tension with each other. For example, today social liberal pluralism is often associated with identity-based social movements, and for some radical critics this represents a potential obstacle to the need for economically-based redistributive justice.

Thus, Fraser (1995, p. 88) contends that what she terms the recognition politics of mainstream multiculturalism coheres well with the redistribution politics of the liberal welfare state in that both tend to accommodate a form of group differentiation based around minoritised categories. However, both also tend to leave the ‘deep structures’ of inequality intact while making ‘surface allocations’: for example, job quotas that do not address either economic maldistribution nor the ways this is shaped by gendered or raced social subjectivities (Fraser, 1995, p. 89). Nevertheless, both strands of liberal thought can also co-exist because what they have in common is that their ‘unit of analysis’ is that of the group. As the paper argues, this group-level tradition of liberalism is what underpins the criticisms surrounding unpaid internships. Finally, while the present focus is on unpaid internships in the UK, the two different schools of liberalism discussed in the following two sections are characteristic of philosophical thought and political practices in North America and other Anglophone world regions. This is reflected in the literature that is drawn upon.

Liberal pluralism and egalitarianism and social representation

1) Social representation through equality of opportunity

The work of the American philosopher, Michael Walzer, a leading liberal theorist of distributive justice, is a key starting point to illuminate some of the philosophical principles behind the criticisms levelled at unpaid internships. Walzer’s (1983) theory of ‘Complex Equality’ begins with the position that the goods with which distributive justice is concerned must be ‘social goods’: they cannot be simply of idiosyncratic value (that is, of value only to individual persons). Rather, the good must have a shared meaning, although that does not mean that everyone will share exactly the same meaning at all times and in all places. In accepting that social goods have a broad common value, it is then accepted that there need to be principles to guide in their equitable distribution. Thus, as Yack (1999, p. 1103) notes, it is Walzer’s emphasis upon the need to secure broad, if not particularly deep, agreements on liberal principles of justice that marks him out as a liberal pluralist.

For Walzer (1983) a job is just such a social good. In fact, Walzer (1983, p. 129) employs the term ‘office’ in preference to that of job to highlight his argument that the procedures by which candidates are selected for any such position are a subject of key interest to the wider political community which the office is to serve. As the office is *for* the wider community, it ‘belongs’ to that community and cannot be idiosyncratically valued (Walzer, 1983, p. 136). The consequence of this is that no office can ever be disposed of as a matter of individual or small group discretion: only transparent procedures which attend exclusively to candidates’ relevant qualifications are acceptable (Walzer, 1983, p. 137). And, while much of Walzer’s (1983) exposition of his argument is given over to governmental or public office, he makes the point that state intervention within labour markets, such as through anti-discrimination legislation, means that all jobs may now be understood as offices in the sense in which he uses the term.

Walzer (1983, p. 10) also contends that social goods are constituted by two characteristics: monopoly and dominance. Monopoly refers to the extent to which individuals or

social groups own or have control over social goods, for example through economic or political means or the education system. Dominance means the fungibility of social goods, the extent to which they can have a use beyond their own intrinsic meaning by affording the owner access to a wide range of other social goods. Walzer (1983, p. 16) observes that, historically, theorists of distributive justice have been most concerned with what he terms 'simple equality': reducing the monopoly side of the equation with a lesser degree of concern for the dominance aspect of distribution. Walzer (1983, p. 17) criticises this tendency by arguing that it is necessary, instead, to focus on reducing dominance and not just, or at least not primarily, on restraining monopoly. To this end, he suggests that social goods should be seen as inhabiting distinct 'spheres', each with their own discrete area of value and meaning, which are not convertible into one another. Thus, political office should not be bought or sold or become an object of nepotism. Where this form of transgression occurs, Walzer (1983, p. 19) labels it 'tyranny'.

Complex equality is what marks out Walzer (1983) as a social liberal egalitarian, although it also locates him as a market egalitarian who accepts a central role for market relations. He is comfortable with the idea that social goods may be held monopolistically so long as this does not mean that any one social good becomes generally convertible thereby leading to a tyrannical incursion into the spheres of others. Thus, in accepting the idea of monopoly, he accepts economic inequalities *per se* as an inevitability of an active market economy. However, Walzer's (1983) concern about the tyranny of dominance means that he is well aware that money is the ultimate convertible social good that provides access to many others. He cautions that its capacity to move across boundaries and distort other spheres is the principal form of 'illegal migration' (Walzer, 1983, p. 22).

In Walzer's (1983) terms, therefore, the criticisms which the sociological literature has made of unpaid internships are based in a perception that relatively laissez-faire employment laws have created their own tyranny by permitting money to distort selection procedures and produce workforces unrepresentative of the wider social community. Of course, Walzer (1983) himself is a philosopher and his theory is limited to offering a set of rough principles rather than prescriptions regarding the boundaries of money, and the theory of complex equality certainly makes no particular reference to unpaid internships. Walzer (1983, p. 120) proposes that 'market imperialism' – the dominance of laissez-faire markets – requires a form of economic redistribution in order to redraw the line into which money has illegitimately crossed.

Walzer's (1983) insistence upon the necessary boundaries between social spheres has been termed a form of 'internal pluralism' because different distributive principles obtain in each; it has also been observed that because internal pluralism rejects the dominance of any one form of social good, it also serves to promote Walzer's (1983) egalitarianism (Bevir & Reiner, 2012). Nevertheless, despite his willingness to countenance redistributive measures, and his insistence upon the importance of jobs as a social good, where employment is concerned Walzer (1983) is essentially a theorist of equality of opportunity rather than outcome. In that respect, his theory of complex equality reflects the strand of market liberal egalitarianism that has prevailed in Britain. Thus, on the one hand, the UK's modern liberal democracy values pluralistic social representation with a focus on equality of outcome; on the other hand, it holds to individualised competition as a key tenet of an

equal society. And, in the balance between the two, the latter has historically outweighed the former.

ii) Social representation through equality of outcome

It is possible, however, that the situation outlined above may be changing to some extent. Recent years have seen growing disquiet in the UK surrounding unpaid internships and their flagrant disregard for the basic principles of meritocratic competition. Calls to ban unpaid internships have been joined to broader suggestions that social class be treated in recruitment practices as a 'protected category' in the same way that other categories such as ethnicity are dealt with under the UK's 2010 Equality Act (Abrahams et al., 2016; APPG, 2017). Although the emphasis here, at least in the policy-level literature, remains more on social mobility than on social representation, there is nevertheless growing concern with the latter and with equalities of social class outcome in relation to the recruitment practices of elite-entry professions. However, calls for greater social class representation imply some understanding on the part of those making them of what is meant by social class or, perhaps more directly, *what* is being represented. This is briefly discussed below, followed by an analysis of a more egalitarian form of liberal pluralism than that offered by Walzer which, it is argued, captures the nature of these growing concerns.

Nancy Fraser (a radical social philosopher rather than a liberal) proposes that social class be analysed as a 'bivalent' social category. In this case, bivalent means that social class should be seen as a product both of a society's economic structure and of its cultural status order (Fraser, 1995, p. 74). It is the economic aspects of class that have made unpaid internships controversial in that individuals from lower socio-economic groups do not have the economic capital to be able to undertake them. Put another way, economic capital has brought into being or, at least, made salient the identity as a 'class of itself' those who cannot afford to take up unremunerated internships. It is, though, the culturally ascriptive aspects of class that are pertinent to questions of social representation. Criticisms that unpaid internships lead to socially exclusive and unrepresentative professions are rooted, to some extent, in a belief that class retains some degree of cultural identity which deserves to be adequately represented within important professional sectors. And the work of the nineteenth century British philosopher, John Stuart Mill, is foundational to this form of liberal pluralism.

Mill believed that an individual was shaped by what would now be termed socialisation or environment, and economic position was of key importance in this respect. Economic position was broadly understood to mean not simply economic divisions per se but membership of social groups that related to each other in terms either of domination or subordination. Thus, in *The Subjection of Women* (1869), Mill wrote at length about the role that nineteenth century patriarchal structures played in the reproduction of intersubjective gender relations. In this broad understanding of 'class', an individual's material circumstances act powerfully to shape, although never to determine, their 'character' and their vested interests. And, while Mill suspected class sectional interests because he privileged individual freedoms above all, he supported universal suffrage as the only way to ensure proper representation of these different group interests. Thus, in *The Subjection of Women* he argued that women's interests could not adequately be represented by men, while in *Considerations on Representative Government*, he proposed that working

class interests are best represented in Parliament by those from within that class. Representation from within the group was important because ‘... *in the absence of its natural defenders, the interest of the excluded is always in danger of being overlooked; and, when looked at, is seen with very different eyes from those of the persons whom it directly concerns*’ (Mill, 1861 [2015, p. 216]).

What Mill was arguing for was what is now termed ‘moral pluralism’: an acknowledgment that different social groups hold different moral positions or worldviews, all of which need to be accommodated within a representative government. In *On Liberty*, Mill warns of the dangers of a middle-class morality and self-interest dominating over other voices (Mill, 1859 [2015, p. 10]). For Mill, though, representation was not just a principle, it also had a functional end in that he felt strongly that middle and upper-class parliamentarians could learn much from the unique experiences of working-class representatives.

Of course, Mill was writing about social class in an age quite removed from that of contemporary Britain. The subjective and ascriptive aspects of class are felt very differently in what has been argued by some to be an era of late modern individualisation (Beck, 1992; Furlong & Cartmel, 2007) from how they were experienced in Mill’s Victorian period. The ‘thick’ concept of culture that underlay Mill’s arguments about class clearly no longer pertains. However, it is this paper’s argument that the criticisms that the sociological literature has made of the socially elitist effects of unpaid internships represent an attenuated form of Millian liberal pluralism. The word ‘attenuated’ is employed here because contemporary sociological studies function from within what may be termed a ‘thin’ concept of class identity and cultures. Nevertheless, there are clear echoes of Mill’s moral pluralism to be heard in today’s concerns that growing social elitism within the professions, partly a product of unpaid internships, means that only a certain class worldview is getting to be heard. Relatedly, contemporary arguments that greater social diversity can conduce to better decision-making resonate with Mill’s insistence that middle-class politicians could gain from the experiences of their working-class peers.

Freedom to labour

Unpaid internships thus offend the liberal egalitarian and liberal pluralist principle that a job is a social good whose incumbents must adequately reflect the composition of the wider community they serve. In contrast, however, unpaid internships find support in another competing philosophy of work which is considerably more powerful: that individuals are free to provide their labour to whichever employer they wish under conditions mutually agreed with that employer. This is the philosophical tradition of classic liberal political economy. In this more dominant school of thought, the individual is the prime unit of analysis, and this has created a set of assumptive labour market practices that have conduced to an acceptance of unpaid internships. The ideology of free contract of labour has its origins deep within Britain’s early modern history. Thus, for Adam Smith, an individual’s labour was ‘... *the original foundation of all other property, so it is the most sacred and inviolable ...*’ and thus any infringement upon its free deployment was a ‘... *manifest encroachment upon the just liberty both of the workman and of those who might be disposed to employ him. As it hinders the one from working at what he thinks proper, so it hinders the others from employing whom they think proper*’ (Smith, 1776 [1999, p. 225]). The freedom to labour was thus a matter of individual sovereignty,

but it was also vital to the smooth functioning of labour markets. Smith inveighed against the restrictions imposed by the eighteenth century apprenticeship system on labour mobility, which meant that sharp wage differentials between declining and expanding industries could not be equilibrated by shifts in labour supply (Smith, 1776 [1999, p. 239]).

The radical historian Karl Polanyi has traced the effects of this ideology on British economic development. For Polanyi (1944 [2001]), the 18th and particularly the nineteenth century witnessed a 'Great Transformation' in Britain from a society in which market relations were an accessory feature of wider social relations and practices to a market society in which all social life was subjugated to the needs of market relations. Polanyi notes that this ideological shift was abetted by developments in machine technology which, in turn, facilitated the growth of factory production. A key part of the movement in the nineteenth century to a highly monetised economy was the requirement for a ready supply of mobile labour free from the constraints of non-market obligations. The free exchange of labour, unimpeded by any prohibitive legislation, thus became a crucial tenet of Britain's nineteenth century laissez-faire liberalism and formed a key element in the principle of the self-regulating market (Polanyi, 1944 [2001, p. 72]). Polanyi (1944 [2001, p. 43]) is sharply critical of these developments, arguing that they led to human labour becoming a 'fictitious commodity' whereby capitalists bought human labour power and workers had to sell it to survive.

In reality, as Polanyi (1944 [2001]) acknowledges, the period of 'pure' laissez-faire in Britain was relatively brief and by the latter half of the nineteenth century socially protective employment legislation made its own interventions into the labour market. This represented what Polanyi (1944 [2001, p. 80]) terms the 'double-movement': where the advance of market relations is met by a counter-movement to preserve wider social relations. For Polanyi (1944 [2001]) the development of a market society was an abrupt and radical departure from all prior forms of social arrangements – he frequently cites Tudor and medieval social practices as periods of contrast. However, the extent to which the nineteenth century really did witness such a profound change has been contested. MacFarlane (1978, p. 54) is critical of what he perceives to be an overly-simplified narrative of discontinuity among 'medievalists', among whom he includes RH Tawney and Christopher Hill and economic historians such as Polanyi, that is not able to account for the changes they emphasise. He contends that England was distinct from its continental European neighbours in having a highly mobile labour force with a more individualistic cultural outlook from at least the thirteenth century onwards. The conclusion from this is that Polanyi (2001) is mistaken in his depiction of the 'Great Transformation' as the shift to a modern market society because England had ceased to be a peasant society long before that period (MacFarlane, 1978, p. 199).

Notwithstanding debates about the chronology of developments towards market relations, the salient point for this present paper is that the principle of a free labour market remains one of the founding tenets of most advanced capitalist economies (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018; Sayer, 1995). Of course, the key word remains 'principle' because, aside from the restrictions on apprentices' movements within the labour market that Adam Smith argued against, the UK capitalist economy, like others, has historically made extensive use of different categories of unfree labour. These have included institutions such as chattel slavery, indentured labour or other forms of coercion (Scanlan, 2020; Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018). Such practices have their contemporary counterparts in

'modern slavery' although this is legislated against through the UK's Modern Slavery Act 2015 which commits employers to adopting an active policy to counter human trafficking and enslavement in all their hiring practices and in their supply chains. Finally, there remains the obvious point that for the great majority of individuals, the right to enter and move within the labour market is a highly constrained one. In fact, though, this latter point goes to the heart of the argument in this section of the paper.

As Rose (1999, p. 61) notes, in its basic capitalist form, employment connotes a purely contractual relationship wherein the worker agrees to alienate a certain amount of labour power in return for a wage, and the capitalist agrees to pay a certain amount of money in exchange for the right to put to task a vital factor of production within the labour process. In Marxian terms, this relationship between employee and employer, where both rely on each other but within structurally asymmetrical power relations, constitutes an 'antagonistic interdependence of material interests' (Wright, 1997, p. 10). The element of coercion – the fact that most people have to engage in remunerated employment in order to at least subsist, and the material benefits the employer class derives from this situation – form the basis of labour exploitation (Wright, 1997, p. 10). Employment, therefore, offers a 'double freedom': the (principle but also reality) of free contract to sell labour, and the (reality) of a negative freedom to suffer the material privations that non-participation in paid employment might incur (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018). In consequence, therefore, the extent to which workers are able, in practical terms, freely to move between jobs will always be limited by such material constraints (Fraser & Jaeggi, 2018; Sayer, 1995).

The anomaly of unpaid internships is to be seen in the way in which they defy the second sense of labour market freedom and, as a result, facilitate a development of the first form of freedom. Thus, individuals who can afford to work without pay through access to familial subsidy or other resources (and it is acknowledged that this is likely to be relative, with degrees to which this is possible for different individuals) are able to avoid the second freedom: to suffer the material consequences that would normally attach to this practice. Having evaded the second type of freedom, they are able to enjoy the benefits of the first type but with a novel twist. They do not enter into a contractual relationship with their 'employer' (indeed, this is what defines them as unremunerated 'volunteers' as discussed) but they otherwise benefit from the normative ideals of freedom which, as Fraser and Jaeggi (2018, p. 16) observe, are constitutive of capitalism. In this case, they benefit from the ideal that an individual's labour is their sovereign commodity which they may deploy as they see fit within the terms of an agreed relationship with an employer.

At this point, it should be emphasised that this paper does not dismiss the argument made within much of the academic literature that unpaid internships are a form of exploitation of those who undertake them (Leonard et al., 2016; Vercammen et al., 2020; Weghman, 2015; Standing, 2016). Employers are extracting a surplus from the unpaid labour of the interns, which clearly defines this relationship as an exploitative one. The argument of this paper, though, is that unremunerated internships are not straightforwardly exploitative within the classic Marxian sense outlined above. The element of material coercion which propels unpaid interns to labour is not material subsistence but the promise, however unclearly defined, of future remunerated employment through accruing experience and social capital networks. This may seem a fine or even technical distinction, but it is not. This is because the relative absence of material compulsion on the part of the intern has the effect of shifting the terrain of the usual

labour-capital relationship in favour of some impression of labour freedom. And, it is this de-centred and somewhat occluded form of labour exploitation which accounts for the subjective sense of agency among unpaid interns which has been widely reported within the academic literature (Brook et al., 2020; Leonard et al., 2016; Percival & Hesmondhalgh, 2014; Shade & Jacobson, 2015).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that the criticisms that surround unpaid internships, and their continued existence despite such denunciations, originate in their position at the intersections of two different philosophies in relation to work: that a job is a key social good and consequently employees need to broadly represent the demographic composition of the wider social community they serve; that an individual's labour power is their own private good which they may deploy as they see fit. This constitutes the 'dual nature' of internships. This duality reflects, in turn, a duality that sits at the heart of liberal philosophy and liberal political practice: that between the abstract individualism of classic liberal political economy and the more socially embedded strains of liberal egalitarianism and liberal pluralism.

The contribution of this paper has been, therefore, to venture beyond critiques of unpaid internships that rest upon contemporary constructs such as neoliberalism, precarity or diversity. Of course, such concepts have much to say about this subject. For example, discussions of neoliberalism can serve to locate unpaid internships within a set of exploitative objective and intersubjective social relations. Lightly regulated labour markets are a keystone of a wide range of neoliberal advanced economies (Rowlands & Rawolle, 2013; Standing, 2016) and form the objective material context within which unpaid internships have flourished. As Standing (2016, p. 42) notes, neoliberalism has produced a growing 'precariat' of workers subject to the vagaries of what he terms 'numerical flexibility', a mode of employment relations that includes zero-hours contracts, unpaid furloughs and unpaid internships. Scholars of neoliberalism have also performed a valuable service in discussing the ways in which neoliberalism can 'get into the head' as a cultural force via concepts such as the 'entrepreneurial self' (Kelly, 2006) or 'homo economicus' (Foucault, 2008).

Despite the value of such analyses, the aim of this paper has been to reach down to some of the deep historical roots and philosophical premises upon which individuals provide free labour as interns, and the principles from which such practices are criticised. By unpicking these underlying tenets, it has been argued, the ambivalence that surrounds such internships may be better understood. And, as this is a central proposition of this review, the paper concludes by elaborating on this point a little further by returning to the work of John Stuart Mill.

The paper has previously discussed Mill's arguments for group-level representation in government. It has been argued that these may be seen as some of the philosophical underpinnings of an equality of outcome discourse that is being increasingly raised in reaction to the socially elitist effects of unpaid internships. To borrow from another philosopher, Isaiah Berlin, the concerns regarding group-level representation within elite professions derive from the aim to foster 'positive freedoms': a self-mastery and autonomy that reaches beyond the simple absence of constraint to a higher, more 'ideal' notion of liberty as the

realisation of the ‘true self’ (Berlin, 1958 [2005, p. 178]). Nevertheless, while Mill laid the foundations for modern liberal pluralism, as additionally noted, he also privileged individual liberties above all. This is made clear in his maxim that ‘... *the individual is not accountable to society for his actions, in so far as these concern the interests of no person but himself* (sic)’ (Mill, 1859 [2015, p. 91]). For Mill, losses or harm incurred by third parties as a consequence of the pursuit of such self-interest, even when mediated by unjust social institutions, are the price to be paid for individual freedoms. The disappointment that individuals may feel in failing to enter ‘an overcrowded profession’ is adduced as an example in this respect (Mill, 1859 [2015, p. 91]). To borrow again from Berlin, this points towards a ‘negative’ sense of freedom: ‘... *the degree to which no man* (sic) *or body of men interferes with my activity. Political liberty in this sense is simply the area within which a man can act unobstructed by others*’ (Berlin, 1958 [2005, p. 169]). This more negative notion of freedom coheres well with the classic Smithian political economy of ‘freedom to labour’ as discussed previously. It is also the conceptual framework within which much contemporary meritocratic, equality of opportunity discourse sits: individuals are afforded a formalised equality of opportunity assured through legislation to protect against any discriminatory barriers but where, otherwise, the individual enjoys freedom *from* state intrusion into employment competition.

If this form of duality may seem a paradox within Mill’s philosophy, it is, as previously argued, one that is reflected more widely in liberalism both as philosophical theory and political practice, which has always been a precarious balance between negative and positive freedoms. This tension is played out in employment areas beyond unpaid internships. Loosely regulated labour markets now mean that an individual ‘enjoys’ the negative freedom to enter into a zero-hours contract or some other form of ‘flexible’ employment relationship. Given the obvious and overwhelming power asymmetries between employer and employee in play here, it is worth recalling Mill’s limits to individual liberty and sovereignty: that nobody should be free to sell themselves into slavery since the freedom to do so is itself a surrendering of all freedom (Mill, 1859 [2015: 99]). However, as this paper has argued, it is the dual nature of unpaid internships which brings the tensions between these two discourses into sharper relief than is the case with paid employment. Unpaid internships are a logical extension of the negative freedoms of free contract of labour and, in that respect, are private goods. But, as forms of employment, unpaid internships offend principles of social representativeness and equality of outcome – particularly in view of the fact they are usually undertaken in pursuit of high-status careers. And this duality embodies two philosophies of work that are, to some extent, pulling in opposite directions. Put simply, bottom-line pressures upon companies to cut employment expenses will always compete with discourses of social inclusivity; and where grey areas in employment law continue to exist, there is no guarantee that the latter will prevail.

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Notes on contributor

Andrew Morrison is a Principal Lecturer in Education Studies. His research interests focus on the relationships between higher education and employment.

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