



## My Job and its Requirements

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# My job and its requirements.<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This chapter concerns the ethics and metaphysics of occupations, such as *teacher*, *waiter*, and *priest*. It is argued that *teacher* is a functional kind, but teachers are not functional objects. If you are a practising teacher, it is likely that you perform a function and serve a purpose, that of imparting knowledge and cultivating minds and skills. This is what *teachers*, generically, are for, and it is what your school is for. But it is not what you are for. Easily confused senses of ‘job’ are distinguished: *occupation*, *position*, *requirement*, and *function*. It is explained that the requirements of your position and occupation do not entail ability, reasons, or fault (if not complied with), and that if you are not as your position and occupation require, you are not as you ought to be, but it does not follow that there is anything wrong with you. There is some metaphysical speculation about positions. Some sources of, and remedies for, workplace alienation and anxiety are examined.

Thomas H. Smith

**Keywords:** role, job, position, occupation, requirement, duty, function, ethics, metaphysics.

## Introduction

My topic is the ethics and metaphysics of occupations, such as *teacher*, *waiter*, and *priest*.

My interest in occupations derives from a broader interest in the brand of moral naturalism defended by Judith Jarvis Thomson in her last book *Normativity* (2008). In Thomson’s chapter on what she calls “directives” (Ch. XII), which are judgements that some thing  $x$  should, must, or ought to  $\phi$ , she maintains that “the concept ‘defect’ lies at the heart of the concepts ‘should’... ‘must’ [and] ‘ought’” (230). Her account of directives, which I construe as judgements about *requirements*, relies on her account of “goodness-fixing kinds”; these are kinds that sets standards by which their instances are evaluable (Ch. II). For Thomson, simplifying somewhat, some  $x$  ought to  $\phi$  just if  $x$  falls under some goodness-fixing kind  $K$  such that, for any instance  $y$  of  $K$ , if  $y$  does not  $\phi$  then  $y$  is a defective  $K$  (212).<sup>2</sup>

Thomson gives *plumber*, *mathematician*, and *stenographer* as examples of goodness-fixing kinds, and in her chapter on what it is for something to be a virtue in a kind  $K$  (Ch. V), treats the kinds *carving knife*, *seeing eye dog*, and *stenographer* as being on a par (70). She does however make no mention of occupational kinds in her chapter on directives. In that chapter, she moves directly from requirements concerning the kinds *toaster*, *pancreas*, *terrier* and *seeing eye dog* to ones concerning the kind *human being*. Her silence on requirements concerning the kinds *plumber*, *mathematician* and *stenographer* suggests that either (i) she simply does not know what to say about these, or (ii) she thinks that there are no such requirements, or (iii) she thinks that such requirements can be fully accounted for in terms of requirements concerning the kind *human being*.

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to the directors of the AHRC-funded Role Ethics Network for inviting this contribution, and to all network members for inspiring discussions. Thanks to the editors for their infinite patience and insightful comments on the penultimate draft. Special thanks to Suddhasatwa Guharoy for his comments on this draft.

<sup>2</sup> I have simplified Thomson’s account in two ways. First, for *actions* that a *human being* ought to perform she adds this condition: that  $x$  knows what will probably happen if she  $\phi$ s and what will probably happen if she does not (216). (The discussion of non-actions is incomplete, but it seems that Thomson would leave the issue of which capacities and traits a human ought to have to “moral theory” (218) as opposed to the kind of moral metaphysics that she is engaged in). Second, for non-humans, she adds a condition regarding goodness-fixing kinds that are sub-kinds of other such kinds (211-4). See my ftn. 8 for some discussion of this condition.

Thomson's silence is unfortunate, because, in the context of her moral naturalism, occupational kinds are of great interest and deserving of more attention.

One reason why is that on the one hand, the kind *teacher* is in some ways similar to a functional artefactual kind such as *toaster*. It is practically analytic that teachers teach and toasters toast. And functional kinds like *toaster* and *pancreas* are, for Thomson, paradigm cases of goodness-fixing kinds. On the other hand, teachers are very different from toasters: toasters are subject to very few standards. Teachers are human beings and so subject to very many potentially conflicting ones. It would be useful to know what implications these similarities and differences might have.

Another reason is this: one of the main attractions of Thomson's moral naturalism, which I should say owes a good deal to (Geach 1956) and (von Wright 1963), and has much in common with Kraut (2007, 2011), is that it combines a hard-nosed demystifying agenda with a non-reductive pluralism about value and normativity. On the one hand, there is no *mystery* about the standards by which a toaster or pancreas is assessable; while human beings are more complicated, the idea that the same is true of them is refreshing. On the other hand, there are many varieties of goodness, in von Wright's phrase, good toasters, good pancreases, and so on. (Contrast those Procrustean theories that rest everything on good *wills*, good *states of affairs*, or good *worlds*).<sup>3</sup> It would be in keeping with both the demystifying agenda and the pluralism to take seriously the standards set by a kind such as *plumber*. After all, there is no real mystery about them. On the other hand, there are many varieties of occupational role, and more generally, social role. Perhaps inquiry into occupational roles could give us the foundations for a more wide-ranging inquiry into less clearly defined social roles such as *parent*, *friend*, *leader*, and *citizen*. And perhaps this would enable the kind *human being* to bear less (or even any) of the theoretical load. The project of accounting for the standards to which we are subject by direct appeal to some non-mysterious conception of what it is to be a good, or defective instance of *human being* is hugely ambitious. It is easy to despair of making much progress with it. The project of accounting for *some* standards, the ones that we fall under by virtue of our occupational roles looks much more tractable. For one thing, the societal purposes that occupational roles serve are pretty clearly defined and understood (more so than is the case with *parent*, *friend*, *leader* and *citizen*).<sup>4</sup> Moreover, while all social roles are in some sense embedded in and defined by social institutions, because of the present state of social metaphysics, we have a reasonably good grasp of the kinds of institution that embed occupational roles: they are *school*, *restaurant*, *church* etc., corporate bodies with governance structures, powers, policies etc.

## Functions

- (1) Hearts are for pumping blood to enable it to circulate
- (2) Paring knives are for cutting foodstuffs

Sentences (1) and (2) plausibly have a *definitional* status. They tell you something about *what it is* to be a heart or paring knife. Jeremy David Fix (2019, sec. 3) makes something like this point when he says that a claim attributes an *essential property* to a kind when it is explanatorily fundamental. (1)

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<sup>3</sup> Indeed, for Thomson, *act*, *event*, *fact*, *state of affairs*, *possible world* and, I would guess, *will* are not goodness-fixing kinds (25-6). I might add that another attraction of her approach is that seems to give the right kind of theoretical role to our *own* attitudes. It doesn't simply account for value and requirement in terms of what some person, or community might prefer, prescribe, commend, or promote, but instead by appeal to goodness-fixing kinds. But since some of these kinds, and certainly kinds such as *teacher* and *school*, will be in some way socially defined and constructed, normativity, in some of its forms, will be partly grounded in us.

<sup>4</sup> 'Bullshit jobs' may be an exception. See my ftn. 7.

and (2) are fundamental in this way. If someone asks for an explanation of them, there is little to say, other than the same thing again, with added emphasis, to indicate that this is bedrock:

- (3) That's just what a heart/paring knife is
- (4) That's just what hearts/paring knives are for

Likewise,

- (5) A teacher is for imparting knowledge and cultivating skills and epistemic virtues
- (6) A waiter is for taking orders, serving and attending to patrons' needs

have a fundamental, and hence a definitional status.

Upon recognizing this, one mistake that, say, a waiter might make is that of thinking that

- (7) Since I am a waiter, I am, by definition, for taking orders, serving and attending to patrons' needs

This is patently untrue, but perhaps easily conflated with, or inferred from

- (8) I am a waiter, and a waiter is, by definition, for taking orders, serving and attending to patrons' needs

which a waiter might truly think.<sup>5</sup>

Consider now:

- (9) Since I am a waiter, I am for taking orders, serving and attending to patrons' needs

This too is a mistake, if a waiter thinks it. For no-one is a means to the end of taking orders, serving, etc. It is not just that no-one is for such a demeaning purpose. It is a mistake to understand ' $\phi$ -er' as used to identify someone by their occupation, as meaning *thing for  $\phi$ -ing*. A vacuum cleaner is a thing for cleaning. A contract cleaner is a person who habitually cleans and has the credentials (which may just be reputational or recognitive) to clean. Something similar applies to any use of ' $\phi$ -er' that identifies someone by their occupation. Indeed, a contract cleaner is in some ways a more perfectly actualized instance of its occupational kind than a vacuum cleaner is of its artefactual kind. For not every vacuum cleaner cleans; a vacuum cleaner might never be used. But one is not a cleaner if one does not habitually clean (although one may be a *qualified* cleaner).

One might think that no-one is for anything (other than perhaps whatever it is that a human being is for, *eudaimonia*, or whatnot), but I think this is an overstatement. As we shall shortly see, members of the House of Habsburg were for ruling. That's what they were born and bred to do.

This second mistake is easier to make than the first. For (1) and (2) entail respectively

- (10) For any  $x$ , if  $x$  is a heart, then  $x$  is for pumping blood to enable it to circulate
- (11) For any  $x$ , if  $x$  is a paring knife, then  $x$  is for cutting foodstuffs

So one might think that the like entailment holds for (5) and (6). However, (5) and (6) do not even entail the corresponding *existential* generalizations:

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<sup>5</sup> Compare: it is false that the number of planets is necessarily  $> 5$ . But one might conflate this thought with, or infer it from, the following truth: The number of planets is 8, which is necessarily  $> 5$ . See (Quine 1976 sec. 1).

(12) For some  $x$ ,  $x$  is a teacher, and  $x$  is for imparting knowledge and cultivating skills and epistemic virtues

(13) For some  $x$ ,  $x$  is a waiter, and  $x$  is for taking orders, serving and attending to patrons' needs

Should we be puzzled by this? In one way, no. Claims (1) to (6) are generic statements, and a generic, such as

(14) A horse has four legs

is not falsified by exceptions. Still, horses *generally* have four legs, so we might be puzzled as to why *every* heart is for pumping blood, and *no* teacher is for imparting knowledge.

Part of the answer is that when a generic has a *definitional* status as in (1), (2), (5) and (6) – and arguably also in (14) – the property it predicates is attributed to the *kind*, with no direct implications as to whether, or in what way, it holds of instances of it. (1), (2), (5) and (6) tell us something about *what it is* to be (as it may be) a heart, paring knife, teacher, or waiter, and we cannot from this infer anything about particular hearts, paring knives, teachers and waiters. Contrast:

(15) Teachers are underpaid

which is not definitional. This tells you something generally true of teachers.

Still, one might wonder, why are occupational kinds like *teacher* and *waiter* functional kinds, (essentially *for a purpose*) when their instances are not functional objects (not things *for a purpose*)?

I think the answer is that no particular teacher owes her existence to the function that teachers perform, although teachers in general do. Contrast hearts and paring knives. Any heart exists in part because hearts are for pumping blood. For it is the product of a process by which hearts have been *designed* by natural selection to pump blood. (Roughly, a heart is designed to pump blood in that hearts that did this effectively were selected for). Likewise, any paring knife exists in part because paring knives are for cutting foodstuffs. It is not just that it will have been designed and manufactured to do this; the process of design and manufacture has *itself* been designed, by a kind of cultural selection, to better produce instruments for cutting foodstuffs. (Roughly, effective processes of design and manufacture flourished while ineffective ones died out).

There are teachers because teachers are for imparting knowledge and cultivating minds and skills. For there are teachers because of processes, of training, recruiting, and retaining teachers that have been designed in order that teachers can effectively impart knowledge and cultivate minds and skills. But it is not true of any teacher that she exists, even in part, because teachers are for imparting knowledge and cultivating minds and skills. If you are a teacher, you came into existence in the normal way that humans do. There will be habits, skills, and policies of yours that exist because of what teachers are for. But your very existence is not explained by this function.

Contrast *schools* (not school buildings, but the organized institutions that they support). Every school exists because of processes designed in order that schools effectively educate children.

One might suppose that my reasoning here relies on the mundane point that one is a human *before* one becomes a teacher, or that one is essentially human and contingently a teacher.

But here is why that is not the central point. Some embryos are *for* research. (Whether this is right is another matter). Any such embryo exists *because* of a cloning process that is designed to

facilitate embryological research (cloning is not IVF, which some people use to have a baby). But any such embryo is an embryo before it is research material. And it is contingently research material.

The example shows that being first of a natural kind and later, contingently, of a functional kind can suffice for being a functional object. But it may not show that being first a *human* and later, and contingently of a functional kind can likewise suffice. For whether embryos are humans is moot.

So here is another example that does show that. The House of Habsburg produced human beings that were for ruling, for each of them resulted from processes of breeding designed in order that the Habsburgs rule. But any such ruler is a human before it is a ruler and is contingently a ruler.

To sum up this section, *teacher* is a functional kind, but teachers are not functional objects. If you are a practising teacher, then it is likely that, to some extent, you perform a function and serve a purpose, that of imparting knowledge and cultivating minds and skills. This is what *teachers*, generically, are for, and it is what your school is for. But it is not what you are for.

## Jobs

'Job' like 'role' is multiply ambiguous. 'My job' can signify my occupation, that is, the *type* of work I do

(16) My job is to teach

or the *type* of worker I am

(17) I am a teacher; that's my job

It can also signify a *particular* position I hold, a position *within* some corporate body, such as a school, restaurant, or church. (A self-employed person will not have a position in the same way, but they may have a position within a community, trades association or similar). Examples of this use include

(18) Karen now has Phil's old job

(19) The job has been advertised

(20) Because of the restructuring, that job is being eliminated/split into two/combined with another/re-defined

But we also use 'job' to signify a duty, or collection of duties, that one has by virtue of one's position and/or occupation. I think this is the most natural way of understanding sentences such as

(21) My job is to prosecute criminals

(22) The job I have is to visit and value your property to ensure a maximum achievable sale

(23) It's my job to cut the meat and sell it to customers

(24) I have the job of delivering the bad news when we let go of someone

(25) My job involves supporting vulnerable people

Are there duties to *be* certain ways as well as duties to *do* certain things? I am not sure. But it is certainly the case that you can be subject to *requirements* by virtue of your position and/or occupation to be certain ways. A Catholic priest should be male and unmarried. A driving instructor should be able to read a number plate at twenty meters. A sumo rikishi must be a male who has finished nine years of schooling; they must be at least 167 centimeters tall and weigh at least 67 kilograms etc. We sometimes use 'job' to mean a requirement to *be* a certain way, as in

- (26) It's my job to be attentive in case a patron needs something  
(27) It's my job to know who the local gangs are and what they are up to

But a more common way of putting it is

- (28) In my job I must be physically fit  
(29) In my job I must stay abreast of the latest developments in my field

Henceforth I shall mostly speak, not of the *duty* but the *requirement* sense of 'job'.

'Job' can also mean *function*, as when we say things like

- (30) A heart has the job of pumping blood to enable it to circulate

This can create confusion as we also say things like

- (31) A teacher has the job of cultivating their pupils' knowledge, skills, and epistemic virtues

And I think (30) entails not only

- (32) For any  $x$ , if  $x$  a heart, then  $x$ 's job is to pump blood to enable it to circulate

but also

- (33) For any  $x$ , if  $x$  a heart, then  $x$  is supposed to/should/ought to pump blood to enable it to circulate

Likewise, on the face of it, (31) entails not only

- (34) For any  $x$ , if  $x$  a teacher, then  $x$ 's job is to cultivate her pupils' knowledge, skills, and epistemic virtues

but also

- (35) For any  $x$ , if  $x$  a teacher, then  $x$  is supposed to/should/ought to cultivate their pupils' knowledge, skills, and epistemic virtues

(30) and (31) are true in both the *function* and the *requirement* sense. We can infer from the generic (30), read in either sense, to the universal (32) read in that same sense. But we can only infer from the generic (31) to the universal (34) if both are read in the *requirement* sense. No particular teacher is *for* what teachers in general are *for*. In one way this difference between what we can say about hearts and what we can say about teachers does not matter as (31) supports (35) regardless (although it is a nice question whether (31) does so on both readings). Still, any teacher who misses the difference between the *function* and *requirement* senses might mistakenly think that she is *for* something.

How does the holding of a position and/or the having of an occupation generate requirements? Of course, one typically acquires contractual obligations to one's employer when one fills a position. More broadly, one typically acquires obligations to fulfil expectations one knowingly induces in others (such as clients and colleagues) by presenting oneself to them as having the position and/or occupation that one has.<sup>6</sup> But it is likely that the requirements that one is under by virtue of one's position and/or occupation are not exhausted by those explicable in these ways. A

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<sup>6</sup> Here I presuppose a version of the principle of fidelity defended by Scanlon (1998, Ch. 7).

police officer has no contractual obligation to remain physically fit and, given the high levels of obesity in the police force, few people can seriously expect police officers to be physically fit. Still, one might think that a police officer ought to try to remain physically fit because of their occupation.

I think it is simply that to enter a position and/or an occupation is, if one is sincere, willingly to accept and take on a job, in the *requirement* sense. You are subject to the relevant requirements because you willingly took them on. (There may be exceptions around deception, duress and the taking on of immoral or pointless requirements).<sup>7</sup> <sup>8</sup> This is so even if one had no good options when one took a position, and has serious misgivings about it, or one's occupancy of it. 'This is my job', one thinks. 'It's what I'm supposed to do'.

Another confusing matter is that your *position* is likely to have a function, even if you do not. Probably, it will have been created in order that some purpose is served, which means it is *for* the serving of that purpose (unless it has since been implicitly or explicitly re-defined in order that it serve some other function or purpose). That is why managers say things like

(36) The position is there to ensure that asset defects are managed effectively

(37) We have created this position in order that car owners are deterred from parking illegally

The purpose or function of your position need not be your purpose or function, or even your job, in the *requirement* sense. Your job may be to ticket cars that are parked illegally, not to deter anyone from parking them illegally.

For many positions, their requirements include a requirement to *present* yourself in a certain way. In some cases, this requirement is to present yourself as being *for* this or that. (Think of the 'Here to help' badges that sales assistants wear). This can be a cause of spiritual damage. Many of us want to be good  $\phi$ -ers, and to be seen as conscientious and professional  $\phi$ -ers, but when this involves presenting oneself as a functional object the requirement can seem to threaten one's authenticity. For some, no doubt, the adoption of a work *persona* is enjoyable and enriches their lives. We shall return to self-presentation later when we discuss Jean-Paul Sartre's café waiter.

In order not to find the requirements of one's working life overwhelming, I recommend keeping the distinctions made in this section clearly in mind. In short, you have a job (requirement) by virtue of your job (position) and/or job (occupation). Your job (position) is likely to have a job (function) which need not be your job (function) or job (duty). Probably, you have no job (function), but it may be part of your job (requirement) to present yourself to others as having a job (function).

## Requirements

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<sup>7</sup> So some bullshit jobs do not generate requirements as the work serves no worthwhile purpose, and perhaps an immoral one. Of course, there may be other, e.g. contractual and financial reasons to do what your job requires. 'Bullshit jobs' is the coinage of Graeber (2018). I thank an editor for asking me to think about them.

<sup>8</sup> Thomson's view of non-human kinds is that if K is a sub-kind of K+, and any K that does not  $\phi$  is a defective K, and any K+ that does  $\phi$  is a defective K+, then the more encompassing kind trumps its sub-kind in that for any x that falls under both K and K+, it ought not to  $\phi$ . She devotes some pages (211-4) to defending such a clause, to deal with an imagined case in which some terriers are sold with their vocal cords cut, as "Quiet Dogs". She wants to ensure the result that a terrier ought to be able to bark, even if it is also of the kind *Quiet Dog*. One might wonder why Thomson bothers to deal with this odd case. I speculate that she was thinking about how to block an inference such as the one from 'If a financier isn't greedy, she is a defective financier' and 'You are a financier' to 'You ought to be greedy'. Her rule about sub-kinds would block the inference because even if any non-greedy financier is a defective financier, any greedy human being is a defective human being.



In the last section, we saw that you *ought* to be and do the things that it is your job to be and do (subject to exceptions around deception, duress, immorality etc.) by virtue of your position and/or occupation. In this section I say a little more to clarify and explain the nature of these requirements.

Consider again

(33) For any  $x$ , if  $x$  a heart, then  $x$  is supposed to/should/ought to pump blood to enable it to circulate

(35) For any  $x$ , if  $x$  a teacher, then  $x$  is supposed to/should/ought to cultivate their pupils' knowledge, skills, and epistemic virtues

First, these 'should's and 'ought's need not imply that  $x$  has *reason* to do anything. Nor need they imply that  $x$  has an *ability* to comply with the 'ought'. Nor need they imply that  $x$  is *at fault* if  $x$  does not comply. These points are obvious when  $x$  is a heart or paring knife. But they hold even when  $x$  is an agent. To see this, consider someone constitutionally unsuited to their job, and incapable of effectively discharging some core responsibility. This might be the result of a hiring error or labour shortage. Or the person may have *been* suited to their occupation, but become ill-suited, due to some crisis, illness, or accident. If you are a heavy jockey, a partially sighted driving instructor, a waiter prone to myoclonic twitches or jerks, a teacher who cannot make themselves understood because of their accent, or an atheist priest, then you cannot effectively do something that, by virtue of your position, you are supposed to do. You are unable to do what you ought to do, you may not be at fault for this, and may not have any reason to do anything in particular about it.<sup>9</sup>

Second, these 'should's and 'ought's are requirements on  $x$ . The claim is not that

(38) It ought to be the case that, for any  $x$ , if  $x$  is teacher, then  $x$  cultivates their pupils' knowledge etc.

Although this is true too. In (35) the 'ought' is predicated directly of  $x$ ; it states a requirement on  $x$ . (38) says of something sentence-like that its truth is somehow a requirement. (38) expresses a standard, or norm, by which the world may be evaluated. (33) and (35) set a standard, or norm, by which a particular is evaluable as (as it may be) an excellent, adequate, or defective heart or teacher.

Third, it would be too quick to say that a heart *en route* from its donor to its transplant recipient is, while it is being transported down the motorway, defective, as it is not pumping blood. So, if a teacher does not comply with a requirement imposed by her position and/or occupation, she is thereby a defective teacher *only if* under favourable conditions, she does or would comply.

Fourth, some requirements may be *qualified*. If a heavy jockey is sufficiently fearless, fit, and skilful they need not be a defective jockey. One might even think that there are, or could be, heavy jockeys for whom their weight is not even a defect, for they manage to use it to their advantage. More generally, it is plausible that some requirements are such that if some  $K$  violates them this *can* but *need not* suffice for its being a defective  $K$ . Perhaps, for some of these requirements, the violation must suffice for the thing in question's having a *defect*, but this defect can be all-things-considered compensated for by the thing's other characteristics (call these *pro tanto* requirements). Perhaps, for others, the violation can but need not suffice even for the thing in question's having a defect (call these *prima facie* requirements).<sup>10</sup> No doubt there is more to be said, but it suffices to note that some requirements on we humans are likely to be qualified in something like these ways.

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<sup>9</sup> You may have reason to leave the position, but if you are not supported in making this transition, which is likely to involve suffering a period of unemployment, and some re-skilling, then you may not have this reason.

<sup>10</sup> We normally talk of *prima facie* and *pro tanto* 'ought's when these are reason-entailing 'ought's, but I do not see why we could not apply these qualifications to the requirements under consideration here.

While (33) and (35) wear the fact that they express *conditional* requirements on their linguistic sleeves, and while they may also express *qualified* requirements (as just conceded) they do not express requirements that are *relative* to some kind. As is well known, in ‘good teacher’, the evaluative adjective is *attributive*, that is, semantically inseparable from the noun that it modifies. A good teacher is not someone that is (a) good and (b) a teacher (Geach, 1956). Such expressions relativize an evaluation to a kind. There is no natural way of likewise relativizing an ‘ought’ to a kind.

Granted, we do say things, like, ‘As a teacher, she ought...’. But I can only hear this as meaning something like

*Because she is a teacher, she ought...*<sup>11</sup>

Or

*She ought, using the powers she has by virtue of being a teacher, ...*

Or perhaps

*She ought, while on duty, ...*

We can say that something is *good* with respect to its being a teacher or toaster, leaving open that it may be bad in other respects. But we cannot likewise say that someone *ought to  $\phi$*  with respect to their being a teacher, leaving open that they *ought not to  $\phi$*  with respect to their being, say, a parent. If we want to reconcile an *ought to  $\phi$  because she is a teacher* with an *ought not to  $\phi$  because she is a parent* the only way to do so is by qualifying one or both as *pro tanto* or *prima facie* or something similar. And if we want to reason from some so qualified ‘ought’s about a particular case to a single unqualified ‘ought’ (and perhaps we should not want this in every case) there is no substitute for the sensitive use of the relevant facts, principles, hunches, and value-judgements.

Of course, one can release oneself from the grip of an ‘ought’ that is grounded in one’s position and/or occupation by changing one’s job. But this may not be straightforward, and, until one makes the change, the ‘ought’ is binding on one, and always *will have been* binding on one.

Consider now this passage from Gilbert Harman:

Sometimes “*ought*” or “*should*” is used to express an evaluation of something in terms of some associated function, need, role, normal case or ideal. A heart *ought* to pump at a regular rate; if it does not, there is something *wrong* with it. A tree *should* have strong roots; if it does, we say it has *good* roots. A paring knife *ought* to cut well. A teacher *ought* to help students acquire an interest in learning and an ability to learn. “Ideally, a plain yogurt *should* have some astringency as well as a sweet/sour character. . .” (*Consumer Reports*, August 1983, p. 386). There is *something wrong* with Tess that leads her to torment little Eddie like that.

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<sup>11</sup> This is the sense in which Thomson thinks we can say things like “As a teacher, she ought...”. It is very easy to misread Thomson on this point, because she says that “...what a thing ought to do is what it ought to do *qua* being of this or that kind” (210). But she does not here relativize the requirement to the kind. Just before, she glosses ‘*qua*’ as a modifier of ‘ought’, as ‘in virtue of’. And just after she glosses the claim quoted above as:

Alternatively put: it is not true of A that it ought to V unless A is of a kind such that everything of that kind ought to V—where it is the fact that everything of that kind ought to V that makes it the case that A ought to (210).

It is also clear from her Chs. X and XI that for her ‘ought’ is never relative.

A judgment of this sort made about a particular agent, as in the last example, need not imply that the agent has reasons to act in a certain way. We can feel there is something *wrong with* Tess without feeling that it is *wrong of* her that she acts in that way. (Perhaps Tess is afflicted with a compulsion of some sort.) However, a judgment of this sort is not just an evaluation of a situation, like the judgment, “It is wrong that children work under such conditions.” It is an evaluation of an agent. (Harman 1986, 135)

This reprises many of the points just made. Harman makes the point about this ‘ought’ not implying reasons, fault, or ability (this is implicit in his use of the supposition of Tess’s compulsion). He makes the point that it applies to an agent, not a situation. He does not attempt to relativize ‘ought’. Harman makes a small error when he characterizes these uses of ‘ought’ and ‘should’ as *evaluative*.<sup>12</sup> For one does not evaluate anything simply by saying that it ought to do something or be some way. Statements of this sort expresses requirements, standards, or norms *by which* we might evaluate things, but they do not, in and of themselves evaluate anything. Even Harman nods.

There is a more important error that is at least suggested by Harman’s “wrong with” formulation, and the fact that, like ‘ought’, it isn’t, by him, and isn’t, naturally, relativized to an occupational kind.<sup>13</sup> If you are a heavy jockey or atheist priest, it is not just that you need not be *at fault* and that it need not be *wrong of* you that you are that way. You need not be *faulty*, and there need be nothing *wrong with* you. You are a defective jockey or priest. You are not doing something that you ought to be doing, or you are not some way that you ought to be. But the fault is not in you.

There may be some other thing that is defective, the panel that hired you, or, more generally the societal mechanisms for the division of labour. Perhaps these are too insensitive to individuals’ skills and needs. Or perhaps it is just your and your employers’ luck that is defective.

Why is it that if you are a bad teacher, it does not follow that there is something wrong with you? Is it because, as we argued in the previous section, you are not a functional object? I’m not sure, for you *do* fall under a functional kind and this does ground non-relativized ‘ought’ judgements. You are not employed as a teacher in the same way as a knife may be employed as a paperweight. The standard by which we evaluate you is external to the kind *human being*, but internal to the kind *teacher*, and you are a teacher. In this sense the standard is internal to you. The standard by which we evaluate a knife employed as a paperweight is external to it, because a knife so employed is not a paperweight.<sup>14</sup> This shows up in a linguistic datum marked by von Wright: if a knife so employed is effective, it is not a good paperweight but good *as* a paperweight (von Wright, 1963, Ch. II, sec. 1). But if you, so employed, are effective, you are not just good *as* a teacher, you are a good teacher.

I think the answer is just that *teacher* is not a *fundamental* kind. Whatever your job, *what you are* is a human being. By this I do not merely mean that it is what you necessarily are: each of us is necessarily an animal as well as a human being. I also mean that, as Wiggins says, *human being*

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<sup>12</sup> Harman’s ‘good roots,’ is evaluative, as are his uses of ‘something wrong with’. But his ‘should’s and ‘ought’s are not. Of course, in the right context, you can conversationally implicate an evaluation by stating a requirement, e.g., by throwing down a blunt paring knife while saying ‘A paring knife ought to cut well’.

<sup>13</sup> If I say ‘there is something wrong with my teacher’ I might conversationally implicate that the defect is a defect in a teacher, but I do not say this.

<sup>14</sup> I borrow this use of ‘internal’ and ‘external’ from (Fix, 2019). But Fix identifies the idea of a standard that is internal to a kind under which a thing falls with the idea of a standard to which that thing is “by nature” subject (15). As the example of a teacher shows, these are distinct ideas. (I press this point a few paragraphs later). Or rather, they are the same only if you suppose that fundamental kinds are the only kinds. Perhaps Fix does suppose this, although he does not say so in terms. All his examples of kinds are of fundamental kinds.

... [carries] us to a certain sort of conclusion... Where no such conclusory answer is provided to the question 'What is it?', it will be indeterminate what we are thinking about. (Wiggins 2016, 45).

If I refer to something as an animal, it will be indeterminate what we are thinking about. (A pike? A butterfly?). And so, you can still press the question *what is it?* If I refer to something as a human being it is not likewise indeterminate what we are thinking about. Of course, you can ask for more information. And I can add that the human being in question is a teacher, or waiter. But to *specify or give details* is not to determine what was previously indeterminate. You already knew what we were thinking about. The additional specification told you *something more* about it, namely *what it does (for a living)*, and not *what it is*. As we might say, *human being* is our determinate form.

Artefacts and organs differ from teachers in this respect. A knife is of the fundamental kind *knife*. This is its determinate form. A heart is of the fundamental kind – it has the determinate form – *heart*. This holds even of a knife (or whatever) that is used as, and even good as, a paperweight.

A defective heart or knife is bad as what it is. It is *by nature* bad. We can think of it as not fully *what it is*, not fully *realized or actualized*. Certainly, we can infer that there is something wrong with it. If you are a defective teacher, you are not thereby bad as what you are.<sup>15</sup> You are not thereby by nature bad. You are not thereby not fully what you are, not fully realized or actualized. So, we cannot infer that there is something wrong with you.

Many of us are not well-suited to every aspect of our jobs. We may try to improve ourselves, and to compensate for our defects as teachers, or waiters, by excelling in other aspects of the job. We might persuade ourselves that we are violating only a *prima facie* or *pro tanto* requirement and are all-things-considered non-defective. But when these defects are things we cannot change, and perhaps especially when they are brought on mid-career by a diagnosis, a crisis, an accident, or some such, we are apt to punish ourselves, like an atheist priest, with the thought *what is wrong with me?* The answer is often 'nothing'. One can violate a requirement as fundamental as that of being unable to  $\phi$  while being a  $\phi$ -er, and have nothing wrong with you, although you are not as you ought to be.

## Positions

As we have seen, a teacher is unlike the teaching position she holds in that the latter will typically be a functional object, existing *for* a purpose and designed and created as such. To serve this purpose, a position must be, broadly speaking, *used* by a human being, and, normally, as it was designed to be used. Plausibly *teaching position* is a fundamental kind: for any teaching position, a teaching position is *what it is*. (We saw that by contrast, for any teacher, a human being is *what it is*). In all these ways, positions are akin to artefacts. Strikingly, they appear to have much in common with another kind of socially constructed or defined artefact, corporate bodies. For a corporate body generally

- is a socially designed and constructed object (hence a kind of human artefact)
- has human constituents
- persists through actual and counterfactual replacement of human constituents
- can share human constituents with other corporate bodies
- is of a kind that has a function

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<sup>15</sup> Granted, you are bad at what you do (or at least bad at something that you do). But we should not think of what a person does (their occupation) as their *principle of activity* in the Aristotelian-Leibnizian sense borrowed by Wiggins (2016). It is not that by which we can determine which particles of matter are parts of you, and which are not, as you trace a path through space and time. Your principle of activity is that of living.

(39) A University is for facilitating education and scholarship in communion

- is thereby evaluable.

On the face of it, a position generally

- is a socially designed constructed object (hence a kind of human artefact)
- has a human constituent (occupant)
- persists through actual and counterfactual replacement of constituents (occupants)
- can share human constituents (occupants) with other positions
- is of a kind that has a function

(40) A professor is for teaching, research, and administration

- is thereby evaluable.

If our theory of positions is that they are essentially bite-size corporations, then it displays the virtues of simplicity and parsimony: it introduces no fundamentally new concepts or kinds. (We must reconcile this with the fact that recourse to the familiar can be a theoretical vice).

This conception of positions suggests a further thought: positions are *parts* of corporate bodies. Think of a company flowchart (an “org chart”). What does it depict? Socially constructed entities, one might think, and the relations of e.g., accountability and authority that hold between them. So, there are the faculties, divisions and departments. These are plausibly thought of as parts of the corporate. But positions may appear on the flowchart also, e.g., the position of HR manager. We might think of these as parts – perhaps the simple, partless parts – of the corporate body too. In short, we might think that what the flowchart shows is the mereological structure of the corporate.

Functional objects enter into part-whole relations. A bicycle has, as parts, wheels, a saddle, derailleur, and so on. A functional part of a functional whole will typically have, as its purpose, some contribution to the well-functioning of the whole, some specifiable way of enabling or helping it to fulfil *its* purpose, and it will be evaluable as such. Given this, we might now suppose that a position, such as that of *professor*, is a functional part of a functional whole, *University*, and has as its purpose, some specifiable contribution to the well-functioning of that whole, and that it is evaluable as such.

This view must accommodate the fact that, like other corporates, Universities have human constituents. One way to do this would be to distinguish *parthood*, which holds (at times) between artificial bodies (the University, the departments, the positions) and *occupancy* which holds (at times) between each of these things and human beings. So, I currently occupy a lecturing position, but I also co-occupy, with others, a University, Faculty etc. But we need not settle these details here.

One might now suppose that the requirements on *you*, if you are a teacher, waiter or such derive from the requirements on your position, which are set by its function within the corporate. The details of the derivation need not be settled here. But we might suppose that they are more complicated than the simple inheritance, by you, of the evaluative and normative properties of your position. If there is a problem with the professor it does not follow that this problem is with you, if you are the professor. Perhaps you are part of the solution. Perhaps you are required to get together with colleagues and managers and seek a resolution: a sabbatical, a job-share, a change of role. But there is no reason to suppose that there will be simple inheritance, by you, of the professor’s fault.

The canvassed position-occupant dualism has emancipatory potential then, the potential to liberate *you* from an attribution of fault to your position. But I don't think the dualist view can bear the weight here given to it. If positions are objects at all, they do not bear the relevant properties.

The analogy between corporations and positions is much weaker than I initially made it seem. We have very many terms for corporate bodies. 'The Supreme Court of Justice', 'The University of Manchester', 'Microsoft', and so on. And it is not just the big beasts. 'The Hebden Bridge Co-op Store', 'The Swindon Moonrakers' (a pub quiz team), 'Handforth Parish Council' and so on. We frequently use these terms referentially and, on the face of it, predicate a wide range of properties of their referents: locational properties, legal properties (ownership of assets, contractual obligations), psychological properties (knowledge, plans), actions (announcements, strategies), powers and normative properties (duties, rights and responsibilities). We carry on as if these predications are not systematically false. And these predications are not straightforwardly "paraphraseable away" as sentences about human beings. Of course, if a corporation does something or is some way, this is at least in part because human beings have done things and are, or have been certain ways. But for the corporation to do what *it* did is not *simply* for the human beings to do what *they* did; we can't offer a statement of the latter as a paraphrase of the former. A human being's making of an announcement, for example, does not by itself *suffice* for the corporation that it speaks for making an announcement. If a human being makes the announcement and this makes it the case that the corporation makes the announcement, then this obviously suffices. But we can't give *this* as a reductive truth-condition as it contains the very thought that we are trying to paraphrase away, namely that the corporation made an announcement.

Of course, more could be said. But taking the evidence at its face value, it seems that corporations exist, and we have an interest in predicating all sorts of interesting things of them.

Contrast positions. We have very few designated terms for positions. To see this, we should first be clear about which uses of expressions do, and which do not, refer to positions.

'The U.S. presidency' refers to a position. 'The U.S. president' does not. As Russell (1905) taught us,

(41) The U.S. president is napping

quantifies existentially, being equivalent to

(42) Some *x* is (uniquely) U.S. president and *x* is napping.

There are uses of 'The U.S. president' that have readings on which they generalize beyond any particular incumbent, such as

(43) The U.S. president has the power to make treaties

(44) The U.S. president has the responsibility either to sign or return with objections every bill passed by Congress

But these are naturally understood as quantifying *universally*, thus

(45) For any time *t* and person *x*, if *x* is, uniquely, U.S. president at *t*, then *x*... etc.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Where a power (or similar) was *acquired* at a certain time, we need only change this to 'For any time *t* since 2001.... etc.' For some sentences we might want to add a universal quantifier ranging over (sufficiently nearby)

While others, which cannot be read as universal quantifications as they admit of exceptions, such as

(46) The president pardons a turkey at Thanksgiving

are naturally understood as generics akin to 'The lily flowers in June'.

I cannot find any uses of 'The U.S. president' that cannot be understood in one of these ways. Likewise for other expressions that identify a human being by their occupancy of a position.

Once we understand this, we should be struck by how few designated terms for positions we have. We *might* have used expressions like 'The Apple CEO' to pick out a position that persists through the actual and counterfactual replacement of its constituents, much as we use 'Apple' to pick out a corporation that persists through the actual and counterfactual replacement of its constituents. But we do not. We might have coined a marker, like the suffix '-ship' or '-y' that we could systematically deploy to generate such a term. But we did not. We do have a device for systematically turning *some* temporally non-rigid designators of humans into temporally rigid designators of their positions: it is 'The position (office) of...' locution.<sup>17</sup> But even this only works for kinds of position that only one person has at a time. I am a lecturer of philosophy in the University of Manchester, and not the only one, so one cannot use this device to generate a term for my position. For positions such as mine, we must resort to expressions like 'Tom's job', or 'Phil's old job'.

I think we can easily explain why we do not have many terms for positions. We do not have many things we want to say about them. In this too the contrast with corporations is striking. We do not predicate locational properties, legal properties (ownership of assets, contractual obligations), psychological properties (knowledge, plans), actions (announcements, strategies), powers or normative and evaluative properties (duties, rights and responsibilities) of them. We might say

(47) That's a great position

(48) The position ought to be eliminated/split into two/combined with another/re-defined

But I'm not sure that (47) evaluates the position; it seems to evaluate someone's *having* it. It is perhaps elliptical for "That a great position *for* [depending on the context] the right person/you/someone... etc. Nor does (48) predicate a requirement *of* the position. It can only be understood as saying that it ought to be the case that the position is eliminated/split into two... etc.

One might suppose that the U.S. presidency has powers, duties and rights that it transfers to, or bestows upon, anyone who occupies that office.

I doubt it. Biden is president and has the powers, duties and rights of any president because, after a popular vote, he was certified as president by the Electoral College and Congress. And 'He is president and has the powers etc. of any president because he was certified as such' is, in turn, true because of certain social facts: roughly, because of the general or collective acceptance by U.S. citizens of U.S. constitutional law. Do we deepen our understanding by inserting into this explanation the idle wheel 'because he holds the position of the president'? I don't think so. The presidency is not an agent; it doesn't do anything. So it is hard to see how it could have powers etc., and how could it transfer anything to anyone. To explain the president's powers, duties, and rights by appeal to some such act of transfer is, perversely, to explain the familiar with the unfamiliar.

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worlds. Arguably, as 'the president' is ontologically committing and universal quantifications can be vacuously true, we should add a clause to the effect that for some  $t$  there is at least one  $y$  who is uniquely president at  $t$ .  
<sup>17</sup> I borrow 'rigid' and 'non-rigid' from (Kripke 1980) of course.

Our main interest in positions is in (i) tracking their persistence over time, especially with regard to the actual and counterfactual replacement of their occupants and (ii) the networks or structures made up of them, the relations between them, and their human occupants. And even this is not *that* interesting. This explains why we have very little to say about them, why we have few designated terms for them and why the few that we do have, or which are easy enough to construct, identify esteemed or powerful positions; for these will generally be of more interest.

We can pursue this interest without referring to, or quantifying over positions at all. Instead of talking about someone *getting* the presidency we can talk about them becoming president. Any talk of the *history* of the presidency can be recast as talk of the history of those people who were (or tried to be) president, with a particular focus on those times at which they were (or were trying to be) president. Any talk of the dignity of the presidency can be paraphrased as talk of the dignity that we both attribute to and expect of anyone who is president, because they are president. Instead of the function and purpose of the presidency, we can talk of the function and the purpose of someone being president. And so on.

What should we conclude about the metaphysics of positions? I am not sure. Here are three views that hold some appeal to me.

First, one might think that there are no such things. John Hyman notes that

The phrases 'take a bath' and 'meet one's death' are examples of a fairly common construction in English, which uses a verb with a so-called eventive object. One can take a bath and have a chat; one can make a choice or a promise; and so on.... The construction... is merely a syntactic expedient, and the verb does not express a genuine relation. (Hyman 2015, 56)

To take a bath just is to bathe; to meet one's death just is to die, and so on.

We might try to take the same line on the verb phrases that we use to "relate" us to our "positions"; that is, to talk of winning, getting, entering, having, holding, filling, occupying, inhabiting, keeping, leaving, and exiting an office or position. These verbs have the same whiff of semantic vacuity as 'take', 'meet', 'have', and 'make' in Hyman's examples. And we can paraphrase them away: to quit the presidency just is to cease to be president etc.

A bit of semantic evidence that may support this view is this.

...when Socrates took a bath, the taking of it *was* the bath he took; and when he met his death, their meeting *was* his death... (Hyman 2015, 56)

Call those verbs that are syntactic expedients and which do not express genuine relations *light* verbs. And call a predicate that we have recourse to if we dispense with one made up of a light verb plus object, a *basic* predicate. 'Bathed' and 'died' are basic with respect to 'took a bath', 'met his death'. Likewise, 'is president' is basic with respect to 'holds the presidency'. Hyman's observation is this: nominalizations of his light verb phrases ("the taking of the bath") and nominalizations of the corresponding basic predicates ("the bath") are *co-referential*. Likewise:

when Biden won the presidency, the winning of it *was* his becoming president; and now that he holds that office, the holding of it *is* his being president.



A second view is that positions *just are* artefacts of, or abstractions from our interest in them, such that a position exists only if we have taken sufficient interest in it (there is a broad brush parallel here with intuitionism, or, more broadly, constructivism in the philosophy of mathematics). This would explain why we have a principle of identity for things like the U.S. Presidency or the Waynflete Chair of Metaphysical Philosophy but none for more lowly positions. I was one of four new departmental hires when I was first employed as a lecturer. As I recall, two people had recently left the department. Did I get a newly created position, or one of their positions? Might one of the old positions have been divided into two, of which I got one? Or did those positions go out of existence to be replaced by four new ones? We might sometimes talk as if there are answers to such questions, for, say, budgeting purposes. But really, they look like non-questions. The concept of a *position* does not provide any clear criterion as to how to answer them. But the positions in which we take sufficient interest do appear to have a principle of identity. No entity without identity.

A third view would be that positions exist as absences or gaps, in something like the way that argument places “exist” in concepts, properties and relations. Katherine Ritchie (2020) and Kit Fine (2020) offer views that suggest something of the sort. On the view as I would express it, a corporate entity has a form or structure that is unsaturated or gappy; and human beings *fill* or *occupy* the gaps. We may think of the corporate entity itself, then, as comprised of the human beings *in their positions*: it is the *completion* of its incomplete structure, by those human beings.

Whichever of these three views is right, or nearly right, and even if none of them is anywhere near right, positions are not the sorts of things act or which are subject to requirements.

To sum up, positions do not fulfil their emancipatory promise. I conclude with a discussion of how the idea of a job’s requirements might oppress one, and how to release oneself from its grip.

### **Some sources of, and emancipatory strategies for, workplace alienation and anxiety**

Recall Sartre’s café waiter:

His movements are animated and intent, a bit too precise, a bit too quick; he approaches the customers with a bit too much animation; he leans forward a bit too attentively, his voice and his eyes expressing an interest in the customer’s order that is a bit too solicitous. Finally, here he is, on his way back... carrying his tray with the recklessness characteristic of a tightrope walker, holding it in a constantly unstable and constantly disrupted equilibrium, which he constantly restores with a light movement of his arm and hand. His behaviour throughout strikes us as an act. (Sartre, 2018, 102-3).<sup>18</sup>

Initially, it seems that Sartre’s beef is that *this guy is not for real*. He is trying to “imitate [an] automaton” and “concentrates on his successive movements as if they were mechanisms”. “Indeed, his facial expression and even his voice seem to be mechanical”. Sartre notes that the waiter “cannot immediately be a café waiter in the sense in which this inkwell *is* an inkwell, in which the glass is a glass”. As we have put it here, *waiter* can never be what someone fundamentally is, as *inkwell* is what an inkwell fundamentally is. Nor is waiting what anyone is for, as the containment of ink is what an inkwell is for. But it is as if the waiter has mistook his job, or perhaps the function of his job (position) for his function. By acting like a robot waiter, he is trying to be a functional artefact.

The thought that one’s job makes one, or requires one to be a functional object is one source of workplace alienation and anxiety. One route to it is over-investment. By identifying too

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<sup>18</sup> All subsequent quotations come from 102-4. Intriguingly, Sartre alludes at 104 to “the duties of my station”.

strongly with one's position and/or occupation, hoping to find one's true self in it, one risks turning oneself into a tragi-comical simulation of an artefact, for whom the mask eats into the face.

As Sartre continues to watch, he has a new thought. The man is "playing *at being* a café waiter" and that "[he] plays with his condition in order to *actualize* it". We might read this as neo-Hobbesian social ontology. By personation, by acting *as*, say, a University, a human being can see to it that this University acts, confers a degree for example. Likewise, one might think, by *personating* or *presenting* himself as ("playing *at being*") a café waiter, a human can bring a waiter into existence ("*actualize* it"). On this way of understanding things, the waiter is distinct from the man ("if I represent him... I am not him"), just as the human at the ceremony is not the University. Consider:

He knows full well what it 'means': the obligation to get up at five o'clock, to sweep the floor of the premises before the rooms are opened, to get the coffee machine going, etc. He knows the rights that come with it: the right to a tip, trade union rights, etc. But all these concepts and judgements refer to something transcendent. These are abstract possibilities, rights and duties, accorded to a 'legal subject'. And it is precisely this person that *I have to be* and that I am not.

There is the waiter, then, an abstract subject of rights and duties, on the one hand, which "I am not", but which, by some contingency, "I have to be"<sup>19</sup>. It is the waiter, not the man that is fundamentally a thing with a function, with associated rights and duties.

The thought that one is distinct from one's position, but, as its *occupant*, somehow contained, trapped even, within it is a second source of workplace alienation and anxiety. (For some it may follow dialectically from the rejection of the previous thought). One is there, hidden and unobserved, behind the mask; a ghost in a socially constructed machine, driven by its purposes. Or, to change the analogy, one is like the *matter* – the aluminium, say – that makes up the functional part of the bicycle, formless in itself but given form and purpose by one's occupancy of an object with a function. This is an unhappily detached and depersonalized (even psychotic) thought.

There is another reading of Sartre's talk of "playing *at being* a waiter", or perhaps another strand in his discussion, according to which the waiter is playing in order to fulfil a self-presentational requirement. One might think of this too as a further step in a dialectic.

He is playing *at being* a café waiter... This obligation is imposed in the same way on all shopkeepers: their condition is entirely ceremonial, and the public demands them to actualize it as a ceremony; there is the dance of the grocer, the tailor, the auctioneer, through which they try to persuade their customers that they are nothing more than a grocer, an auctioneer, a tailor. A grocer who dreams is offensive to the buyer, because he is no longer completely a grocer. Etiquette requires him to contain himself in his grocer's function...

The thought that one is required to *present* oneself as something one is not, a functional object is a third source of workplace alienation and anxiety.

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<sup>19</sup> Sartre's translator Richmond says (lx) that *avoir à être* (to have to be) "is used by Sartre to indicate the future-orientated, dynamic and responsible aspects of the for-itself: rather than simply 'being' something (e.g. myself) or some way, I have *it to be*. Although it can be quite simply translated into English as 'to have to be', the reader needs to be careful in some instances not to read the phrase in the sense that involves the idea of *obligation*. If the for-itself 'has X to be' it is not *obliged* to be X, but chooses itself as being or aspiring to be X". So while a job may bring obligations, one chooses to take or to keep a job, one is not duty-bound to do either.

But there is an *emancipatory* reading of Sartre's talk of play. One can read it as psychoanalysis ("The child plays with his body to explore it, to take stock of it; the café waiter plays with his condition in order to *actualize* it"). The waiter has a conception of a "waiter" that is a thing for waiting, as a knife is thing for cutting, a waiter for whom the kind *waiter* is *what he is*. He knows that he is not this thing, but also that he might appear to others as this thing. Perhaps it is the very conception we were just discussing, on which the waiter exists because the waiter personates him. And he *plays* with this conception. We might think of this play as a strategy for alleviating alienation and anxiety, by exploring what Goffman (1959) was to call "role distance". One can *toy* with a question such as *Where do I stop, and where does he start?* And as "play is a type of research and investigation", such play can help one to find a non-anxious way to think about difficult issues.

In addition, by "amusing himself", perhaps by fulfilling the demands of the job to an exaggerated and absurd extent, the waiter can ironize his condition. He can both meet the expectations, indeed exceed them, while holding on to a sense of who *he* is (the performer, not the role). This can perhaps go too far; a playful attitude can become a flippant one. If one starts to think that it is a *joke* that one has requirements by virtue of one's position, this may lead to problems.

von Wright has this to say about the goodness of artefacts ("instrumental goodness"):

An attribution of instrumental goodness of its kind to some thing is... secondary in the sense that it logically presupposes a judgment of goodness for some purpose. (von Wright, 1963, Ch. II. sec. 2.)

So, for example, if *x* is a good paring knife this is *because x* is a paring knife and is well suited to cutting foodstuffs. There is another way in which the judgement that *x* is a good paring knife is "secondary". It is of secondary importance. What one cares about, if one has the purpose of cutting foodstuffs is whether one can get hold of something that serves that purpose. Whether it is of a kind that is essentially associated with that purpose, as the kind *paring knife* is, is of secondary concern. (For von Wright this is largely just a *morphological* matter).

von Wright has this to say about "the goodness of ability or capacity or skill" ("technical goodness"):

The good K is a K who is good at the proper activity of Ks.... an attribution of technical goodness of its kind to some being is a secondary valuation. Its basis the primary valuation is a judgment to the effect that this being is good at something. (von Wright, 1963, Ch. II. sec. 9. I have elided a paragraph break)

So, for example, if *x* is a good teacher this is *because x* is a teacher and good at teaching. There is another way in which the judgement that *x* is a good teacher is a "secondary valuation". Whether or not someone is good at teaching is more important than whether they are of a kind that is essentially associated with that activity, as the kind *teacher* is. (For von Wright, this is largely just a matter of their credentials; I'd add that it is a matter of whether they habitually teach.)

Another emancipatory strategy is to refuse to move from primary to secondary evaluations. If I peer review your class, it is not you, nor even you relative to the kind *professor* that I am primarily evaluating, it is your teaching. I try to think of my work as a lecturer like this: what contributes, or should contribute, to my University fulfilling its purpose, is neither *me* nor my *position*; it is my *teaching* (*research etc.*), the habitual activity by virtue of which – together with my credentials – I *am* a lecturer. We need, not a dualism of positions and occupants, but one of  $\phi$ -ers and  $\phi$ -ing.

A final route to emancipation is found in a famous passage of Marx's in *The German Ideology*

...in communist society, where nobody has one exclusive sphere of activity but each can become accomplished in any branch he wishes, society regulates the general production and thus makes it possible for me to do one thing today and another tomorrow, to hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening, criticize after dinner, just as I have a mind, without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.<sup>20</sup>

We can think of what Marx envisages as a sweeping away of all secondary valuations; a world in which we can evaluate teaching but not teachers, for there are none. One thing that would be welcome about this – whether this be in communist society or a gig economy – is that of never having to trudge through the moments of the fraught Sartrean dialectic that I have itemized.

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<sup>20</sup> I am grateful to Gabriel Wollner for alerting me to the brief discussion of this passage in (Cohen 2000, Ch. V, sec. 7), from where I take the Marx quotation (132). Cohen takes Marx's point primarily to be, not about the value of doing what one wants, or doing a number of different sorts of things, but the value of human relations not mediated by roles and institutions.

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