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Neoliberal Ideologies and Cultural Models of Work among Young French and American Business Students and Professionals: A Study in Institutional Change and Cultural Meaning

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Neoliberal Ideologies and Cultural Models of Work among Young
French and American Business Students and Professionals: A Study
in Institutional Change and Cultural Meaning

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Nolan Y. Ferar
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Neoliberal Ideologies and Cultural Models of Work among Young
French and American Business Students and Professionals: A Study
in Institutional Change and Cultural Meaning

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Abstract

In this thesis I analyze semi-structured interviews I conducted with fifteen young French and American business students and professionals in order to uncover cultural models relating to work, while paying particular attention to the acceptance or rejection of neoliberal ideas. To contextualize the analysis, I first review the history of neoliberal ideology along with its arrival and political and institutional influence in both countries. In the U.S., the neoliberal transition was rapid and dramatic under the Reagan administration, which constitutes a critical institutional juncture and a shift in the dominant paradigm of governance. In France, in contrast, neoliberal policies have been implemented reluctantly and incrementally, suggesting traditional French values relating to the state and its role in regulating the economy remain largely intact. In line with these historical patterns, the Americans I spoke to primarily conceptualize work as a commodity, accepting the definition of work as defined in the market; while the French interviewees conceptualize work as personal fulfillment and occupational citizenship, emphasizing the human and psychological essence of work and the need for moral regulation of the market economy, perceived as immoral and anarchic. Overall, the Americans much more readily accepted neoliberal ideas and policy directives and towards which the French were far less welcoming. In particular, I argue that the traditional role of the French state as responsible for the wellbeing of its citizens presents a major obstacle to neoliberal ideology, historically on an institutional level as well as in the minds of the French interviewees.

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Chapter One

Introduction, Methods and Literature Review

“It’s a shame you didn’t go grocery shopping yesterday. I never go to the store on Sunday if I can help it,” my cousin chided me one rainy May afternoon, as we sat on a bench along the quai of Ile Saint Louis, where the Seine divides to envelop the small island at the heart of Paris. I didn’t see the problem. It was nearly time for dinner but this was Paris, not a village, and I wasn’t worried about being able to find groceries. “The Franprix across from my apartment is open right now,” I countered, somewhat taken aback by her attitude. “Yes, but it’s a matter of principle,” Célia explained, “Sunday is supposed to be the day everyone can be home, with their family, not at work. And if you go shopping on Sunday, you’re encouraging everyone to go to work.”

As we got up, heading off to catch the metro home, Célia patiently resigned to the consequences of my lack of foresight and myself perplexed, trying to make sense of her point of view, it was not the first time I ran into cultural logics around work in France different from anything I’d encountered at home in America. I’d listened patiently to many French friends and family exalting the virtue of the thirty-five hour work week—how it lets people enjoy family and pursue other interests—often explicitly contrasted to the perceived American attitude towards work, in short, that work is life. I’d seen crowds young and old marching through the streets of the capitol to protest raising the age of retirement. Nor was it the first time I’d grappled with cultural differences between France and the U.S generally. Indeed, being born

to a French mother and American father, raised in Portland, Oregon but educated at a French immersion school, my whole life I've straddled two cultures and have been constantly forced to compare and question them. I still recall as a child visiting my maternal family in Brittany, and being confused by why my two worlds were so different. The importance of family was different. The food was different. The cities were different. Why couldn't I walk to the bakery at Portland, when I could walk to four or five in any small town France? What began as a necessary exercise in making sense of the world and myself gave me a distinct perspective, one that was more relativist and culturally curious; one, I believe, that led me to the discipline of anthropology. Perhaps it's unsurprising that I today I'm still preoccupied by the differences between how Americans and the French people see and think about the world.

From my observations and considerations of French attitudes towards work, I developed this project. Far from considering the topic of work as a curious and peripheral realm of difference that I happily stumbled across, I quickly came to see work as crucially central, both in people's lives and in the organization of capitalist societies in general. Work is fundamental. As Budd explains, different conceptualizations of work "do not simply describe alternative perspectives on work; rather, they actively structure our understandings of and our experiences with work by providing frames of references, norms, values, and attitudes toward work that actors translate into specific practices" (Budd 2011:184). I decided that for my thesis I would interview French and Americans about work, with the aim of identifying distinct cultural models in each society. What is the framework in which

they are able to conceptualize work? How do these differences relate to institutional differences between how work is recognized and organized in each society?

As I delved into the literature concerning work, states and political economy in France and the United States I learned that many scholars suggest a convergence in recent decades between French and American labor institutions, welfare systems, and national responses to economic crises according to a neoliberal paradigm. The possibility and extent of global convergence to a single economic, political and ideological model have important implications for the economic and political future of societies such as our own, and ultimately the cultural diversity of our species. As Levi-Strauss anticipated, “we have lost the possibilities offered by these [geographical, linguistic and cultural] barriers for developing and testing new genetic combinations and cultural experiences” (Levi-Strauss 1985:23). As global economic, political and value systems converge, so too does the fate of humanity. By examining if and how the neoliberal ideology that shaped national institutions over time also shape cultural conceptions, we deepen our understanding neoliberal ideas and their relation to culture, society and historical change.

To begin my investigation, therefore, it was first necessary to review the extent of convergence between French and American national experiences with neoliberalism historically. With this context in mind, the analysis of cultural systems of meaning and belief becomes grounded in historical social reality, enabling sounder reflection on the implications of cultural differences. Do the patterns of institutional convergence parallel a convergence in French and American cultural

conceptualizations of work? How, exactly, could neoliberal ideas and logics map on to distinctively French or American ways of thinking about work?

Methods

To answer these questions, I needed samples of people from each country that were similarly exposed to the forces of globalization and neoliberalism. I specified my project, resolving to conduct interviews with young French and American business students and professionals under the age of thirty-five. The age restriction serves to insure that every individual was born after neoliberal ideas and policies began to take hold in governments and societies across the world. My sampling was purposive and I was largely dependent on contacts with friends and family in both countries to find suitable and willing participants. I originally intended to contrast four groups of students and workers from each country, with roughly a balance of gender. However, in the face of difficulties finding enough people to interview—business students and professionals, as it turns out, happen to be very busy people—I had to collapse both categories for each country into one, leaving a single group from each nation. The majority of the participants were in fact students, as professionals are even busier. This was unintentional but accepted. While I had hoped to have a balance of gender in each sample, I was only able to interview one female from each country. Rather than excluding them for the sake of consistency, I make use of their interviews as well, and ask the reader to note the gender bias represented in my sample and excuse it as unintentional. We're now

ready to introduce the young French and Americans who participated in my project:¹

American participants:

David is 34, male and is the CEO of an online marketing firm.

Duncan is 22, male and work at a financial services start up company.

Ethan is 24, male and works for IBM as a worldwide consolidator of integrated supply chains.

George is 22, male and studies business with a concentration in finance at the Wharton School.

Kevin is 22, male and studies business administration at Chapman University.

Samuel is 21, male and studies business at Chapman University.

Arthur is 22, male and studies accounting and French at university in southern California.

Christina is 19, female and studies business at Chapman University.

French Participants:

Thierry is 26, male and is a money manager for professional, business, and agricultural clients.

Emma is 23, female and attends a business school in Paris.

Arnaud is 21, male and studies economics at the University of Rennes.

Paul is 23, male and attends a business school in Paris.

Édouard is 23, male and attends a business school in Paris.

Nicolas is 26, male and is an oil and maritime industry analyst for a French bank.

¹ To protect anonymity, all names and identifiable details about the interviewees have been changed.

The interviews lasted between one and three hours. They were semi-structured and covered three broad themes: personal experience of work, work in the life of the individual in general, and the relations of work to society. Particularly with the French interviews, the majority were conducted online over a video conversation. The next step was to transcribe all of the interviews, and then analyze them to uncover cultural models related to work. I mostly made use of two analytical approaches, first collecting and analyzing the metaphors each group used to talk about work, and then looking at their reasoning about different elements relating to work.

Literature review

In endeavoring to compare cultural models of work across two societies gleaned from the analysis of discourse, while paying particular attention to the influence of institutional structure and global forces, this project stands at theoretical and analytical intersection sparsely populated by scholarly work. Cognitive anthropology, from which the cultural models approach emerged, seldom involves comparative studies. Meanwhile in the anthropology and sociology of work, there has been a general lack of emphasis on the cultural meaning of work itself. In a somewhat dated review of the literature in the sociology and anthropology of work, Abbott (1993) observes the dominant focus has been on specific occupations, the topic of gender or the power of institutional forces of the labor market on economic actors, while in a single year only 5% of the literature dealt with cultural meaning of work. Furthermore, “the cultural literature is very diffuse, spread over many areas

of substantive concern, rather than concentrated into ‘a literature’ on the symbolic structure of work” (Abbott 1993:192).

Concentrating on research in France, Paradeise (2003) also reviews the shifting interests and academic alliances that have characterized the sociology of work and labor over the past fifty years. From World War 2 to the 70s, sociologists of work largely embraced a Marxist perspective, concentrating on industrial blue-collar workers—the developmental protagonists of history—and were strongly critical of Taylorism. Empirical research was conducted primarily in large industrial firms, considered the best location to observe the struggle between labor and capital. By the 1980s, sociologists of work turned to focus instead on markets, the exchange values of skills on the labor market, and employment norms. Throughout the various phases of the sociology of work in France identified by Paradeise (2003), there seems to be no concern with the cultural meaning of work itself. Though recently sociologists have theorized new organizational forms to better describe the nature of work through a sociological lens, there has not been a similar emphasis on the effects of those same organizational changes on the way that work is experienced and conceptualized by workers themselves.

Across the Atlantic, the recent sociological approach to work does not appear to be very different. In his textbook on the sociology of work, Volti (2008) similarly focuses on job socialization and the structural forces of labor markets on individual workers, though he does approach the cultural meaning of work in his chapter on the tension between work roles and life roles. Once again, however, the sociological analysis of work passes through broad structural trends, (e.g. hours worked per

year by Americans, the large-scale entrance of woman into the labor force), rather than the direct experience and thoughts of people within the system that is analyzed.

In *A New Sociology of Work?*, the contributors exhibit a certain interest in the meaning of work as historically specific, but primarily in terms of the boundaries of what is considered work. Glucksmann (2006), in chapter one, reviews her total social organization of labor approach, which proposes to explore the analytical theme of the differing modes of interconnection between four dimensions of work activities: activities across processes of production, distribution exchange and consumption; across the boundaries between paid and unpaid work, market and non-market formal and informal; articulation of work activities and relations with non-work activities and relations; and finally, differing temporalities of work and significance of temporality across the other three interconnections. The objective of the framework is to facilitate analysis between and across work performed under differing socio-economic relations and of similar work in disparate conditions, by providing a model to represent a particular case. Central to her approach is Glucksmann's (2006) assertion that what is seen as work and "economic" has historical specificity, depending on how economic processes are embedded and instituted in particular cases. While her approach shows interest in the meaning of work, it makes that meaning contingent upon a historical specific moment and structure, denying the role of agents and cultural meanings in recreating and embedding those structures. A turn to ordinary discourse as a means to uncover the meaning of work, as I propose, would give greater voice to the cultural agents that

exist in those structures. In addition, in investigating the meaning of work by analyzing how it is distinguished from non-work activities, Glucksmann's approach primarily deals with the formal boundaries of what is considered work, at the expense of the rich content of that meaning: the variety of ways in which work can be conceptualized and experienced by individuals, along with culturally salient trends in meaning.

In the same volume, Bottero (2006) also shows interest in the meaning of work, and explores the embeddedness of occupations in a broader context of social relations through which they are defined—the social identity, social networks, and life trajectories of people who hold a particular occupation. These social meanings of occupations and their shifting nature have important implications for understanding class and social inequality. She employs a social distance method that puts social relationships at the heart of stratification analysis in order to arrive at a hierarchy of occupations. While Bottero's (2006) interpretation of the meaning of work is more detailed than Glucksmann's (2006), consisting of the hierarchy of occupations rather than simply the boundaries what is considered work, it once again glances over the content of what exactly work means to people. Indeed, in her conclusion she advocates her quantitative approach to directly address the shifting meaning of the social location of particular occupations, but she also notes that it is no substitute for qualitative approaches which directly access the subjective experience of social location. To the subjective experience, I would add the cultural systems of meaning, also housed in the subject, which directly influence the way that a certain occupation, and work generally, is conceptualized and experienced.

While the tendency in the anthropology and sociology of work is to ignore the cultural meaning of work, some scholars have taken the meaning of work seriously. Notably, Wadel (1979) approaches work as a socially constructed category, observing that the boundaries of activities termed work in our society are continuously changing, along with the way in which we characterize work activities and distinguish them from non-work activities. Thus, in contrast to the contributors to *A New Sociology of Work?* discussed above, Wadel is interested in both the formal boundaries and the content of cultural meanings of work. He begins by reviewing the economist's concept of work—an activity sold on the market—and argues that such a conceptualization leaves the definition of work left to the organizations that pay for and demand work. In delimiting and entrusting their concept of work, economists have also disregarded the notion of work as a source of cultural and social value, which he contrasts with the folk concept of work, imbued with a moral component, or a value beyond remuneration. It's precisely this folk concept of work that I hope to glean from my interviews.

Additionally, whereas Glucksman (2006) emphasizes the role of historically contingent structural features of labor markets in redefining the boundaries of what is considered work, Wadel (1979) argues that the analysis of work as a social construction must take into account a dialectical relation between changes in institutional arrangements and what he terms "cognition"—the subjective characterization of work activities. In such a framework, agents and cultural meaning are no longer completely subordinate to structure, and cultural conceptualizations of work are valorized as partly constitutive of institutional

structures. For the purposes of the present study, which in part endeavors precisely to explore the relationship between institutional structures and cultural meanings of work, Wadel's dialectical is useful in valorizing and relating both sides of the equation.

Another notable exception that takes the meaning of work seriously is Budd's (2011) exquisite archaeology of the concept of work, *The Thought of Work*, in which the author attempts compile a diversity of perspectives in order to promote a multidisciplinary understanding of work. Each chapter presents a critical synthesis of important philosophical traditions and academic theories of work from across the social and behavioral sciences—from work as a freedom to a curse, a disutility to identity—tracing the histories and interrelations of those conceptualizations. Rather than summarize the most interesting chapters here, Budd's most relevant insights will be integrated into the analysis below. In presenting such variable conceptualizations of work, however, Budd also evokes their cultural power:

How a society defines work also reflects and reveals how that society implicitly defines human nature. To see work as freedom is to define humans as compelled to master nature and create things. To embrace work as disutility is to specify human nature as rational, self-interested, atomistic, and largely materialistic. Emphasizing the personal fulfillment element of work casts humans as seeking inner satisfaction, while a perspective that recognizes work as service shifts our deepest intentions outward toward others and perhaps toward a higher spiritual purpose. And to see work as a social relation is to characterize human nature as fundamentally concerned with how we relate to others, and perhaps as driven to dominate others. The meaning of work in a particular society is therefore an inherent part of the deeper cultural fabric. [Budd 2011:181]

The present study assumes the same fundamental importance of how work is culturally defined, and strives to elucidate cultural models of work in order to

explore the importance, posited by Budd, of their relation to the organization of society.

To do so, it's necessary to integrate a framework that considers historical change together with culture, ideas and discourse. Historical Institutionalism (HI), a branch of New Institutionalism, provides such a theoretical framework from comparative political economy in which to consider the questions of institutional continuity and change. Emerging in the social sciences, particularly in sociology, in the 1980s in opposition to Behavioralism and its focus on individual agency, New Institutionalism attempted to reintroduce structure to political and cultural analysis, in the form of institutions (Brejning 2012). Institutionalism, in all forms, considers that institutions—in the broadest sense, rules—are the foundation of all political behavior (Steinmo 2001). Individuals exist and make choices within these institutions, which limit what behaviors are deemed legal or acceptable.

HI in particular stresses the importance of considering the unique historical trajectories of different countries' institutions in order to understand cross-national differences (Brejning 2012). A key concept for HI is the notion of path-dependency, which “describes the propensity of initial and often random choices to create a pattern which will persist” (Brejning 2012:17). Path-dependency is established at moments of “critical junctures”—founding moments of institutional formation (Thelen 1999). These junctures set countries along “developmental pathways,” as institutions “continue to evolve in response to changing environmental conditions and ongoing political maneuvering but in ways that are constrained by past trajectories” (Thelen 1999:377).

A distinction is often made in HI between formal and ideational institutions (Thelen 1999). Formal institutions consist of “governance arrangements,” made up of government structures, political parties, laws, social policies, etc. (Brejning 2012). They provide the legal and governmental framework in which national actors are able to make choices and act. In contrast, ideational institutions are more intangible, consisting of mental constructs. Borrowing from Sociological Institutionalism, the turn in HI to ideational institutions emphasizes how individuals are constrained by cognitive maps, cultural values and norms, symbols, identities, ideologies, etc. Thus, HI aims to integrate considerations of culture and social structure in a theoretical framework, with agency largely contingent upon both, in order to explain institutional continuity or change.

Brejning (2012) provides a useful distinction between two aspects of an ideational institutional structure: paradigms and discourse. Paradigms are widely agreed upon, usually unarticulated worldviews according to which policy makers and other individuals derive interpretive frameworks in order to conceptualize social problems and solutions. Discourses, in contrast, are always articulated and often contested. Brejning defines them as “the articulated interpretation of concepts, ideas and the general complexities of the social world” (Brejning 2012:16). They inevitably draw on normative paradigms and values, though they do not necessarily stand in total agreement with dominant paradigms. Finally, “free-floating ideas” are concepts that are not fully ingrained in either kind of ideational institutional structure. To be articulated, they must be embedded in discourse, “whilst discourses

are heavily influenced by the paradigms of the context in which they are articulated” (Brejning 2012:17).

According to HI, institutional change, absent of revolution, depends on the actions of policy actors who may seek to embed new free-floating ideas in a convincing discourse consistent with an underlying paradigm in order to garner support for reforms. This process is known as “framing” (Brejning 2012). Framing “can involve constructing a particular situation as a social problem in order to facilitate the presentation of the new idea as a solution” (Brejning 2012:21). Andersen similarly argues for the need to take a constructivist approach to how both “challenges” and “solutions” are discursively created (Andersen 2000). In emphasizing the importance of ideas and agency, this trend in HI avoids the tendency for overemphasis on structure and continuity in favor of considerations of change and transformative agency within an institutional framework.

Harper (1996) provides one example of how discourse can be analyzed to reveal underlying cultural systems of meaning. Specifically, he argues in favor of a discursive—rather than an attributional—approach to understanding poverty as socially constructed, by examining the various discourses of poverty explanation and the ideological interests they serve. Though Harper does not necessarily turn to analyzing a sample of individuals’ discourse obtained in interviews, he highlights the aptitude of a discursive approach to understanding political concepts that are socially constructed. In addition, such an approach dissolves the boundary between individual-as-explainer and institution-as-explainer, considering individuals and governments as using a certain repertoire of accounts to warrant their conducts.

Another exemplary use of discourse is Karjanen's (2010) study in which he investigates American cultural logics surrounding the ways people conceptualize work, worth, and the compensation of labor by analyzing public attitudes towards wage floor policies. Specifically, he looks at the cultural politics of economic policy discourse, and lay debates about living wage laws to provide a window into the hegemonic, cultural and ideological structures of reactionary economic populism and neoliberalism in the United States. He begins, however, by noting—as we have seen above—that in the anthropology of work, the focus has not been on economic theory and debates around policies, but rather has centered on cataloguing different forms of labor, exchange and production, commodification, or analyzing the incorporation of non-capitalist modes of production into an ever expanding global capitalist market. In contrast, research on economics as discourse and a cultural practice is very limited. Similarly to the present study, Karjanen (2010) is interested in the translation of academically informed debate into general cultural interpretation regarding economic policy in which jargon-ridden statements are translated, symbolized and reiterated within the political culture. Along with Budd (2011), he argues that in much of economic thinking and analysis, especially in public policy, there are implicit social, cultural and normative judgments about human agency, rationality and social behavior. Indeed, he finds that free market rhetoric is the dominant framework for people to think and talk about economic forces in a post cold war world where unbridled capitalism is seen as natural and superior. In this context, free market fundamentalism dovetails with with pre-existing ideas about individual liberty and politics in US society, supporting

neoliberal conceptions of rational choice and agency central to economic arguments. Here Karjanen demonstrates the importance of considering more fundamental cultural discourses and traditions along with their relationship to the particular object of study, neoliberalism. In addition, he finds that the concept of “the marketplace” offers a model of social reality that integrates questions about social life into a singular, unifying operation, becoming a metaphor and symbolic substitute and solution for all sorts of social problems. Karjanen’s findings and analysis of the way neoliberal logic is translated and integrated with general cultural knowledge provides a model for my own analysis, and his findings suggest the cultural acceptance and salience of such neoliberal notions in American political culture. The comparison of the American salience of such ideas with France, and its own set of cultural values, will further illuminate the ways in which neoliberal notions are able to engage with preexisting cultural systems regarding work; contrasting several samples can reveal most clearly what structures each.

Another valuable work, particularly pertinent, which takes discourse seriously is Lamont’s book, *Money, Morals, and Manners: The Culture of the French and the American Upper-Middle Class* (1992). Drawing on 160 interviews with upper-middle class French and American men, she is interested in the nature of the criteria people use to define and discriminate worthy and less worthy persons, or symbolic boundaries. She considers these shared symbolic boundaries as supraindividual by-products of basic social processes that are shaped both by the cultural resources that people have at their disposal, and by the structural situation they live in. The drawing of boundaries is not a voluntaristic process guided by

autonomous individual moral or existential programs, but rather is largely shaped by culturally available accounts of what defines a worthy person and what behaviors are reasonable. Nevertheless, she considers that individuals have the opportunity to select among available cultural resources even though their choices are largely channeled by the “cultural supply side” of the equation. Just as I have proposed, Lamont considers both the power of institutional structure and culturally significant discursive resources in order to support an analysis of cultural differences.

Lamont (1992) identifies three kinds of boundaries that members of both societies draw: moral, socioeconomic and cultural. In general, she finds that Americans stress socioeconomic and moral boundaries more than cultural ones, while the French stress moral and cultural boundaries over socioeconomic ones. Notably, she evokes structural differences to explain the main differences between French and American moral boundaries, with the French attaching less importance to work ethics, competence and competition: since the French enjoy greater job security and there are strong social pressures against lay offs, market competition is less important to them. In regard to the relatively greater importance of income as a socioeconomic status signal in the United States, she argues this results from the simple fact that money is more central to quality of life in an underdeveloped welfare state with less uniform quality of education, where health care and child care must be purchased privately, and higher education is very expensive. Thus, she asserts that in general, market principles have more influence in the allocation of professional rewards, strengthening the symbolic power of money. According to

Karjanen (2010), the logic of the market is a crucial aspect of American conceptualizations of neoliberalism, and Lamont's findings seem to suggest such logic has less of a hold in France, even among the upper strata of society.

In her discussion of national discursive repertoires, for the United States Lamont (1992) highlights the primacy of pragmatism, populism and Americanism—uniting themes of achievement, individualism, egalitarianism and democracy. She also points out that, in contrast to France, no widely accepted political party has diffused a fundamental critique of capitalism, achievement and individualism. In France, she emphasizes the influence of aristocratic, socialist and anarchist traditions, along with the republican ideals of the French Revolution—the Jacobin obsession with equality, universalism, and national unity, and reason as the basis for political order, implying society should be organized on the basis of a preconceived master plan transcending idiosyncratic interests. These latter ideals seem to stand in opposition to neoliberal ideas, which oppose government regulation, let alone a “master plan,” and assert individualism over equality and universalism, further suggesting neoliberal notions may have a more difficult time combining with preexisting French cultural values than they might in America.

Finally, Lamont's chapter on the variations within the upper-middle class of each society is also very relevant. She divides her respondents into four occupation aggregates, first distinguishing those whose work is involved in capitalist production and distribution and those whose work is not, and then into two further groups based on their sector of employment. A picture emerges in which boundary-drawing activities vary with the degree to which an individual's occupation is

instrumental to profit making. Her comparisons show that, in both societies, social and cultural specialists (such as priests, professors, civil servants, etc.) are more culturally exclusive than for-profit workers, who are more likely to draw strong socioeconomic boundaries, with moral boundaries being valued equally. This suggests that people in business should be, in general, among those who conceptualize worth most strongly according to socioeconomic status, a stance that can be seen as complementary if not integral to a neoliberal system of logic. In general, Lamont's work provides crucial insight into the cultural values of the French and American upper-middle classes, and highlights the role of both institutional factors and available discursive resources in creating systems of cultural values, an approach I strive to emulate below.

Whereas Lamont is concerned with symbolic boundaries, however, I am specifically interested in cultural notions of work, which—as discussed above—provide a lens into fundamental ideas about how society should be organized and what constitutes a worthy individual. To uncover cultural meanings implicit in talk about work, I turn to the theory of cultural models, an approach in cognitive anthropology developed to glean cultural significance from ordinary discourse. As explained by Holland and Quinn (1987), cultural models are “presupposed, taken-for-granted models of the world that are widely shared (although not necessarily to the exclusion of other, alternative models) by the members of a society and that play an enormous role in their understanding of that world and their behavior in it” (Holland and Quinn 1987:4). Cultural models are seen as systems that simultaneously store and process information. In other words, they are constructed

according to one's subjective cultural experience, but they also play a role in subsequent interpretations of the subjective experience. Cognitive anthropologists consider speech as an important act in which people negotiate understandings and accomplish social goals, and thereby justify the turn to discourse, often in the form of semi-structured or unstructured interviews, in order to reveal the implicit and normative assumptions that constitute a cultural model for a given concept. But it is also important to note that cultural models are not necessarily seen as providing a single, coherent system of interpretation; alternative—even contradictory—models can exist in parallel, to be evoked in ways that are not necessarily logically or ideologically coherent (Strauss 2005). The space that the theory of cultural models allows for a plurality of interpretative cultural systems is essential for the purposes of the present study, which is precisely concerned with the interrelation of distinctive cultural and ideological systems. Holland and Quinn (1987) posit that, in order to be successful, ideologies promulgated by states and other organizations “must appeal to and activate preexisting cultural understandings, which are themselves compelling” (Holland and Quinn 1987:13). This insight from the theory of cultural models could help explain the salience of neoliberal ideas in American discourse opposed to the living wage found by Karjanen (2010), and generally explain the influence of such ideas in terms of their compatibility with preexisting ones. Holland and Quinn (1987) put forward another particularly relevant insight as they explain, “Cultural understandings would seem to gain force from their identification with expert knowledge and cultural wisdom, in spite of the availability of alternative, equally expert explanatory systems and contradictory, equally wise-

sounding admonitions” (Holland and Quinn 1987:10). In the case of popular neoliberal conceptions, this would suggest that they might be empowered by their association with the academic discipline of economics, particularly among business students. In short, the theory and methodological approach of cultural models (see also Quinn 2005) provide a means to extract cultural meanings, with their nuances and contradictions intact, from the discourse of individuals.

The literature reviewed above is clearly very diffuse, reflecting the unconventional approach of the present study. While the sociology and anthropology of work rarely engages with the cultural meaning of work, some scholars have articulated work as a socially constructed category—and one with important political implications (Budd 2011; Wadel 1979). From such a perspective it is possible both to study different cultural conceptions of work comparatively, and to relate the nature of these conceptions to distinct institutional structures, and discursive resources (Karjanen 2010; Lamont, 1994; Wadel 1979). Drawing on the theory of cultural models provides a methodological and analytical approach to the cultural analysis of discourse, and a framework in which to consider the interrelations of a plurality of explanatory systems.

Before turning to the substance of the interviews themselves, however, Chapter 2 will review neoliberalism in more detail, and trace its arrival as an idea in the United States and its subsequent institutional influences. This historical context will situate the analysis of the American interviews to follow. Chapter 3 will then provide the same context for the analysis of the French interviews, relating the history of neoliberal ideas and their political influence in France to date. With these

contrasting historical experiences in mind, we will then be prepared in Chapter 4 to present the analysis of the American interviews, looking to uncover cultural models relating to work. This chapter will focus on how work is understood generically, and how it relates to the life of an individual. In Chapter 5 the French interview transcripts will receive the same treatment, contrasting the French cultural models of work with the American ones identified in the previous chapter. Then, Chapter 6 will present and contrast how the French and American cultural models of work relate to beliefs about the just organization of society, in particular concerning ideas around the state in relation to the market economy. Differences in cultural reasoning will be related to each society's particular historical experience of neoliberalization. Finally, a brief conclusion will consider the implications of my findings.

Chapter 2

Neoliberalism, the Regime of Flexible Accumulation, and the American Experience

Looking back today, the 1970s and 80s clearly emerge as a decisively transformative moment for the global political economy and international patterns of political economic governance. Faced with a global crisis of “stagflation” that saw unemployment and inflation surging everywhere, it became clear that the Keynesian policies and embedded liberalism of the postwar period—based on the notion that the state should intervene in the market in pursuit of the goals of full employment, economic growth, and the welfare of its citizens—were no longer working (Harvey 2007). Out of a host of possible policy responses, a certain economic doctrine, known as neoliberalism, eventually emerged as hegemonic in policy debate and reform. Embodied in the charismatic figures of Reagan and Thatcher, the “conservative revolution” charged forward hailing tax cuts, industry deregulation, and the roll-back of the welfare state as the cures to economic woes. In some countries, the movement did indeed exhibit a truly revolutionary momentum, and it is commonly attributed with restructuring state and international institutions across the globe. But it is also frequently noted in scholarly work that different states have taken the neoliberal turn always partially, implementing distinctive combinations of policy changes (Harvey 2007). Reflecting upon the uneven geographical advance of neoliberal policies, David Harvey (2007) argues convincingly:

The degree to which neoliberalism has become integral to common-sense understandings among the populace at large has varied greatly depending on the strength of belief in the power of social solidarities and the importance of traditions of collective social responsibility and provision. Cultural and political traditions that underpin popular common sense have therefore had their role to play in differentiating the degree of political acceptance of ideals of individual liberty and free market determinations as opposed to other forms of sociality. [Harvey 2007:116]

In Historical Institutional terms, the process of neoliberalization within a particular nation state is mediated by pre-existing formal and ideational institutions. I argue that the 1970s represented a critical juncture in both France and the US, after which point neoliberal ideas began to play an essential role in policy reform. In contrast, during the postwar period in both countries and prior to the 1970s, neoliberalism can be considered a largely free-floating idea, absent from mainstream political discourse and policies. Only once neoliberal ideas became anchored in political discourse could they begin to engender political reform of formal institutions. As we've seen, the ability of discourse to justify reforms depends, in turn, on the compatibility of the discourse within a broader ideational paradigm. An historical examination of the extent and processes of neoliberalization can elucidate the relationship and tensions between neoliberalism and pre-existing formal and ideational institutions in France and the US. Thus, in order to properly contextualize the influence of neoliberal ideas among young French and American business people and students' conceptions of work, it behooves us to investigate the historical processes and contexts of neoliberalization in each nation. This chapter will focus on the rise of neoliberalism in the US. Throughout, we must ask ourselves to what extent was neoliberalization achieved? What formal institutions were

reformed, and which have resisted reform? How has neoliberalism been embedded, successfully or unsuccessfully, in political discourse and ideational paradigms? In short, what have been the cultural and political “sticking points” in the process? But first, what exactly is neoliberalism?

A brief sketch of neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a nebulous concept, encompassing a range of political economic policy directives derived from a distinctive conceptualization of human nature and freedom; the historical process through which such practices have been implemented by national and supranational organizations; and a hegemonic mode of discourse according to which political economic problems and their solutions are constructed. At the heart of neoliberal theory, however, is the belief that human freedom and wellbeing can be maximized by extending “individual market freedoms” within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade (Harvey 2007:2). Freedom is the highest of virtues for neoliberals, but their conception of freedom tends to be either conveniently vague—as in the case of Milton Freedman, who leaves the term undefined—or so specific as to seem self-fulfilling—as in the case of Hayek, for whom freedom is “the positing of autonomous self-governed individuals, all coming naturally equipped with a neoclassical version of rationality and motives of ineffable self-interest, striving to improve their lot in life by engaging in market exchange” (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009:437). Indeed, market exchange is considered to be an ethic in itself, harnessing individual self-interest for social good. Furthermore,

markets are considered to be information processors vastly more powerful than any human brain, since prices in an efficient market contain all relevant information.

This is the foundation of the argument for the inevitable failure of socialism, since a state could never possess enough information to second-guess market signals.

While neoliberals favor the extension of markets and the retreat of the chronically inefficient state in the provision of goods and services as the route to economic growth and social welfare, they nevertheless require a strong if sharply delineated state. Indeed, what distinguishes neoliberalism from classical liberalism is the belief that the triumph of their vision of a good society depends upon the *construction* of preconditions for its existence, and it will not arise “naturally” without concerted political effort and organization (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009).

Accordingly, neoliberal theory posits a distinctive institutional state structure. The integrity of the sacred market contract and the individual rights to freedom of action, expression and choice are central to the legal framework and defended by the state’s monopoly on violence (Harvey 2007). Intellectual property rights are protected to encourage technological innovation. International competition is valued, since competition increases efficiency and productivity. Thus, the state must ensure the free mobility of capital between sectors, regions and countries—in effect ceding state sovereignty over the movement of commodities and capital to the global market. Since individual property rights are considered the best way to guard against the tragedy of the commons, sectors that are run or regulated by the state must be turned over to the private sphere and deregulated. According to neoliberal theory, private competition simultaneously improves

efficiency and productivity, increasing quality and reducing costs of goods and services, while eliminating bureaucratic red tape. Efficiency in the private provision of goods and services is also indirectly stimulated by the reduction of the tax-burden, the corollary to the roll-back of the state. Taxes are regarded as serious disincentives to work, muting the rewards for the self-interested economic activity that makes the world go round. Even worse are social assistance programs, which are generally seen as simultaneously subsidizing and encouraging a state of poverty by once again providing a disincentive to work for both the recipients and providers of transfer payments. Conspicuously absent from this framework is an explicit concept of power. Since neoliberalism holds that efficient markets contain and process all relevant information in setting prices for commodities, government regulations in the labor market on behalf of labor—such as minimum wage laws—and wage negotiation on behalf of labor unions are all viewed as market distortions, which stifle the potential of the free flow of capital from lifting all boats (Harvey 2007).

Having sketched a general overview of the state policies that characterize neoliberalism and the values that underpin them, we can now turn to the next logical questions that arise: Where did neoliberalism come from? And how did it arrive in the United States? The period examined here corresponds to neoliberalism's phase as a free-floating idea, unanchored in ideational or formal institutions across the world. More specifically, we will first turn to the deliberate construction of this particular free-floating idea by an international group of liberals known as the Mont Pèlerin Society.

Where did neoliberalism come from?

From April 1 to April 10, 1947, under the leadership of Albert Hunold and Friedrich August von Hayek, an international group of 39 loosely connected intellectuals held a conference in Mt. Pèlerin, a village in Switzerland. Their founding statement declares their view that “Even that most precious possession of Western Man, freedom of thought and expression, is threatened” (Plehwe 2009:25) The threat to individualism came from socialism and state intervention in the economy, and the solution lay in the revalorization of private property and the power of the competitive market, “for without the diffused power and initiative associated with these institutions it is difficult to imagine a society in which freedom may be effectively preserved” (Plehwe 2009:25).

The contributors to the edited volume *The Road from Mont Pèlerin* (2009) identify the Mont Pèlerin Society (MPS) as the central thought collective which, from this moment on, conscientiously developed the neoliberal identity. Prior to the founding of the MPS, there were neoliberal thinkers and neoliberal ideas, but they were geographically dispersed and intellectually isolated. Therefore the aim of the society, which continues to host international conferences to the present day, was to establish a sort of international academy where mostly academics but also politicians, journalists, and prominent business executives with common philosophical ideals could converse in a process of collective learning dedicated to advancing a common neoliberal cause, by rethinking classical liberalism (Plehwe 2009). Members spanned the academic disciplines of philosophy, history, sociology,

in addition to economics, reflecting the long-term objective of establishing a trans-disciplinary individualism. Conscientiously, collectively, the members of the MPS honed their neoliberal ideology and their strategy for the contest over political economic hegemony. Eventually, what emerged from the structure of the MPS was a fine-grained division of intellectual labor, which the strategists of the Institute of Economic Affairs, a neoliberal think-tank in Britain, have sometimes described in military terms: partisan think tanks that organize academic production of publications tailored to specific audiences constitute the long-range artillery; both think tanks and journalists dedicated to marketing neoliberal pamphlets are considered the short-range artillery; and neoliberal politicians and other activist types are engaged in hand-to-hand combat (Plehwe 2009:6).

The stated objective of the MPS points to the organization's awareness of the fact that their own economic vision of the future was incompatible with the contemporary ruling ideational paradigm of political economy among advanced capitalist nations. The trans-disciplinary, cosmopolitan, and intellectually colonizing nature and structure of the organization reflect the objective of engendering a shift in this dominant ideational paradigm. To pursue the military metaphor, if the advancement of the neoliberal cause was an international war, it was one fought in a series of drawn out, geographically dispersed battles upon distinctive social, political and cultural terrains, where it attained victory to varying degrees. In France and the U.S., the first phase of the war was that of intellectual colonization—the arrival of neoliberalism as a free-floating idea. Just as Harvey (2007) stresses the diversity of forms neoliberalism and neoliberal policies take across the globe, so

Plehwe argues “hegemonic neoliberalism needs to be thought of as plural in terms of both political philosophy and political practice” (Plehwe 2009:). Mirowski and Plehwe document how the manner in which these ideas were exported to and received in particular countries varies a great deal. Accordingly, we now turn to a brief account of the arrival of neoliberalism as a free-floating idea in the United States, attending in particular to its reception, propagation, and the transformations it underwent.

Neoliberalism arrives in America

In the United States, neoliberalism was able to establish a coherent and centralized intellectual foothold. The endeavor centered around the establishment of the Chicago School of Economics—referring both to a group of academics and the political economical school of thought which it gave rise. Mirowski and Van Horn (2009) argue that the ascendancy of the Chicago school must be understood as one component of a much larger transnational project of developing neoliberal doctrines for the postwar world, led by the MPS. The project benefited from the direct involvement of Hayek, one of the founders of the MPS, but nevertheless also depended on the powerful efforts on the part of business interests and a select group of likeminded intellectuals. For our purposes, it is worthwhile to examine the establishment of the Chicago School in order to better understand both the form that neoliberal reforms that were to follow took, and the contemporary status of neoliberalism in American formal and ideational institutions.

The financial impetus behind Hayek's American project was the businessman Harold Luhnow. A strident anti-New Deal conservative, Luhnow served as president of the Volker Fund—a philanthropic foundation intended to help citizens of Kansas City. In 1945, however, after meeting with Hayek who was on a book tour promoting *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), Luhnow began to reorient the Volker Fund towards rethinking liberal politics in America (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009:141). Specifically, Luhnow sought to commission Hayek to write *The American Road to Serfdom*, adapting the British best-seller for an American audience. This project would be at the heart of the establishment of the Chicago School of Economics, supported all the way by the Volker Fund.

Incidentally, Hayek had certain close intellectual comrades teaching law at the University of Chicago: Aaron Director, and Henry Simmons, who benefited from a close friendship Robert Hutchins, the president of the university (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009). In 1945, Simmons wrote to Hayek proposing the creation of an institute that would be comprised of various scholars from several disciplines, with the goal of publishing scholarly and semi popular literature to promote neoliberal ideas. Hayek, engaged in the parallel construction of the MPS in Europe, sought the financial support of the Volker Fund. Luhnow refused to fund an “international academy.” He did, however, finance Hayek's 1946 American tour of various universities, and emphasized again his primary goal of finding someone to compose a plan for “a workable society of free enterprise” that a layperson could comprehend (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009:150).

Eventually, all parties seemed to converge contently around the project of establishing the Free Market Study. Hayek wanted the freedom to choose his collaborators and an intellectual scope broader than the publication of a single book. Hutchins and Simmons wanted an institute without total reliance on departmental or university policy, since private funding could offset the perceived looming influence of the federal government on the University—not to mention the fact that the existing faculty was largely unsympathetic to the neoliberal agenda. And Luhnnow wanted his book, tailor-made for an American audience. The Free Market Study would pursue general research and reflection on the free market, while aiming to publish the semi-popular *American Road to Serfdom* within three years, all funded by Luhnnow's Volker Fund (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009).

The proposal for the Free Market Study was eventually accepted in 1946 by the University administration and established under the leadership of Director. Luhnnow quickly wrote to Hayek stipulating that certain individuals be included on the Advisory Committee, and demanded to review the suggested committee members before its official announcement. As Mirowski and Van Horn note, "Luhnnow thus ensured that men conforming to the Volker Fund's political philosophy would oversee the progress of the Free Market Study project, even from its outset. Hayek had no option but to agree" (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009:155).

Ironically, Hayek himself was unable to receive a position at the University of Chicago, which was of course a major component of his international objective of collectively rethinking liberalism. Luhnnow and the Volker Fund would once again

step in, funding a new position for Hayek in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago in 1950, where he remained until 1962.

The Free Market Study failed to fulfill its original contractual obligation to finish *The American Road to Serfdom*, but the Volker fund seems to have taken the long view and continued to support the study in its revision of the classical liberal doctrine and propagation of the results through both technical and popularized outlets (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009:165). Finally, in 1962, the original premise of the project was made good with Milton Friedman's publication of *Capitalism and Freedom*, tailor-made for the American context. The book was very successful, and, Mirowski and Van Horn (2009) remark, much more "simple-minded" than the original *The Road to Serfdom*. It also represented certain intellectual divergences from Hayek and the MPS versions of neoliberalism, which for our present merit some emphasis.

If the Chicago School benefited from the involvement of Hayek and the close ties of its members to the international MPS, the versions of neoliberalism that the two organizations propagated were nevertheless not identical. In particular, "Chicago liberalism transcends the classical liberal tension between the self-interested agent and the patriotic duty of the citizen by reducing both state and market to the identical flat ontology of the neoclassical model of the economy" (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009:161). This is accomplished with the Chicago School's innovation that much of politics could be understood as if it were a market process, and thus amenable to formalization through neoclassical theory. Politicians and voters are conceived of as trying to maximize their own utility—a doctrine that

implied the state was “merely an inferior means of attaining outcomes that the market could provide better and more efficiently; and that in turn led to a rather jaundiced assessment of the virtues and benefits of democracy” (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009:162)².

Once politics and markets are conceptualized in the identical terms of individuals attempting to maximize utility by means of contracts in the marketplace, it becomes difficult to incorporate considerations of power within economic or political theories. Within this framework, there can be no notion of any social or political responsibility of corporations, which inevitably come to be characterized as passive responders to exogenous market forces. Thus, while trade unions are considered illegitimate and harmful sources of market distortion, corporate monopoly is either treated as harmless or attributed to state intervention. This line of argumentation was very well received in America, as evidenced by the fact that *Capitalism and Freedom* has never gone out of print.

The relative success of the neoliberal intellectual colonization of the United States between the 1930s and 1960s can be attributed to the Chicago School’s close relationship with the MPS. Mirowski and Van Horn’s history of the Chicago School reveals that “Hayek provided both the intellectual impetus and the organizational spadework for both the Chicago School and the MPS,” with funding coming from

² Indeed, Harvey also notes the paradoxical relationship between neoliberalism and democratic values: even though “individuals are supposedly free to choose, they are not supposed to choose to construct strong collective institutions” (Harvey 2007:69). Accordingly, neoliberals have tended “to put strong limits on democratic governance, relying instead upon undemocratic and unaccountable institutions (such as the Federal Reserve or the IMF) to make key decision. This creates the paradox of intense state interventions and government by elites and ‘experts’ in a world where the state is supposed not to be interventionist” (Harvey 2007:69).

European and American corporate sources respectively (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009:159). In France, as we will see in the next chapter, there was no lack of corporate funding, which was also forthcoming (if relatively much less so than in the U.S.), but nor was there a centralized and coherently organized reflection upon a new kind of liberalism. As French membership in the MPS dwindled, American numbers rose, pointing to the much tighter organizational ties between the MPS and the Chicago School (Plehwe 2009). The major protagonists of the establishment of the Chicago School were all present at the creation of the MPS as well. For a decade, the Volker fund provided airfare for selected Americans to attend MPS conferences, maintaining strong intellectual links between the two organizations (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009).

The rise in the influence of American neoliberalism reflects the organizational and intellectual coherence behind the free-floating idea, but it also suggests a certain degree of compatibility between neoliberalism and the economic ideational paradigm. In American academia, neoliberalism consistently gained momentum in the following decades. By the 1990s, Harvey (2007) notes, “most economics departments in major research universities as well as business schools were dominated by neoliberal modes of thought” (Harvey 2007:62). The trend points to the successful incorporation of neoliberal ideology within the dominant economic ideational paradigm in the United States. But it would take a period of crisis for neoliberal ideology to rise to the status of the hegemonic paradigm of American economic governance and policy directives. It’s to this crisis and the

opportunity it presented to neoliberal ideas to reshape American society (along with global political economy) that we now turn.

From Fordism to Flexible Accumulation

In order to explain the rise of neoliberal policies in the United States in recent decades, we must first address conditions that enabled such dramatic policy reform. David Harvey (1990) argues that the transition can be described as a change in the capitalist regime of accumulation. The regime of accumulation describes the eventual stabilization of the net product between consumption and accumulation, implying a correspondence between the transformation of the conditions of production and the condition of wage earners. The *mode* of regulation, then, is the body of interiorized rules and social processes—in the form of norms, habits, laws, regulations, etc—that sustain the consistency of individual behaviors with the regime of accumulation (Harvey 1990). As such, the mode of capitalist regulation corresponds closely with the concept of the dominant ideational paradigm from HI. Both are linked to the formal institutions that govern political and economic life, yet both extend to the domain of cognition, governing how social-political problems and solutions are constructed, understood, and justified. The crux of Harvey's argument is that the ensemble of the political, economic, and cultural shifts between the 1970s and 1980s can be explained in terms of a transition from a Fordist-Keynesian mode of accumulation to a flexible mode of accumulation.

Briefly, we must examine the nature of Fordist accumulation, its failure, and the transition away from it in order to contextualize the wave of neoliberal reforms

that followed across the world. Fordism—from Henry Ford—is characterized by mass production, mass consumption, and a particular form of state involvement in the economic sphere. While the Fordist mode of accumulation emerged in the United States, Harvey (1990) notes that it was also exported to Europe, which, for the purposes of reconstruction, had been recently opened up to foreign investment and trade. After World War II, a host of powerful mass manufacturing industries emerged, leading to cheaper products, mass consumption, and economic growth. This growth was backed by a series of compromises and particular arrangements between the powers and interests of corporations, the state, and organized labor. Industrial corporations were committed to steady technological innovation and massive fixed capital investment in manufacturing centers that produced standardized (and therefore cheaper) products, stimulating demand. They accepted union power, negotiating wage gains for organizational changes increasing productivity. The state, for its part, invested massively in public infrastructure—vital to both mass production and consumption—while striving to maintain full employment and provide social security, health care, education and housing for its citizens. The ability of the state to provide those services—and by extension its legitimacy, along with that of the Fordist mode of accumulation as a whole—depended upon the continuous acceleration of the productivity of labor to maintain a high supply and demand for goods and the ability of capital to finance such an acceleration.

Compromises are revealed to be unstable arrangement when viewed in the light of history however. In the early 1970s the Fordist mode of accumulation broke

down. The loose monetary policy that had financed the postwar boom resulted in a crisis of capital accumulation: excess capital could not find sufficient productive outlets of investment, leading to strong inflation (Harvey 2007). The Arab oil embargo in 1973 heightened problems, increasing energy prices and the volume of excess capital. The ensuing recession, and the responses to it on the part of the state and corporations undermined the compromise of Fordist accumulation.

The problems of Fordism, according to Harvey, can be summed up by “rigidity” (Harvey 1990:142). Once stable growth in production and consumption broke down, the assets of the Fordist compromise turned into obstacles. Suddenly, fixed capital investments by the state and corporations, labor markets, labor contracts, union power and state welfare commitment were all perceived as too “rigid” in that they inhibited the “natural” flow of capital. In response, in order to remain productive, corporations were forced into a period of rationalization of production, internal restructuring and intensified labor control:

Technological change, automation, the search for new product lines and market niches, geographical dispersal to zones of easier labour control, mergers, and steps to accelerate the turnover time of their capital surged to the fore of corporate strategies for survival under general conditions of deflation. [Harvey 1990:145]

Harvey goes on to argue that the changes culminated in a new mode of accumulation, termed flexible accumulation. In stark contrast to Fordism, this new mode of capitalist accumulation demands flexibility in the movement of capital, labor processes, labor markets, products, patterns of consumption and is characterized by “the emergence of entirely new sectors of production, new ways of

providing financial services, new markets, and, above all, greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation” (Harvey 1990:147).

The transition to the flexible mode of accumulation is closely related to the more familiar concepts of globalization and neoliberalism. Wilding (1997) documents the implications of globalization—understood as trends in the internationalization of production, capital flows and markets, the emergence of transnational and supranational agencies and the internationalization of culture—for social policy within the nation state. He argues that globalization impinges on social policy in several key ways. As capital becomes more flexible internationally and nationally with the roll-back of regulations, its power vis-à-vis organized labor is drastically increased while nation states become more powerless to regulate the free-flow of capital. Heightened and internationalized competition also forces corporations to pay attention to relative advantages between locations to optimize production. In so doing, the legitimacy and feasibility of corporatist values such as full employment and social entitlements are undermined. The ability of the state to manage the economy at the macro-level, as in the Keynesian system, is compromised by national vulnerability to globalized economic forces—increasingly viewed as exogenous, and by extension relatively uncontrollable (Wilding 1997). As a result, succumbing to the logic of international markets comes to be understood as the only way to achieve growth (Babb and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2002). Instead of micro level policies, states give greater priority to the micro-level of economic policy, striving to create economic environments that are attractive to international capital. Within this framework, governmental social policies become an obstacle to

providing a “good business climate.” All of the repercussions of the heightened flexibility of capital, international markets, and labor markets contribute to a reformulation of the role of the nation state vis-à-vis its citizens.

In HI terms, the transition in the mode of accumulation and the acceleration of globalization can be said to undermine the legitimacy of the formal and ideational institutions—characterized by collectivism, compromise between labor and capital, and an interventionist macroeconomic state policy—that governed the postwar Fordist consensus in advanced capitalist nations. In the context of the flexible mode of accumulation, as Wilding (1997) documents, such strategies are no longer as feasible or effective as they once were. As a result, all over the world nation states have been forced to reform their formal institutions in order to bring them in line with the new paradigm that has governed global political economy. This process is contingent, however, upon the compatibility between reforms of formal institutions and the ideational paradigms that still govern at a national level. In democracies, politicians must be able to convince the general public that institutional reforms are necessary and desirable by referring them to ideational paradigms through political discourse. Ideational paradigms can certainly change, but since they are intangible and diffused across the minds and behaviors of an entire polity, the process of change is much more complex than say, the privatization of national industries.

Neoliberalism provides an ideological mechanism to engender such ideational change, in that it was in fact explicitly constructed for this purpose by the MPS. Its compatibility with the flexible mode of accumulation is no accident. Wilding (1997) touches upon the symbiotic relationship between globalization and

neoliberalism, which, in its demands for the free circulation of capital, requires globalization. Indeed, neoliberalism provides a justifying logic for the transition to the flexible mode of accumulation and the rise of globalization. Politically, the neoliberal turn served just that purpose, ushering in extensive deregulation and cuts in entitlement programs designed to make the economy as a whole more “flexible.” Certainly, the turn to “flexibility” in labor markets, labor contracts, and the flow of capital as a means to achieve economic growth rings true with the neoliberal belief in the inefficiency of government regulation and the power of efficient markets to lift all boats. The need to address the rigidity of entitlement programs is more than compatible with the belief that such programs are inherently useless, and even harmful. Furthermore, a certain hyper-individualism and anti-collectivism underlies the logic of each concept, guided, it seems, by a belief that Adam Smith’s invisible hand does its best work when individuals pursue their self-interests as atomically as possible. After decades of intellectual and organizational efforts by members of the MPS and the Chicago School, the moment had finally come for neoliberal ideology in the U.S in the form of the crisis of capital accumulation.

The critical juncture of crisis and the rise of neoliberalism

The impressive rapidity and decisiveness with which the Fordist model was dismantled in the United States calls for some explanation. As described above, American political economy during the post-war period was dominated by the regime of Fordist accumulation. Characterized by Keynesian macro-economic policies and a compromise between labor, the state, and business all in the service

of steady growth, the model delivered until the early 1970s. This period is also characterized by a progressive taxation policy, an interventionist industrial policy and a redistributive welfare state policy (Prasad 2006). While explaining the transition away from the Fordist paradigm, Prasad (2006) argues against the American exceptionalism thesis, which posits that the America has a qualitatively different role in the world based on its emergence in the context of revolution and ideological commitment to individualism, populism, and laissez-faire trust in capitalism: “*because* of the areas of pro-market dominance in some areas of American policy, there have always been moments of backlash in American policymaking in other domains” (Prasad 2006:31). Rather than pointing to some American ethos, according to Prasad it is the shape of the American state that has restricted its size and driven its reforms during the following decades: “[In the United States] progressive taxes generate resentment from taxpayers, anti-business industrial policy leads business to organize against the state, and targeted welfare measures are subject to the fluctuating goodwill of those who pay them” (Prasad 2006:29). These observations suggest that the post-war regime of Fordist accumulation was much less enmeshed in the American ideational paradigm of political economic governance than the *dirigisme* model in France that we turn to in the next chapter, which was dismantled over the course of decades and continues to present an obstacle to free-market ideals.

It was during the economic troubles of the 1970s that neoliberalism began to move from the fringe of American politics and academia to center stage. Well-financed neoliberal think-tanks, offshoots of the MPS such as the Heritage

Foundation, developed and propagated neoliberal economic solutions to the economic crisis, while in academic economics neoliberal ideology's influence also grew, led by Milton Friedman and the Chicago School (Harvey 2007:22). During this period, business interests rallied and organized behind the neoliberal cause. In 1971, Lewis Powell, a corporate lawyer, wrote an influential memo to the National Chamber of Commerce, an American lobbying group representing the interests of business. The Chamber, he argued, "should lead an assault upon the major institutions—universities, schools, the media, publishing, the courts—in order to change how individual think "about the corporation, the law, culture, and the individual" (Harvey 2007:43). This was nothing more than a call to arms to bring the American ideational paradigm of governance more in line with neoliberalism and the mode of flexible accumulation. Over the next ten years, the National Chamber of Commerce would expand nearly five-fold, and led the way, along with the National Association of Manufacturers, in directing huge financial resources towards lobbying Congress and funding research (Harvey 2007). A slew of think-tanks emerged with corporate backing to advocate and disseminate the neoliberal cause. In 1976, the Supreme Court ruled in *Buckly vs. Valeo* that the right of a corporation to make unlimited financial contributions to political actors and political action committees was protected under the first amendment (Harvey 2007). The ruling that corporations enjoyed the same rights as individuals would pave the way for corporate interests to influence both political parties by lobbying for a neoliberal platform, and by extension the ideational paradigm that dominated political economic governance.

While corporations could now lobby to their hearts' content, they still couldn't vote, and accordingly sought out an electoral base for their platform. In 1978, the alliance between the Republican Party and the Christian right was consolidated with the foundation of Jerry Falwell's "moral majority." As Harvey explains,

This political base could be mobilized through the positives of religion and cultural nationalism and negatively through coded, if not blatant, racism, homophobia, and anti-feminism. The problem was not capitalism and the neoliberalization of culture, but the 'liberals who had used excessive state power to provide for special groups (blacks, women, environmentalists, etc). [...] The effect was to divert attention from capitalism and corporate power as in any way having anything to do with either the economic or the cultural problems that unbridled commercialism and individualism were creating. [Harvey 2007:50]

During the following decades, the alliance between big business and conservative Christians deepened, "turning it into the relatively homogenous right-wing electoral force of present times" (Harvey 2007:50).

The 1970s also saw important changes to the American political structure that would further pave the way for neoliberal policy reforms. In the early 1970s, a wave of congressional budget reforms weakened the power of centralized budget-making committees. The Ways and Means committee in the house, which reviewed all bills involving taxation, was stripped of its power to assign members to other committees, crippling its ability to impose its will on the House (Prasad 2006). The power of the chairman was also reduced while the committee as a whole was enlarged, empowering members to pursue their own goals related to their particular interest-groups and constituencies rather than the original objective of ensuring budgetary responsibility. The reforms had the effect of unlinking tax issues

from spending issues by removing the power of the Ways and Means committee to review either outside of public influence, thus opening the way for individual politicians to seek particular favors for their constituencies (Prasad 2006). The structure of the state had become less technocratic and deliberative in regard to the national budget, and instead more decentralized, more open to populist entrepreneurial politicians and budgetary unsoundness.

The final development in 1979 which paved the way for neoliberal reforms on a grand scale was the dramatic shift in US monetary policy known as the Volcker shock. Paul Volcker, chairman of the US Federal Reserve Bank argued a shift to monetarism was the only way out of the crisis of stagflation. In effect, the transition signaled the defeat of Keynesian macroeconomic policies in the US:

The long-standing commitment in the US liberal democratic state to the principles of the New Deal, which meant broadly Keynesian fiscal and monetary policies with full employment as the key objective, was abandoned in favour of a policy designed to quell inflation no matter what the consequences might be for employment. [Harvey 2007:23]

Harvey considers the turn to monetarism as a necessary but not sufficient condition for neoliberalization, which would be consolidated with the election of Ronald Reagan in 1981. Approving of Volcker's monetarism, the Reagan administration reappointed the chair of the Federal Reserve, proceeding to provide, "the requisite political backing through further deregulation, tax cuts, budget cuts, and attacks on trade union and professional power" (Harvey 2007:25).

The transition within the political discursive justification for industry deregulation from the 1970s to the 1980s is indicative of the sharp rise in neoliberal logic. Already under the Carter administration, deregulation was on the political

agenda as a response to the economic stagflation (Harvey 2007). But this was a populist phenomenon that did not serve the interests of big business (Prasad 2006). The perception was that regulatory agencies had been captured by the industries they were meant to regulate. The move to deregulate the economic regulatory agencies was intended to prevent the government from providing unfair advantage to industry at the expense of consumers, and was thus a populist issue rather than a free-market one. By 1979, however, “the dramatic consolidation of neoliberalism as a new economic orthodoxy regulating public policy at the state level in the advanced capitalist world occurred in the United States” (Harvey 2007:22).

Whereas Carter had experimented with economic deregulation of specific industries, Reagan pursued *social deregulation*, extending to all industries (Prasad 2006). The overall objective was to reduce government presence in the market economy with the intention of unleashing the creative power of industry. Backed by the resources of pro-market think tanks and key journalists in the business press, especially at the *Wall Street Journal*, neoliberal ideas about the inevitably harmful nature of government intervention in the market continued to spread among policy elites and the American populace.

The weakened state of political party structures and the gutting of the Ways and Means committee also paved the way for a new breed of legislators that Prasad (2006) terms “policy entrepreneurs”—legislators who sought to make a name for themselves by seeking out substantive issues. One of these was Jack Kemp, elected to congress in 1974, who made his name championing supply-side economics, which holds that taxes create a disincentive for individuals to work and produce

goods. By lowering taxes, he argued (incorrectly, as history would show) that government revenue could actually be increased because of the economic growth that would be unleashed. In the late 1970s, the Republican Party was still the party that advocated a balanced budget (Prasad 2006). Kemp's ambition and personal commitment to his taxation policy, backed by the Wall Street Journal and neoliberal think-tanks however, pushed his agenda into the national spotlight (Prasad 2006). With the election of Reagan, a conservative president who supported Kemp's vision was in power, and massive reforms were enacted. The role of Jack Kemp illustrates the decentralized, "entrepreneurial" nature of policy innovation in the US. The structure of the political system made it possible for neoliberal policy innovations to quickly arrive upon, and dominate, the political arena.

Inspired by Kemp's advocacy, in 1981 Reagan passed the Economic Recovery Tax Act (ERTA), indicating his subscription to supply-side economics. ERTA cut funding and powers of social regulatory agencies, especially at the Environmental Protection Agency, but also the Food and Drug Administration, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and the National Labor Relations Board (Prasad 2006:64). Reagan also appointed anti-regulatory, industry-oriented personnel, to head regulatory agencies (Harvey 2007). The office of Management and Budget was mandated to oversee cost-benefit analyses of all regulatory proposals—past, present and future—and to scrap them if the benefits of regulation could not be shown to exceed their costs. Another aspect of social deregulation was a dramatic cut—amidst allegations of waste, fraud and abuse—in welfare program spending by over 20

billion dollars a year during his first years in office (Handler 2009). According to neoliberal logic, welfare programs also represented government intervention in the market economy and provided a disincentive to work.

The only domain where government regulation was desirable, for Reagan, was organized labor. If the regime of flexible accumulation was to reign, the union power that had formed one of the pillars of the postwar Fordist compromise had to be toppled. In dramatic fashion, Reagan took on the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization when they declared a strike in 1981. Deeming their activities illegal, Reagan ordered the workers to return to work. Within two days of their strike, he fired 11,345 workers who had ignored the order. The message to organized labor was clear. On a broader scale, Reagan's appointment to the National Labor Relations board took it upon himself to attack and regulate the rights of labor at the same time as industry was being deregulated (Harvey 2007). While the Reagan administration went about crippling labor's organizational power, it also sought to woo individual workers with a vision of a flexible labor force: "Greater freedom and liberty of action in the labour market could be touted as a virtue for capital and labour alike, and here, too, it was not hard to integrate neoliberal values into the 'common sense' of much of the workforce" (Harvey 2007:53).

ERTA represented the largest tax cut in American history (Prasad 2006). The lobbying efforts of business interests were instrumental in bringing about the corporate income tax cuts (Prasad 2006). The ERTA also cut marginal tax rates across the board, however, for individuals by 25%, and reduced the top personal tax rate from 70% to 28%. These tax cuts lay at the heart of Reagan's budgetary

reforms. All of his policy reforms, however, derive from the neoliberal vision that government intervention is inevitably the problem rather than the solution, and that a tax code that incentivizes economic activity was the best path to growth and social welfare. The global transition to a flexible regime of accumulation was accompanied by a neoliberal turn in American politics that justified the social deregulation, tax cuts, and labor control that were necessary to make capital flexible, domestically and internationally. Neoliberalism abruptly emerged as the governing ideational paradigm under Reagan, and justified a slew of reforms of American formal institutions in order to bring them in line with the flexible mode of accumulation.

Using the terminology of HI, the Reagan administration's sharp neoliberal transition and the massive public deficit that ensued consist of a critical juncture that shaped the American political and economic climate for decades to come. As such, neoliberalism, hyper-individualism, and the mode of flexible accumulation continue to dominate the American ideational paradigm of political economic governance. Taxes would be raised under Presidents George H. W. Bush and Clinton to bring the budget back into balance, but low tax rates, especially for corporate taxes and the highest individual income bracket, would be the norm. Under President George W. Bush, tax cuts and sustained deficits were reintroduced. Transformations in the political arena would prove formative for these trends. As discussed above, the Republican Party had settled into a fruitful alliance with the Christian right, which would combine a patriotic nationalism and individualism with the neoliberal crusade against the tyranny of government, to great political effect. Meanwhile, the Democratic Party was constrained by the need to pander to

corporate and financial interests necessary to win elections in their efforts to improve the economic condition of their popular base, as Harvey explains:

The political structure that emerged was quite simple. The Republican Party could mobilize massive financial resources and mobilize its popular base to vote against its material interests on cultural/religious grounds while the Democratic Party could not afford to attend to the material needs [...] of its traditional popular base for fear of offending capitalist class interests. Given the asymmetry, the political hegemony of the Republican Party became more sure. [Harvey 2007:51]

In the sense that the path taken by Ronald Reagan dramatically altered the political landscape for decades to come, the “conservative revolution” was truly transformational in American politics and can be considered a critical juncture in American political economy. There was one domain of the American state, however, where neoliberal reforms lagged behind, namely state welfare provision. Lastly, we must consider the degree to which welfare reforms enacted under President Clinton correspond to the logic of neoliberal ideology.

Welfare reform

Though welfare programs were cut under the Reagan administration, real structural reform to the American welfare state would occur under President Clinton. Under the 60-year old Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, welfare had been a universal right for the poor, albeit one that shrank considerably in size since Reagan’s presidency. The federal government provided resources to states according to how many families were on welfare. In a move purporting to “end welfare as we know it,” Clinton changed the name of the program

to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), which offers assistance to poor, single parents of children under 18 (Handler 2009). Welfare provision was delegated to the states, with basic federal requirements, and introduced labor market activation—policies that emphasized the recipient’s obligation to work. Social assistance under TANF became temporary as well as conditional: a family is limited to two years of continuous welfare, during which adults must engage in work, and is limited to a lifetime cumulative maximum of five years.

The transition from the AFDC to the TANF welfare programs suggests an underlying shift in the logic of welfare provisioning. It corresponds with the shift from a Redistributive Discourse (RED) framework to a Moral Underclass Discourse (MUD). RED holds that social exclusion is an aspect of poverty, whose conditions lead to a reduction in the extent of social participation (Brejning 2012). As such, social exclusion is defined by disparities in income, and redistribution is seen as the best policy to combat poverty and exclusion simultaneously. The universal extension of benefits to the poor under the AFDC program illustrates the underlying RED logic. In contrast, the logic of TANF corresponds most closely to the MUD model of poverty and social exclusion. Growing out of neoconservative concerns over rising social security spending in the 1980s, MUD maintains that a dependency culture has emerged among a moral underclass of individuals dependent on welfare (Brejning 2012). This unfortunate affliction is considered a pathological, moral, and psychological condition in which the individual rejects the values of work and family in favor of antisocial behavior. Since the moral underclass has been created by overly generous benefits, which abolish the incentives to work and save, the policy

solution is to tighten benefit eligibility and generosity in order to incentivize the poor towards their own self-sufficiency (Brejning 2012). As Handler notes, “Despite the long-standing, enduring nature of poverty, the primary concern of welfare policy [under TANF] is not to relieve hardship but to make sure that benefits do not result in disincentives to work” (Handler 2009:73). By now, the neoliberal logic of incentives and atomic individualism undergirding MUD is evident. At a broader level then, the American welfare state apparatus distinguishes between the deserving and the undeserving poor. The deserving poor (the elderly, the disabled) are excused from the labor force, whereas the undeserving are expected to support themselves and their families—being poor is not an excuse in and of itself.

Alongside the public welfare state is the private welfare system, which is “much more extensive than the public system and is uniquely American” (Handler 2009:49). Most higher-income workers receive employer-provided health care, retirement, and life insurance, as well as rights to sick leave, family care leave, and child care services (Handler 2009). While these insurance schemes are considered part of the private welfare system, they are heavily regulated and largely financed by the government through tax exclusions, deductions, and credits. An overall review of the public and (semi-) private welfare systems in the US indicates the governing logic of the work-ethic: wealthier workers enjoy higher benefits provided by the private sector, but subsidized by the government; those unable to work are deemed universally deserving of aid; while those who are poor and able to work are required to do so in order to receive temporary and meager benefits.

In a comparative analysis of different mixed economies of welfare and their cultural and political receptivity to the idea of corporate social responsibility, Jeanette Brejning (2012) offers important contributions to our understanding of the nature of the American welfare state. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) takes the form of businesses or employers providing some form of welfare, whether for employees or social stakeholders outside of the organization. The production of welfare by welfare actors other than the state is central to the ideational and formal paradigm shift in notions of state responsibility—a paradigm shift, we recall, brought on by the transition to a regime of flexible accumulation and the rise of neoliberal ideology and policy directives.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we saw how neoliberalism was deliberately constructed by the members of the MPS as an ideology aspiring to set a new paradigm of political economic governance. It arrived in the U.S. during the 1940s as a free-floating idea, originally supported by a small group of intellectuals. The close ties between the Chicago School and the MPS, in addition to the enthusiastic financial contributions of business interests combined to mold American neoliberalism into a coherent and forceful doctrine, particularly hostile to the state. Backed by the increasingly massive efforts of corporate interests, neoliberalism advanced steadily among academic economics, governing elites and the American populace at large.

Upon the global economic crisis and ensuing transition from the Fordist regime of accumulation, neoliberalism exploded onto the highest levels of

government, ushering in the new regime of flexible accumulation. The decentralized “entrepreneurial” structure of American policy innovation opened the door for business interests to finance the neoliberal think-tanks and politicians that made the “Reagan revolution” possible. Massive social deregulation was pursued, along with tax cuts and the curbing of labor power. Later, the public welfare system was reformed along neoliberal lines under President Clinton. Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has enjoyed a comfortable political abode in the Republican Party, and to a certain extent the Democratic Party as evinced by Clinton’s participation in the process.

Together, these historical processes all point to a critical juncture in the governing formal and ideational paradigms of political economy in the United States along neoliberal lines. The speed and comprehensiveness of the transformations under the Reagan administration suggest Americans weakly subscribed to the ideational logic of the Fordist compromise, an argument Prasad (2006) supports. The force and the drama of the neoliberal transition in the United States make the story appear almost inevitable. However, in the following chapter we consider the French experience with neoliberalism, which could hardly be more different.

Chapter 3

The French Experience of Neoliberalism

If the United States neoliberalism was successfully nurtured and developed as an ideology eventually able to assert itself as the hegemonic ideational paradigm in political economy with violent suddenness, the French experience with neoliberalism was much less coherent, and the policy turn more partial, incremental and cautious. By examining the historical reception of neoliberalism and the process of neoliberalization in France, while keeping in mind the contrasting American case, the influence of cultural and institutional obstacles to neoliberalization becomes apparent. As we will see, French formal and ideational institutions proved to be much more resilient and resistant to change than their American counterparts, where the “Reagan revolution” represented a critical juncture for both. Particularly problematic for neoliberal ideology in France has been the traditional role of the French state, which contradicts the basic premises free-market ideology. As in our historical investigation of neoliberalism in the U.S., however, before turning to the actual policy reforms, we must examine the arrival of neoliberalism as a free-floating idea in France.

The Arrival of Neoliberalism in France

Paris had in fact been the scene of an important but fleeting chapter of neoliberal prehistory. Neoliberalism first appeared in France in the late 1930s, in a context of great political uncertainty. Following the political defeat and economic

failure of the left wing Front Populaire government coalition, many elites held the view that both classical liberalism and socialist planning had failed, making many of them especially receptive to alternatives. The preeminent French neoliberal of the period was the philosopher Louis Rougier, who was quite taken by Walter Lippmann's book, *The Great Society*, a fierce critique of American society that advocated a turn to economic liberalism as the only way to safeguard individual freedoms (Denord 2009). Largely spontaneously in 1938, upon hearing the American journalist was soon arriving in France Rougier organized the Colloque Walter Lippmann, a conference of hand picked intellectuals, French corporate managers and senior civil servants around the French translation of Lippmann's book. In the same year, the participants would also establish a neoliberal journal and nonprofit organization—the Centre international d'études pour la renovation du liberalisme (CIERL), which organized discussions among elites on the crisis of capitalism (Denord 2009).

At the time, the CIERL grouped together previously irreconcilable factions across French society, from classic liberals to disillusioned socialists and labor leaders, further pointing to a general receptivity to potential alternatives. Unsurprisingly, participants disagreed on many points, even the name of their political philosophy, though it was here that eventually the term neoliberalism was first coined. What they were able to agree upon will sound largely familiar. As Denord relates:

For the first time, neoliberalism was defined by a set of postulates that constituted an agenda: the use of the price mechanism as the best way to obtain the maximal satisfaction of human expectations; the responsibility of the state for instituting a juridical framework

adjusted to the order defined by the market; the possibility for the state to follow goals other than short-term expedients and to further them by levying taxes; the acceptance of state intervention if it does not favor any particular group and seeks to act upon the causes of the economic difficulties. [Denord 2009:49]

The CIERL was abruptly dissolved as France entered World War II, but it is commonly regarded as the model for Hayek and Hunold's MPS. Indeed, the two organizations shared many members. However, the ties between French neoliberals and the MPS would not endure in the second half of the twentieth century.

Despite the intellectual receptivity to neoliberal ideas and their early foothold in Paris in the late 30s, neoliberalism seemed to have lost a great deal of ground by the end of the war. The new republican government between 1944 and 1946 introduced nationalizations and social security to widespread public approval. It seems as though the formal institutions put in place by the new republic and the ideational paradigm that justified it—based on collectivism, nationalism, and solidarity—was incompatible with the neoliberal doctrine. The Centre National des Indépendents, a political party advocating neoliberal economic policies, was created in 1948 but failed to gain any ground against the Left and de Gaulle's Rassemblement du Peuple Français. Yet, as Denord notes, “the Liberation had two opposite effects: it marked the institutional defeat of neoliberalism within France, but it also led to a reconfiguration of the political field, which nurtured the rebirth of liberalism” (Denord 2009:51).

During the early 50s, neoliberalism would regain popularity in the context of the Cold War, riding the wave of anticommunism and the political rise of the right in France. The economic policies of the 1944-46 government were increasingly

questioned, and policy debates centered around the search for a balanced budget and the fight against inflation. Once again, there was new receptivity to notions of free competition. The chief supporters of neoliberalism in France were businessmen, united in their opposition to state regulation and planning across all sectors of the economy (Denord 2009). It seems, however, that in the absence of the CIERL, the French neoliberal movement suffered from a lack of coherence. Liberal-minded businessmen took the lead in establishing a number of new organizations, putting forward distinctive versions of neoliberalism, which tended to correspond to their particular interests. The Comité d'action économique et douanière, for instance, grouped businessmen and academic neoliberals who advocated a fairly classic neoliberal view, staunchly opposing government regulation and bureaucracy (Denord 2009). In contrast, the Centre des Jeunes Patrons, inspired by Social Catholicism, also advocated a return to liberalism, while at the same time accepting nationalizations of certain industries. The Association interprofessionnelle de l'entreprise à capital personnel, to name another, was founded upon shared opposition to the intrusion of the state or trade unions into their affairs.

Though neoliberalism enjoyed a newly receptive political climate in France, and it quickly received significant financial support of business people, it proved unable to put forward a unified vision for the future and stake out serious political legitimacy in the 1950s and into the 60s. Denord (2009) notes that neoliberalism's decline in France is paralleled by a steady decrease of French members of the MPS, as French members lost interest or diverged irreconcilably in their views. The situation was compounded in 1958 when Maurice Allais, one of the most prominent

French neoliberals, founded the Mouvement pour une Société Libre, which sought an alliance between socialists and neoliberals against collectivism and laissez-faire policies (Denord 2009). A schism erupted in French neoliberalism, opposing many politicians and academics, siding with Allais, who considered liberalism was impossible without state intervention and a more libertarian-minded group centered around businessmen.

As Denord (2009) points out however, the position of neoliberalism during these two decades is paradoxical. On the one hand, neoliberals themselves were divided, and failed to mount a significant political resistance to Marxism, Social Catholicism and Keynesianism, while on the other, “neoliberal conceptions seeped into consciousness even if the term *neoliberalism* itself remained unpopular and even if the neoliberals themselves had become marginalized” (Denord 2009:55). A few neoliberal professors, such as François Perroux, Maurice Allais, and others, taught law and economics at France’s most prestigious universities that trained future civil servants. By the arrival of the Fifth Republic in 1958, at which point a new generation of civil servants took the helm, neoliberal ideas circulated more than ever, even if neoliberals themselves were hardly visible. The project of European construction in particular offered fertile grounds for neoliberal ideas, in its demand for the expansion and deregulation of the common European market as a means to achieve political unity. While neoliberal ideas continued their slow advance among members of the state and economic administration, the compromises that successive governments had to strike between various political constituencies prevented major reform of state institutions along neoliberal lines.

The early history of neoliberalism in France offers a few key insights into its political status and intellectual organization that are relevant to the present study. First of all, from the Liberation on, as in the United States during the same period, the financial backing and political support of neoliberal policies came consistently from the business sector, whose interests are served most directly by neoliberal programs. Second, relative to the neoliberalism that would develop within the MPS or the Chicago School, French neoliberalism was not able to consolidate itself into a unified vision or set of policies. Specifically, the cleavage among French neoliberals centered on the proper role of the state in ensuring and delineating the boundaries of fair market competition. Already at this early stage, orthodox neoliberal distrust of the state, appears to be a point of friction with the French ideational paradigm that values a strong state. The division of French neoliberals around this issue would foreshadow the difficulty of neoliberal ideology in taking hold and reforming policies to the extent it was able to in the United States.

Neoliberal reforms in France

A number of scholars have characterized the French neoliberal turn as "pragmatic," "technocratic" or "state-led" (Babb and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2002; Meunier 2004; Schmidt 2002a, Prasad 2006). There was no political movement comparable to the "Reagan revolution" in political drama or public popularity in France, yet the French state has nevertheless taken dramatic strides towards neoliberalization. Neoliberal ideas served as the impetus for a number of reforms, primarily in the form of privatization of state-led industries as well as changes in the

structure of welfare and work (Schmidt 2002b). The argument, according to these scholars, is that the changes have been implemented gradually and out of necessity by successive governments, all committed to the project of European construction and the liberalization of European markets (Denord 2009, Babb and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2002). The strongly centralized, bureaucratic and technocratic nature of the French state also contributed to the cautious and incremental form the changes took (Schmidt 2002a).

In general, French politics as a whole are substantially to the left of the American political spectrum. There was no right wing party consistently ideologically motivated by a neoliberal framework. Nor, when reforms were introduced, were the French technocrats ever “appealing to the idea of creating a better society built on the ethics of the market” (Schmidt 2002b:571). The parties that carried out policies of liberalization were the same ones who had earlier advocated state-led expansion. Both left and right wing coalitions seem to have implemented reforms perceived as necessary due to economic factors largely exterior to France, which were not necessarily ideologically desirable—nor in the case of the socialists, compatible. Babb and Fourcade-Gourinchas (2002) also note that the role played by neoliberal think tanks and journals—and financial support for them from the business sector—is comparatively puny next to American politics, recalling the intellectually and organizationally fractured aspect of neoliberalism in France reviewed above. The political climate, it seems, was not very receptive to full-blown versions of neoliberal ideology. This suggests that neoliberalism has been

consistently at odds with the dominant ideational paradigm in France.

Paradoxically, neoliberalization was still achieved to a considerable degree.

A crucial factor in the form policy reform took is the particular deliberative structure of the French state. While in the United States, think tanks and non-governmental organizations play a huge role in policy innovation, in the France the state is the major site of both policy innovation and implementation (Prasad 2006). Technocrats play a much more central role than ideologues in public policy, proposing cautious, incremental reforms which are put the test at the end of the election cycle. Schmidt (2002a), who analyses the discursive construction of policy issues and solutions in France and Italy, also notes that French policy programs are elaborated by a restricted government centered elite. Only once a policy decision is made does the government seek public approval through a legitimating discourse explaining the nature of the problem and proposed solution. Contrasting welfare reforms in Italy and France, she argues that while the French state had a much larger capacity to impose reforms, the Italians were nevertheless quicker because successive French governments were unable to come up with a successful legitimating discourse until the 1990s. Their difficulty points to the popularity of the welfare state in France and their solid foothold in the French ideational paradigm of political economy, as well as the reason French reforms were, for a long time, focused on privatizations rather than unpopular welfare or labor market reforms.

The traditional role of the French state, in its formal and ideational nature, was also a political obstacle to neoliberalization. Emerging from the ravages of World War II, France was a heavily agricultural economy relative to other European

powers. In response to the perceived economic backwardness of the country, the French state adopted a *dirigiste* model: the state took a directive role in economic development, leading the nation in a program of *rattrapage*—meaning “catching up” (to the U.S)—towards the goal of modernization (Meunier 2004). Dirigisme held that the state had an essential role to play in guiding economic developments, because only the state can identify and pursue the common interest of the nation, superior than the sum of its citizens. The market economy is allowed to function, but under the strong supervision of the state. The French state’s position in the economy was especially powerful, centrally administering economic management through the Central Planning Agency, extensive nationalizations of industries and finance, as well as high rates of taxation and spending (Babb and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2002; Meunier 2004).

During the postwar period the French state also put in place a welfare system that would prove very resilient in the decades to come. The aim of the program was not redistribution, but social insurance for the middle classes (Prasad 2006). Programs designed to mitigate poverty benefited everyone, not just the poor, by providing universal services such as healthcare and childcare. Along with the loyalty that it generated among the majority middle class, the fact that the welfare state was implemented by a government of the Right contributed to making it such a difficult area for reform in the following decades.

Similarly, the tax code enjoyed great populist appeal, because income and property are taxed very little, relative to the United States (Prasad 2006). The progressive tax structure in the US allow taxpayers to see exactly how much they

are paying but nothing at all about what their money will go towards. In France, state revenue is heavily dependent on the sales tax, which is collected “invisibly,” and payroll taxes, which are directly and explicitly targeted to spending, especially on welfare programs.

The postwar political economy in France recalls many aspects of Fordism, albeit a particularly centralized Fordism ultimately in the service of nationalism. The state pursued the goals of full employment and social security, invested massively in education and infrastructure, and oversaw the successful industrialization of France. It maintained an important role in the economy, made possible by a strong system of international monetary regulations and capital controls. The restraints on the mobility of capital allowed governments to pursue goals other than currency stability, such as full employment and the welfare state (Babb and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2002). Indeed, France was one of the countries where embedded liberalism was most successful in producing growth, averaging a 5% annual growth in GDP between 1961 and 1974. All too good to be true, as we well know, since the Fordist regime of accumulation would break down in the 1970s. France’s political economic institutions would have to adapt.

By the 1970s, the French political economy was under considerable stress. Internationally, the rapid progress of financial innovation and the rise of multinational firms engendered a movement in favor of the liberalization of capital movements (Babb and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2002). Supported by Britain and the United States, the push culminated in 1971 with the American decision to let the dollar float, ending the Bretton Woods system of fixed currency exchanges that had

empowered the French state. Already suffering from inflation, economic woes were compounded as the French economy was flooded with foreign capital. The state's ability to pursue anti-inflationary measures was compromised, and the Franc became more vulnerable to increased international speculation (Babb and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2002).

The initial response of the French government was unusual in the contemporary global context. The Gaullist government attempted to stimulate the economy with expansionist macroeconomic policies. Babb and Fourcade-Gourinchas (2002) argue that deflation in response to the crisis did not, at first, seem like a viable option to the French because throughout the postwar period social conflict had been mitigated politically by delivering economic growth, to considerable success. This is the first instance in which French formal and ideational institutions demonstrate their resilience in the face of the shift to a regime of flexible accumulation. However, France was quite alone on the world stage in this endeavor, which was doomed to failure within the new international context of flexibility and mobile capital. Unable to control its currency, France found itself in the humiliating position of pulling out of the European Monetary Snake, put in place to manage currency exchange rates so that they would fluctuate only within a fixed range. (Babb and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2002)

The situation was ripe for the neoliberal turn in France, if not demanded by the transition to a global flexible mode of accumulation. As we saw earlier, there were few prominent and respected neoliberals in France at the time. Nevertheless, from a few neoliberal-minded professors at the Ecole Nationale d'Administration

and the Institut d'Etudes Politiques—from which almost the whole of France's political leadership emerges—neoliberal ideas about the efficiency of markets trickled down to circulate at the highest levels of technocratic deliberation (Prasad 2006). The election of President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing in 1974 marked the first time a politician receptive to free market ideals presided over the centralized state apparatus. In 1976, he chose as prime minister Raymond Barre, one such conservative economics professor—an appointment which has been described as the signal of the end of the French model of the state (Prasad 2006:258).

While the reforms Giscard d'Estaing was able to pass represent the first steps of France towards neoliberalization, they did not amount to a major restructuring of the French economy. Furthermore, the policies that were implemented were initiated not by ideological fervor but by a deliberate political commitment to European economic integration. France did not want to repeat the embarrassment of 1975. What this meant was that French economic policy was pinned to the model of Germany—the European country with the most restrictive monetary policy (Babb and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2002). The state's traditional commitment to modernization would from now on consist of the European project, so that policy reforms could be presented by the government as pragmatic steps taken in response to exogenous economic conditions. Even for Giscard d'Estaing, who personally supported free market policies, it wasn't possible to justify neoliberal reforms as neoliberal reforms. Rather, they had to be mediated discursively through commitments to Europe in the continued spirit of state-led modernization associated with *dirigisme*.

The priorities of the Giscard d'Estaing government were intended to “rationalize” industry by driving unprofitable firms out of the market. The president sought to make industry and the economy more competitive by opening them to external competition, reducing government subsidies to nationalized and ailing firms, and beginning to abolish price controls (Prasad 2006). All of these reforms were designed to make the economy as whole more “flexible,” and thereby competitive, while expanding the domain of the economy governed by the market mechanism.

The extent of neoliberalization under Giscard d'Estaing was limited by the cautious technocratic nature of policy innovation, but also the political context in France. Throughout the 1970s, two social alliances dominated the political landscape: on the Left, the majority of public sector workers and blue collar workers were represented by the socialist and other left parties; on the Right, the majority of the managerial class, the self-employed, professionals and most farmers were represented by the Gaullist party and other liberal allies (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). The Left coalition favored greater state intervention in the economy, and the Right opposed further nationalizations, but nevertheless believed in state intervention to provide an industrial strategy in order to protect national interests (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). This explains Giscard d'Estaing's massive investment in high-tech industries such as aerospace and nuclear power, which had the net effect of increasing the size of the state (Prasad 2006). As mentioned above, however, the middle class welfare state and the tax code were very broadly popular among French citizens—thus the president's focus on

industrial policy as the means to make the French economy more flexible and competitive. Giscard d'Estaing had taken important steps, but tensions would continue to arise between the traditional French ideational paradigm of political economy—ruled by corporatism, solidarity, and a strong state in the service of modernization—and the new global capitalist regime of flexible accumulation.

If the lesson that traditional state expansionist economic policy was incompatible with the new economic world order was not learned in the mid 70s, it was driven home to French politicians and the French people in the dramatic confusion of the early 1980s. In 1981, with the victory of the socialist party in the legislative and presidential elections under the banner of President François Mitterand, it seemed as though a reversal from the state's retreat from the economy was possible. The party ran on the platform of a return to state dirigisme in economic growth through neo-Keynesianism, appealing to socialist values of solidarity (Schmidt 2002b). The first socialist-communist government of the Fifth Republic turned once again to economic stimulus to pull the economy out of the crisis that dragged on with the oil crisis of 1979 and saw rising unemployment and inflation. On the macroeconomic level, the government instituted a program of redistributive Keynesianism of increased spending founded on public sector hiring, a reduction of the workweek, extension of paid vacation, and increases in social transfer payments, particularly social security (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012; Babb and Fourcade Gourinchas 2002). They also sought to restore the state's role in microeconomics, reinstating an interventionist industrial policy and

nationalization program. Mitterrand ran on the promise to nationalize 75% of industry and 100% of the financial sector.

The reforms of the Mitterrand government were met with substantial capital flight and a massive trade deficit, leading to international speculation against the Franc (Babb and Fourcade Gourinchas 2002). The French currency had to be devalued three times in the first two years of the socialist government, and was nearly forced out of the European Monetary System once again. Needless to say, the policies failed to curb inflation or significantly reduce unemployment. The French socialists had been disciplined by the international flexibility of capital, and the French people would soon feel the consequences.

Faced with the failure of its policies, the socialist government had two options: to continue the measures they advocated, leaving the European Monetary System and risking high inflation; or, they could adopt a deflationist policy to maintain the international standing of the Franc and accept the resulting unemployment. The second, of course, was the only option compatible with the project of Europeanization; the government chose it, ushering in a period of austerity known as *la rigueur*. The shift to a “moderate neo-liberal policy program” was considered necessary for a successful integration of France into the European and international economies, dominated, of course, by highly mobile capital (Schmidt 2002b). In a total U-turn of economic policy, the government began to dismantle the remaining price controls, deregulate labor and financial markets, eliminate trade barriers through further European integration, privatize public enterprises, and pursue a strong currency. The socialists found themselves in a

curious position, which they would remain tied to according to their commitment to Europe, of implementing policies they ideologically opposed and indeed, that they had just replaced. As Babb and Fourcade Gourinchas put it, “nothing is a better testimony to this abandonment of political vision in the name of economic efficiency than the narrowing of the ideological gap between the Left and the Right, whose economic stance became barely distinguishable during the 1980s” (Babb and Fourcade Gourinchas 2002:566).

Accordingly, the socialist party abandoned their socialist discourse of the 1981 elections, instead attempting to legitimate their policies by emphasizing the *necessity* of the changes due to the exogenous forces of the economic crisis and the pressures of globalization (Schmidt 2002b). They also maintained that the decision to remain in the European Monetary System and the European project in general would act as a shield against globalization (Schmidt 2002a). Shifting away from socialist values in their discourse, they turned to national pride. There was a general failure, however, to address the inherent contradiction between the neoliberal economic policies deemed necessary, and the social policies that, presumably, were still desirable.

The mid 80s was a period of political discursive experimentation on the part of both party coalitions, however. Jacques Chirac was elected prime minister in the legislative elections of 1986. Inspired by the “conservative revolution” in the U.S. and the U.K., he adopted a “somewhat Thatcherite ideological discourse on the reasons for restructuring the economy:” increasing individual responsibility, innovation, and independence while overseeing the retreat of the state from the

market economy (Schmidt 2002b). When discussing socio-politically entrenched social policies, however, his discourse veered more towards the socialist ideal of solidarity.

Upon taking office, Chirac announced his intention to reduce taxes from 45% to 35% of GDP, to reduce spending by 1% per year, and to privatize a total of 61 companies (Prasad 2006). These objectives were not accomplished, but corporate and individual taxes were lowered, and thirteen state-owned companies were privatized. Spending cuts, always unpopular, were quickly taken off the agenda. The Chirac government also took steps to make the labor market more flexible, abolishing the government's prior authorization for corporate lay-offs for economic reasons in order to enable managers to conduct more corporate restructuring (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012).

The move to the *rigueur* also represented a political transition, in which traditional constituencies in both parties felt their party no longer represented their interests. Unsurprisingly, traditional working-class interests were unsatisfied with the neoliberal-austerity turn of the Socialist president and party. The new neoliberal orientation of the Right was also divisive within the party, around the same contradiction between neoliberal economic policies and traditional French welfare state values of social solidarity. The party was dividing between interest groups who desired greater flexibility in the labor market (e.g. the self employed, the managerial class), and those who felt threatened by it (e.g. salaried employees in the private sector) (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). As a consequence, by 1988 the Right dropped its overtly neoliberal discourse. It is worth noting that the purer neoliberal

discourse Chirac briefly espoused was the only one capable of overcoming the ideological contradiction at the heart of both political coalitions. It did so, however, at the expense of social insurance programs and the strong state. Evidently, such a shift was impossible to sustain electorally, pointing once again to the relative resilience of French formal and ideational institutions vis-à-vis the individualist values demanded by neoliberalism. Both parties would struggle into the 1990s to justify reforms, particularly in the welfare state, which only continued to expand as it absorbed the costs of corporate restructuring with generous early retirement benefits and unemployment compensation.

Mitterand's second term, which began in 1988 with the failure of the Right's neoliberal discourse, continued the slow path of partial neoliberalization, though less actively than during the first term. At the same time, the advance towards the monetary unification of Europe and the creation of the single market sharply limited French macroeconomic policy (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). Politically, Mitterand attempted to balance his shift to the right in economic policy with concessions to the socialist base in the form of social assistance reforms. A major innovation was the introduction of the revenue minimum d'insertion, or RMI in 1989. Until this point, the French social assistance system was made up of a host of categorical schemes for specific social groups (Arriba and Aust 2002). The RMI guaranteed a minimum income for all citizens in need of at least 25 years of age, extending social rights to groups that had been excluded under the previous schemes (Arriba and Aust 2002). The reform was justified by the government in terms of fighting poverty and social exclusion—understood as a “deficiency of

solidarity, with society view as a single body within which the constituent parts depend upon each other” (Arriba and Aust 2002:28). The political mobilization of the RMI as a response to social exclusion corresponds to the redistributive discursive framework of poverty reviewed in the previous chapter. The underlying logic of redistribution derives from the French tradition of republicanism, which holds that the state is responsible for ensuring the inclusion of all its citizens (Arriba and Aust 2002). Accordingly, the benefits and duties of the RMI recipient were to be determined in an integration contract, which aimed to integrate recipients into society rather than just the labor market. This final commitment proved to be quite tricky, but nevertheless, the RMI mustered broad political consent across party lines and French society.

Predictably, the introduction of the RMI also had the effect of increasing the stress on the French welfare state. In the early 1990s, the French welfare state’s commitments expanded even more as France was hit with another recession. The social security system was nearly bankrupt (Schmidt 2002a). It was becoming clear that reforms to the welfare state were necessary. Particularly if France was to meet the Maastricht criteria for eventual European monetary unity, it would have to lower budget deficits and public debt significantly (Schmidt 2002a). Even so, opinion polls showed that the French public continued to stand solidly behind the social security system. Regardless, socialists and conservatives alike intensified their talk of the need to conform to the criteria for European integration, which would act as a shield against globalization (Schmidt 2002b). As both parties oversaw cuts in welfare and social security in the mid 1990s, the French public

remained largely unconvinced as to the necessity or desirability of the reforms (Schmidt 2002b).

These difficulties were particularly evident in the government of Mitterrand's last prime minister, the conservative Édouard Balladur, from 1993 to 1995. Following tradition, the prime minister avoided overseeing any changes in labor market regulation, instead redoubling efforts towards privatization of the remaining French national enterprises (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). He did attempt to reduce social protection for pensions in the private sector—a risky move considering the fault line in the conservative base between those who valued labor market flexibility and those who valued social protection. In the presidential election of 1995, Balladur faced fellow conservative Jacques Chirac, who cleverly capitalized on the prime minister's unpopular move by taking a centrist stance and assuring he offered a different path than Balladur's neoliberalism.

Once elected, however, Chirac and his prime minister, Alain Juppé, championed their own neoliberal policies, albeit in this instance directed towards the public sector rather than the private. They reformed pensions for public employees with the aim of aligning their special pensions with the general pension plans of the private sector, by making them smaller (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). The reforms were met with widespread public resistance, which transformed into a movement against neoliberal policies in general, attracting the support of popular classes on the Left but also disgruntled salaried employees from the public sector—those groups that had been left out of the political consensus of

Europeanization as progress and modernization (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012).

The explosion of popular protests was part of a larger pattern since the early 1990s, when an anti-globalization and anti-American sentiment was spreading in French society. According to Meunier, the movement corresponded with the shift in the debate over free trade from the economic to the cultural domains (Meunier 2004). Tensions emerged during the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations in 1993, when the United States and the European Union, led by France, debated the issue of cultural exception—whether liberalization of markets should extend to cultural goods (such as movies, music, and television programs). The endeavor to create a Europe more unified economically and politically has not stemmed the advance of American culture and the English language. At risk, for the French, is the very foundation of French greatness, France's cultural identity (Meunier 2004). For instance, there is a sense that the French film industry, which depended largely on state support, in addition to the French language itself, are undermined as international economic barriers and state-support are scaled back and the tide of Americanization is set loose. These sentiments were compounded by the decline of the traditionally strong and centralized French state's ability to manage the French political economy in the face of international capital flexibility and globalization. In the words of Meunier:

Indeed, globalization consecrates American individualism and the victory of American-style democracy over French-style republicanism and *dirigisme*. In reacting against globalization, the French are reacting to the surrender of their state traditions to a foreign system of political values. [Meunier 2004:110]

The tension between the traditional French ideational paradigm of political economic governance and the ideational paradigm demanded by neoliberalism, globalization, and the flexible mode of accumulation could not be clearer. To this day, the French sentiment against “Anglo-Saxon globalization” has been much more pronounced relative to other industrialized nations (Meunier 2004). As a result, French politicians and foreign policy generally have sought to take the international lead in questioning the nature of neoliberalism, globalization and American hegemony.

Following the unpopular public pension reforms, Juppé was voted out of office and replaced with the socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. Paradoxically, it was Jospin who enacted the most significant neoliberal reforms out of any prime minister. Part of his strategy was to focus reforms on the sectors of the French economy that weren't considered sensitive to the socialist party's base (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). As such, Jospin privatized more state-owned companies than any government on the Right, and adopted laws bringing the French system of financial and corporate governance more in line with Anglo-Saxon standards (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). The Jospin government had to tread a delicate tightrope line, mediating the contradiction between liberalizing policies and left-leaning values of social solidarity. Thus, the profound transformations in financial and corporate governance were traded against an increase in public employment, and the enactment of the 35-hour workweek (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). The 35-hour week law was more ambiguous than it appeared on the surface, however, also pursuing greater labor

market flexibility by giving employers the ability to calculate work hours on an annual basis.

Observing that the Jospin government enjoyed very high popularity during its first three years, Schmidt attributes the government's unusual ability to carry out reforms to the deployment of a more effective communicative discourse.

Specifically, Jospin sought to persuade the public that it was possible to institute reforms making France more economically efficient, while at the same time promoting social equity and combating social exclusion. Jospin promised neither pause nor acceleration in the pace of reform. Rather than blaming Europe for demanding unpopular structural reforms, he cast the French commitment to Europe as a defense of the "European social model" against the excesses of "Anglo-Saxon liberalism" (read neoliberalism), and U.S.-led globalization (Schmidt 2002a). We see how the Jospin government's efficiency in reforming French formal institutions along more neoliberal lines derived paradoxically in part on their ability to capitalize on the anti-Anglo-Saxon-neoliberal-globalization sentiment permeating French society. Substantial reforms of French formal institutions were achieved, but the dominant ideational paradigm was still largely intact.

The Jospin government was also able to enact a host of reforms to the increasingly problematic welfare state. At this point it is worth pausing in our chronology in order to examine the nature of the French welfare state and its transformation, since cultural understandings of work, the individual, and society lie at the heart of welfare state institutions. In general, among western industrialized nations during the postwar period until the mid 1970s, social policy writing

operated under the assumption that the state responsibility for welfare would continue to expand under the banner of social solidarity (Brejning 2012). The “welfare state crisis” of the following decades challenged welfare state expansion and the taken-for-granted value of state responsibility for welfare. As we’ve seen, however, despite the economic problems the French welfare system posed for European integration and general budgetary soundness, it resisted significant reforms until the mid 1990s.

Jeanette Brejning’s (2012) study of different mixed economies of welfare and their receptivity to corporate social responsibility offers important contributions to our understanding of the resilience of the French welfare state. Regarding France in particular, she finds that CSR has been met with considerable resistance relative to most other countries. Research among employers and scholars has found that the prevailing attitude towards CSR has been characterized either by indifference, skepticism, or outright resistance (Brejning 2012). Brejning (2012) points to the historical role of the state in providing social welfare to the exclusion of intermediary organizations, and the strong legitimacy the state enjoys. This attitude derives from the republican idea that the state is trusted as the exclusive domain for overseeing the interests and wellbeing of wider society. In contrast to the state, studies show that the commercial sector in France maintains a relatively low level of legitimacy, reflecting a broader skepticism of the compatibility of individual interests with collective ones (Brejning 2012). Another ideational sticking point for the notion of CSR in France derives from French perceptions of ethics and morality. Whereas morality—which belongs in the public sphere—is understood as relating

to universal principles, ethics are considered to be subject to the individual—and thus relegated to the private sphere. Such a distinction is fundamentally incompatible with the neoliberal notion that the moral realm of social welfare can be maximized by extending the domain of market interactions, which are subject to individual self-interests and ethics.

Furthermore, among business and government, there is a consensus that French businesses already exercise sufficient social responsibility, contributing to the tendency to view CSR as an “Anglo-Saxon invention” (Brejning 2012). This perception—which may seem surprising considering the low legitimacy of the commercial sector in France—emanates from the conviction that a company’s social responsibility first and foremost relates to its role as an employer. Thus, the social element of CSR is understood as relating to an internal rather than external community of stakeholders. In France, as Brejning (2012) points out, employer-employee relations are already extensively safeguarded by legal requirements and societal norms. She suggests that CSR does in fact exist in France, albeit more implicitly than in the US, for instance, expressed through compliance with values, norms, and legal requirements. From this point perspective, CSR is seen as superfluous by many French people in business and government.

The incompatibility between notions of CSR and traditional French ideational paradigms of the state, welfare, and the business sector, explains why the welfare state is the domain that has proven most difficult for successive governments to reform, even as the problems it posed grew. By the end of the 1990s, however, the Jospin government was able to begin significant reforms. Arriba and Aust (2002)

explain the change in terms of a shift in the paradigmatic discourse in which welfare was discussed, from a redistributionist discourse (RED) to a social integrationist discourse (SID). Just as AFDC in the US exhibited a RED logic in extending universal benefits to the poor, so did the RMI in France. During the 1990s, however, the RMI would come to be increasingly blamed for its failures regarding both labor market integration, and the lack of obligation imposed on the recipients (Arriba and Aust 2002). Over the course of the 90s, it was a social integrationist discourse that came to dominate. Sharing certain understandings of the problem of social inclusion with RED, SID diverges in defining social exclusion as exclusion from the labor market (Berjning 2012). The transition to SID in the social construction of policy problems and solutions regarding the welfare system represents a partial compromise between traditional French values of governance and social solidarity, and the neoliberal emphasis on individualism and the value of participation in the labor market. The rise of this new discourse meant that policy discussions on the RMI increasingly proposed “labor market activation”—which was activating in the sense that social assistance claimants had new obligations to work in order to be eligible. The notion of “disincentives”—central to neoliberal understandings of work and welfare—appeared in public discourse in place of “insertion,” which dominated RED. Once the problems posed by the French welfare state were conceptualized in terms of SID, new reforms became possible and desirable. Employers were now exempt from contributions to family benefits and health insurance for the low paid, with the aim of reducing labor costs of the unskilled in order to create jobs

The shift in policy culminated under Prime Minister Raffarin in 2004, however, with the introduction of the Revenu minimum d'activité (RMA), in place of the RMI, whose generosity came by now to be regarded as a disincentive to work. The RMA addresses long-term recipients of the RMI, by enforcing much more strictly the obligation of welfare recipients to find work (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). RMI benefits are redirected to subsidize employers who hire RMI recipients at the minimum wage level (Arriba and Aust 2002). Thus, in accordance with the discursive and ideational transition from RED to SID, efforts to help the poor are redirected from universal aid in the form of transfer payments to efforts to make the labor market more flexible while removing disincentives to work.

In the presidential election of 2007, the Right wing candidate Nicolas Sarkozy continued in the footsteps of Jospin, attempting to reconcile demands for increased flexibility in the labor market and neoliberal reforms with demands for social protection. Running on a platform of tax cuts and softening the regulations on overtime hours—thus emptying the 35-hour work week regulation of its content—Sarkozy argued that the pursuit of flexibility in the labor market was not incompatible with economic security, and would in fact lead to a “flexicurité à la française” work (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). Based on the ideal that periods of unemployment would be short, with generous compensation and an efficient rehabilitation of workers, he assured the electorate that his program was quite distinct from Anglo-Saxon flexibility.

Sarkozy was elected on this platform, but the global economic crisis in 2008 undermined his already uneasy compromise represented by the message of flexicurité. The president managed to reduce taxes and public expenditures, but the public debt continued to grow work (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). At the same time, in the context of the crisis, the rigidity of the French labor market seemed to be an advantage in mitigating long term unemployment, which was in incompatible with the model of flexicurité. While in 2007 and 2008, the Sarkozy had praised the American and British models of capitalism, following the financial crisis he would declare, “self-regulation to solve all problems is over. Laisser-faire is over. The market that is always right is over” (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012:93). His abandonment of “flexicurité” and explicit rejection of Anglo-Saxon neoliberalism points to the continued difficulty faced by politicians and their policies to integrate neoliberal reforms considered necessary within the ideational paradigm of French values that prevail.

The tension is unresolved today. The election of the socialist Francois Hollande in 2012 recalls the uneasy position of Mitterrand following his turn to the rigueur. In the aftermath of the economic crisis, Hollande ran under the banner of the “responsible Left,” which would give oversee necessary austerity in a fair way work (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). His program represented a retreat to the center next to that of the Socialist Party, already made up of a series of compromises between the traditional French mode of governance and values of social solidarity and the heightened international competition which demanded

increased labor market flexibility while limiting the power of the state vis-à-vis its own citizens.

Conclusion

The French path of neoliberalization is characterized by an uneasy reluctance. As a free-floating idea in France, neoliberalism was much more incoherent than its counterpart at the Chicago School, and already exhibited an internal cleavage around disagreements as to the role of the state in the economy. Even so, neoliberal ideas permeated among governing elites who enacted significant reforms over decades. But the form that reforms took in France was quite distinct from the American experience with neoliberalization. Whereas in the U.S., the decentralized nature of policy innovation and the ability of corporate interests to lobby with seemingly limitless resources allowed a neoliberal platform to quickly rise to a dominant position under the presidency of Ronald Reagan, in France the technocratic and deliberative process of policy innovation led to incremental and cautious reforms towards neoliberalization. If the Reagan administration represented a critical ideational juncture in the American case, no such juncture can be found within the French experience—other than formally, with the global transition in modes of capitalist accumulation.

As we have seen French formal institutions proved much more resistant at every step to change than their American counterparts. I would argue this stems in fact from the resilience of traditional French ideational paradigms concerning the state, work, welfare, and the market, legacies of *dirigisme*. The incompatibility

between these native ideational institutions and a neoliberal ideology emerge again and again: Mitterand's turn to Keynesianism in the face of the economic crisis of the 80s; Chirac's brief, fleeting and quickly forgotten flirtation with an overtly neoliberal discourse and platform; the resilience of the French welfare state over time; the unprecedented anti-globalization movement nourished by anti-neoliberalism and anti-Americanism; the discursive struggle on both sides of the political spectrum, to this very day, to justify neoliberal reforms deemed necessary in terms of common ideals and values that are desirable. Some ideational changes do seem to have occurred, particularly in regard to the shift in the logic of the welfare state towards more neoliberal lines, but overall, the resilience of French traditional values has been impressive, especially in light of the American experience.

Chapter 4

American Cultural Models of Work: Work as a Commodity

Having reviewed neoliberal ideology, the particular forms it took in France and the U.S., and the historical processes neoliberalization in both contexts, we can now turn to the substantive analysis of the interviews I conducted. I spoke to fifteen young French and American business students and professionals, all under the age of thirty-five, about work. The justification for the focus on that particular sector of French and American society is precisely that they are the most likely to be influenced by neoliberal ideas: in both France and the U.S., the business class played the crucial role of organizing institutions and resources to propagate neoliberal discourse and ideology in society at large and among state policy makers. The age restriction means that all of the participants were born after the transition to the flexible mode of capitalist accumulation, further implying their exposure to neoliberal ideas.

By analyzing both groups' talk about work, the next three chapters endeavor to focus in on the cultural elements—in HI terminology, the ideational paradigms—at play in the two national historical experiences with neoliberalism. The first task is to determine for each national sample what the cultural models of work and related concepts are. From this basis, we can then consider how these conceptualizations translate into beliefs about the just organization of society; how these more overarching views and more basic understandings of work are compatible or incompatible with neoliberal ideas; and ultimately, how these patterns of

acceptance or rejection of neoliberal ideology compare to the historical experiences of each country reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3.

This chapter represents the first step in attempting to answer these questions by presenting the analysis of the American interviews in order to identify cultural models of work and beliefs about how work relates to the life of an individual. In the following chapter the French interviews will receive the same treatment. In Chapter 6, we will then be able to consider and compare how each national group's understandings of work generically and as it relates to individuals translate into distinct beliefs and conceptualizations about the relation of work to society. Ultimately, these points of view entail ideas about the proper role of the state relative to the proper role of the market economy—an area where the preceding reviews of the French and American national experiences of neoliberalism suggest that there lie dramatically contrasting cultural values and beliefs.

However, before beginning the analysis it must be emphasized again that the views and beliefs espoused by my interviewees do not necessarily reflect those of all French or American people, in the world of business or otherwise. Due to my small sample size, it's not possible to make any precise claims about the extent of the distribution of particular cultural models identified here. That being so, one advantage of the approach I take is that once a cultural model is identified, it is implied that it is shared to *some* extent by other members of the same social and cultural group (this is what the "cultural" in cultural model means), even if that extent cannot be specified. Keeping this caveat in mind, we now turn to the analysis

itself, which is organized around the findings as revealed by two analytical procedures I utilized: analysis of speakers' metaphors, and analysis of their reasoning.

American metaphors of work

I began the analysis of both the French and American interviews by looking at the metaphors speakers used to talk about work. The advantages of metaphors as a starting point in discourse analysis are three-fold (Quinn 2005). First, metaphors are used frequently and convey implicit assumptions about what they describe. Second, as Quinn explains, in mapping a source domain onto the target domain of what is being talked about (here, work), metaphors “are particularly salient intersubjectively shared examples of what they stand for; it is for this reason that I call them *culture-laden*” (Quinn 2005:49). Indeed, while it is tempting to believe that individuals construct metaphorical meanings freely and spontaneously to suit their communicative purposes, thereby making all of us poets, this does not seem to be the case. Instead, the vast majority of the time it's the underlying cultural model that formulaically selects the appropriate metaphors, rendering them both communicatively effective and analytically useful (D'Andrade 2005). Finally, once metaphors are classified according to what they express, the comprehensiveness of the classes that emerge suggests the analysis is in fact, at this level, comprehensive. Thus, by beginning with metaphors—that is, broadly and largely unconsciously shared, meaningful associations that structure our very thought and

communication—my goal was to identify the most basic and shared meanings at the foundation of distinct cultural models of work.

After sieving all the metaphors about work from the American interviews I conducted, I sorted them into groups according to what they described. I only considered a group of metaphors to be significant if the majority of interviewees contributed at least one metaphor to that category, which strongly suggests we're not dealing with poetic idiosyncrasies. The American metaphors of work I identified fell into just four categories: subsistence, vertical occupational hierarchy and individual trajectory, individual drive, and work-life balance. By examining each category of metaphors in turn, we can begin, as I began my analysis, to piece together the foundation of a French cultural model of work. For the discussion of each category, I quote illustrative passages from the interviews, indicating the metaphors in bold.

The most basic metaphor of work was that of subsistence:

Got to **keep the roof over my head**, I mean that's a big part of it. My wife came on back in September so our business is our main, pretty much only source of income. We do have a couple of people who rent a couple of rooms in our house but that's not nearly enough money to keep us going so **putting food on the table** is important.

But also [work] **puts a roof over your head**.

Every metaphor for subsistence had to do with providing either food or shelter for oneself or one's family. In this way, modern work is naturalized as an essentially human obligation upon which our very survival is contingent. In contrast to the French usage of subsistence metaphors (see Chapter 5), American metaphors of subsistence were never leveled as critiques of the modern institution of work, but

instead pointed unanimously to the natural necessity and benefits of working to survive. The indispensability of working to survival as encoded in this group of metaphors means that for people *not* to work is unnatural, almost unimaginable if they are to survive independently.

The second, and largest category of metaphors I identified among my American participants represented the labor structure as comprised of vertical levels and the individual's working life as (ideally) a vertical trajectory through those levels. By far the most common verticality metaphors invoked a "ladder," or "moving up the ranks." Consider these four examples, chosen instead for their diversity:

And I'm proud of the fact that you know **my ladder has continued to move upward**, as far as a total direction, you know it might not always be going 90 degrees straight up but, at least the progression is there you know

Well professional success is like, well getting to **the top of your industry**.

you know having an accounting related job or some other job is secure and it's great and all but I don't like having like **an upper limit**. I just love to **see the sky and kind of cheat that**.³

Yeah. So I really, at first wanted to go through a track of **building my way up** either through like corporate finance or banking, um and kind of **work your way up to the corner office** kind of scenario.

Different jobs are organized in a vertical hierarchy, with the most prestigious and desirable generally at the top. The fourth example is particularly illustrative: the source domain to describe Ethan's ideal vertical occupational trajectory is the very hierarchy of occupations as vertically reified in the building in which he works.

³ In this context, "cheating" the sky does not seem to mean unethical behavior, but rather surpassing even the most objective obstacles to upward mobility, as reflected in the preceding affirmation, "I don't like having upper limits."

Upward mobility is invariably a desirable end, and closely associated with success, effort and work (e.g. work your way up, work up the ranks, climb the ladder).

Within this vertical hierarchical structure of occupations, individuals may take different paths with different characteristics:

[...] a lot of people, they know what they want to succeed in and they're just literally too lazy and I think a lot of people work where they don't want to work, do something they don't want to do and that could be their own fault. They could be too lazy to **pursue another career angle to take that risk**.

If I'm thinking like any job, ever I would love to be a stadium announcer or a voice over actor. I just think those would be cool things to do but I don't know how the heck you break into that stuff so I went for the **safer route** and just hit business schools.

[...] advancement is really difficult because our system does hold again that, a lot of value on education so because of that you're going to hit **some sort of ceiling**, in a lot of businesses that where you're going to need education

Career decisions and specific opportunities are most frequently described as "angles" or "routes," each one associated with different combinations of risks, responsibilities, and opportunities for upward advancement. Along these ideally vertical paths there can be obstacles to advancement (e.g. a ceiling) if someone does not have the education, skills, or whatever qualities necessary to move up a rank. Responsible individuals pursue paths that correspond to their abilities and offer real prospects of upward mobility.

A small cluster of metaphors that were not widely invoked and therefore did not receive their own group describe work in terms of becoming fixed on a certain course. In so doing, they point to the tension between the ideal of upward advancement and the (at least temporary) stasis associated with accepting a certain position:

Like I think that work kind of is a **point where you almost have to you know stop dreaming of things to do**, like **you're kind of like fixed** in a certain way.

[...] you don't need to like **settle down in a job**—a career, right out of college. Um. So you know, find your niche and then get into your career five or ten years out.

While the ideal is upward mobility, these metaphors describe the reality that people's decisions of where to work are major life decisions, which are to a certain extent path dependent junctures (“fixed in a certain way,” “you don't need to like settle down in a job—a career”). For both of the speakers above, however, having to “stop dreaming” and “settle down” are viewed as potentially undesirable effects associated with work. In the first case, the problem appears inevitable, while the second emphasizes the need to make a well-informed career choice before settling down. In either case, the path dependency encoded in these metaphors further raises the stakes for the individual to make responsible decisions in choosing where to work.

Once a decision has been made, the occupational location the individual finds him or herself in within the vertical hierarchy is often metaphorically represented as a physical space for self-development and advancement:

Um, [the positive effects of work are that] it gets them in **the area to achieve success** [...]

Ernst [and Young, a global accounting firm] is, like it's sort of a **general building ground** because they work you so hard and you learn about all different things related to business.

These metaphors stress that particular job locations along a trajectory can be defined in terms of the opportunities they provide for growth and advancement. By working, it is implied that people can develop skills, competences, and knowledge,

which are crucial for upward mobility. Related is the close conceptual link between vertical trajectory and success, further illustrated by metaphors of immobility.

If upward mobility is desirable, it follows that immobility in an individual's working life trajectory is undesirable:

[...] especially with automation coming in, um, that those people [who are unintelligent and unskilled] **get stuck** either getting minimum wage jobs or either hard time farming work

Just because I know in my head the potential that I have and that what I want to accomplish in life and I could just—in my head I couldn't picture **just stopping after high school**, working at minimum wage for the rest of my life, and it kind of makes me think, like, 'Really? Are you really aren't motivated at all?'

Across the board and regardless of causal association, metaphors of immobility are negative, pointing once again to the paramount objective of climbing and achieving success. A similar metaphor evokes not immobility but difficulty getting traction, and is particularly evocative:

So at that point [getting out of college during the 2008 recession] I was kinda **scrambling** like alright, I need a job you know.

The use of the word "scrambling" suggests the need to find traction—by getting a job—in order to move forward (or upward). Though it draws on a different source domain than immobility, "scrambling" certainly signals reduced mobility and reflects the same importance behind having an upward trajectory, the absence of which is undesirable. In line with the ceiling metaphor cited above, the first and third examples here demonstrate that individual immobility can be due to the individual's lack of the skills or other necessary qualities for advancement (e.g. education, intelligence) along with structural obstacles (e.g. lack of vertical opportunities, an unfavorable labor structure, a national recession). But the last

example suggests another possible cause of immobility: the lack of personal drive to be upwardly mobile.

Indeed, the category of metaphors of individual drive is the missing element that enables an individual to climb the ranks and achieve success:

[I'm proud of my success in high school and college which is] a testament to me that if I **put my mind to it** and work hard I can definitely get it done and stepping back and looking at that right now I have a lot of confidence in myself.

[Responding to 'What motivates people to work'] The want to feel accomplished. No, it doesn't matter what makes you feel accomplished as long as there's something in you. You know, like **a fire in you**.

Um, I don't know, I have I guess **an internal a pretty big motor to succeed, to win**, and even though I was pretty happy and was already planning on leaving Y, my previous company, the fact that they decided to let me go, there is definitely some internal like competition now where I want to beat them. So that's definitely a piece.

Metaphors of individual drive connote mental focus, internal energy, effort, persistence, and are always associated with the pursuit of success or accomplishment. If workers must climb the ladder to achieve success, their individual drive is the energy source that propels them upward. In the absence of such energy, an individual may be described as "burnt-out," and will be unproductive and immobile. Significantly, the source of energy is invariably internal, recalling the responsibility of individuals to make intelligent decisions in choosing a career path. Since it's difficult to imagine putting a fire or engine inside of someone else or bending their mental will towards success from outside their head, it follows that individuals are directly responsible for their internal drive and by extension their own success and upward mobility. Furthermore, if an upward trajectory is desirable and individual drive is necessary to be mobile, it also follows that internal drive is desirable as well.

The final group of metaphors I identified within the American interviews expressed the work-life balance:

[...] but of course there is **that healthy balance** of work and still having, you know, free time to go and watch movies, go to the gym, you know, walk the dog...those types of activities are important [...]

Like there's definitely times when you have to choose **work over family** or family over work, and that's normal, and that's just human but I think if you get to doing it [work] too much it's **just out of control**.

[...] but yeah I mean [the place of work in life] does come, it's a **tradeoff** with like your personal life, your family life, things like that, so it's really up to the individual to kind of regulate that.

And she [a friend of mine] travels pretty much every other week to her client base and you can definitely tell it **dragged her down on her social life** and everything like that. So if you're motivated by money that would definitely be a good job to take but if you have other **balances** it's definitely a pretty lopsided job.

Balancing work and the rest of one's life entails prioritizing one over the other in different situations such that the individual can be effective and satisfied in both.

Too much emphasis on work can impinge on someone's family life, social life, and other interests, which is psychologically unhealthy. However, as the third and fourth examples especially express, since different individuals have different circumstances and priorities in life it's difficult to arrive at an objective standard of what constitutes a healthy balance. Rather, achieving a healthy balance is an individual matter, and a circumstantial one.

At this point, it's worthwhile to take a step back and summarize the representation of work as described by the groups of metaphors that were widely evoked among my American interviewees: work is an essential human obligation upon which the individual's very survival and independence is contingent. Ideally, individuals should work their way up a vertical structure of occupations, propelled

by their internal drive to succeed. Success means being upwardly mobile and is desirable, along with the internal drive and work ethic it takes to succeed. In contrast, occupational immobility is undesirable, understood as the absence of success and sometimes of drive. Individuals are responsible to rationally select a job or a path by doing a cost-benefit analysis of responsibilities, risks, and opportunities for advancement. A specific job—a location on a structural ladder of occupations *and* a location within the individual occupational trajectory—is a space in which people can develop their skills and abilities through experience in order to move up the ladder. Finally, work needs to be healthily balanced with the rest of one's life so as not to totally take over everything, but ultimately what constitutes a healthy balance is up to each person to determine according to their personal priorities and the circumstances of their life.

The central values of the vision of work encoded by these metaphors are success, closely entwined with upward mobility, work ethic and individual responsibility. The imperative behind climbing the ranks implies that being successful in a job is more important for personal fulfillment than doing an intrinsically fulfilling job. Interestingly, the dominant concern evoked by French metaphors of work (see Chapter 5)—the psychological wellbeing of workers—is almost entirely absent, except within the need to balance work and personal life. Among those metaphors directly relating to the nature of work, human psychological considerations are totally nonexistent. Related is the absence of non-market humane ethical standards for the production and distribution of wealth, which were also prominent in French interviews. All in all, at the metaphorical level

the absence of psychological and non-market ethical concerns combined with the imperative behind individual drive and upward mobility implies a certain faith in a moral economy where the market mechanism of supply and demand is trusted to fairly and effectively maximize social welfare. The degree to which the American interviewees do exhibit such faith will be further explored below and in Chapter 6, when we examine their reasoning about work.

Together, the representational categories reviewed above amount to a metaphorical sketch of the American dream: upward social mobility is desirable and attainable within a free market where the invisible hand of supply and demand is trusted to reward hard work; freedom and fulfillment are maximized by the pursuit of property, coded by success. And this despite the fact several of my interviewees said the American dream was no longer a reality! Regardless, it seems as though the conceptual framework at the foundation of the American dream lives on in their hearts and minds as the dominant shared metaphorical mode of conceptualizing and talking about work.

Work as a commodity

The vision of work encoded by the metaphors analyzed above corresponds closely to a logically coherent conceptualization of work identified by Budd (2011): work as a commodity. Of course, the correspondence is partial in practice. The American interviews as a whole cannot be fairly characterized simply by a single model, nor can any individual's understanding of work. This would be a superhuman feat of logical consistency. Nevertheless, Budd's (2011)

conceptualization of work as a commodity has many elements that recur consistently and saliently across the American metaphors and interviews, suggesting that it can inform our analysis of an American cultural model of work.

The conceptualization of work as a commodity is associated with the discipline of economics going back to Adam Smith, though it remains the mainstream model in economics today (Budd 2011). By considering work as a generic source of economic value traded in the marketplace, it becomes possible to model it as an abstract economic good independent of extra-economic considerations. In short, the human, psychological, social, cultural, and political aspects of work are conveniently ignored so that work can be analyzed as a generic commodity subject to the laws of supply and demand. Workers, for their part, are considered to engage in work as a disutility to support consumption. Budd (2011) points out that the enduring nature of this conceptualization is understandable: in addition to its privileged status within the discipline of economics, the fact is most individuals working in capitalist economies such as the United States or France *do* sell their labor power as a commodity to earn a living, and work is legally regulated as a contractual relationship in which work is sold as a commodity.

The conceptualization of work as a commodity is rooted in the ethical theories of utilitarianism and libertarianism, together coalescing in a certain hyper-individualism (Budd 2011). Accordingly, the invisible hand of supply and demand in perfectly competitive markets is considered the fairest and most effective mechanism to create and distribute economic rewards, such that market inequalities reflect non-market inequalities. From this perspective, labor unions and

state regulations inevitably distort the optimal allocation of labor as a commodity in the free market. The state has little role in society beyond providing justice and protecting sacred property rights. People are understood to be utility motivated, rational optimizers that consider work as a disutility to support consumption, giving rise to concerns of social welfare policies representing disincentives to work. From this perspective, people are consumers more than they are workers, as reflected in economic arguments that value low prices over better working conditions. Similarly, the value of work does not come from the labor exerted, but is determined by the mechanism of supply and demand and therefore subject to the willingness of other market actors to buy the product or service created by working. Individuals are formally equal, responsible for themselves, and should strive to maximize their freedom and independence by the pursuit of property. Contract law provides the framework for this endeavor, as individuals are free to buy and sell their labor for whatever terms they can find someone to agree to in the market (Budd 2011). In this conceptualization, employment is always voluntary and exploitation becomes quite unfathomable.

The model of work as a commodity should be quite familiar from our investigation of neoliberalism, which indeed depends upon conceptualizing work as a commodity in emphasizing economic outcomes and the ultimate effectiveness of laissez-faire economic policies. However, I by no means mean to suggest here that the entirety of my American participants are constrained in their thought and speech by essentially neoliberal metaphorical associations. Rather, the model of work as a commodity informs *both* a broader neoliberal ideology *and* certain

American metaphorical representations of work in distinctive ways. Moreover, it's well worth emphasizing again that just because these American metaphors correspond to certain aspects of the conceptualization of work as a commodity, this does not imply that this logic governs the totality of their thought about work. Indeed, the American metaphors have nothing to say about the desirability of non-market institutions such as labor unions, welfare or labor regulations—for American views on these we will have to look at their reasoning. But they do have a great deal to say about individual responsibility, success, and the market.

The theme of individual responsibility, essential to libertarianism, is indeed quite salient in the model of work evoked by the shared American metaphors. Work is represented as essential for survival so that not working is the ultimate irresponsibility, resulting in dependence at best and death at worst. As utilitarianism grafts on to libertarianism, individuals are considered responsible to rationally undertake a cost-benefit analysis in selecting a job and career path that is suited to them, balancing risks with opportunities for advancement. Similarly, finding the healthy balance of work within life is ultimately the individual's responsibility, again a matter of cost-benefit analysis, contingent upon the individual's particular situation and preferences. Furthermore, the imperative behind personal drive and upward social mobility as success, the undesirability of immobility and the conceptualization of a job as a space for individual advancement, *combined* with the absence of psychological considerations of work, notions of personal fulfillment beyond success, and non-market ethical standards for work and the distribution of economic rewards reflect an underlying belief in the efficiency

and ethical adequacy of the market mechanism in distributing economic rewards. The inherent value of upward mobility is only vaguely evinced by these metaphors, but it fits nicely with the notion from the model of work as a commodity that freedom and independence are maximized by the pursuit of property. To fairly and fully assess these conjectures, again we will have to examine the Americans' reasoning about the market and success below and in Chapter 6.

The categories of metaphors identified and analyzed above do not constitute a shared cultural model of work. What they do accomplish for analytical purposes is to highlight the basic and shared ways of symbolically representing work. While it seems logical that these agreed-upon patterns influence the way people subjectively conceptualize and experience work, it also seems naïve to assume people are completely cognitively bounded by cultural representational prescriptions. To demonstrate that, and to what extent, these metaphorical groups are in fact related to the way people conceptualize work, we have to look at how specific people actually think and talk about work. Since one cognitive function of cultural models is to interpret and process information, reasoning is inevitably structured by underlying cultural models. In the second phase of my analysis, I looked closely at my participants reasoning about work, paying attention to the implicit assumptions and patterns that structured their speech.

The imperative of success, upward mobility, the pursuit of property and their relations to personal fulfillment

American metaphors for work largely revolved around the notion of success, suggesting success as a reasonable starting point to look at American participants'

reasoning. By paying close attention to the assumptions that are shared as well as the diversity of views, we can better understand what success means to these Americans, and how it relates to the idea of personal fulfillment. When I asked my interviewees “What does professional success mean to you?” all of their responses fell into two basic categories: climbing the occupational ladder and accomplishing personal goals. Arthur, a senior majoring in accounting and French at a university in southern California, exemplifies the first category in his response:

Well professional success is like, well getting to the top of your industry. Like if you're a writer it would be being an award-winning writer. If you're a doctor it would be being a doctor who like saves lots of lives, or like discovers things or publishes things, you know. If you're working at a business it would be reaching upper level management, like executive type position. So it's just like getting to the top of the ladder I guess in whatever profession it is.

Prompted by the same question, half of the young American business enthusiasts I spoke to evinced the same generic understanding of success as upward occupational mobility regardless of the sector of employment, invoking metaphors of climbing the ladder or ranks. Their responses suggest some acceptance of the same imperative behind upward mobility reflected in the metaphorical language of work.

Indeed, the American participants consistently spoke of success, understood as upward mobility, as a valuable end in itself. For instance, when I asked them about their personal motivation to work the three most common motivating elements that were touched on by a majority of participants were the drive to climb the occupational ladder, the need to acquire skills and experience to differentiate oneself in the labor market, and the desire to impress one's superiors and prove oneself at work. All of these are at least implicitly tied to the ideal of upward

occupational mobility. Samuel, for example, is motivated to work by the quest to determine what degree of success he is capable of achieving, and how:

I think it's a lot of fun to like, you have an idea of what's like coming up next if you have an idea and you achieve it or you fail at it. There's always this great uncertainty what could actually happen if you did this or what could actually happen if you didn't do this. Just to keep pushing along and pushing along, and like what's going to be on the other end of this turn [...]

This description corresponds almost exactly to the metaphorical description of the individual work trajectory described above: forward motion (success) is desirable, and there are different paths (choices) to success, each characterized by different risks and possible outcomes. For Samuel, the pursuit of success is inherently enjoyable and entwined with a sense of personal fulfillment, though this perspective was not shared by many other Americans I spoke to. In response to the same question, Ethan, who has worked at IBM for a year and a half as a worldwide consolidator for their integrated supply chains, similarly describes his motivation in terms of a desire to move up the ladder:

[...] when I first started at IBM doing my co op thing, I would definitely say [I was motivated by] recognition, financial incentives, um, and just kind of an overall being a person that other people come to—that really, I really like explaining things and kind of teaching the newer people coming in. Um, and I would definitely say the trajectory that I was shooting for was going up getting into management and then like I said before having that corner office.

When the Americans discussed their motivation to take particular internships or jobs, success as climbing the ladder also appears inherently desirable. George, a senior at the Wharton School studying finance, provides a case in point as he walked me through his motivation looking for and working internships while at school, a process that is inextricable from concerns for future upward mobility:

I think from the freshman year...so to get them, there's definitely like an environment here that stresses like oh you need to have an internship or your going to like never ever going to be employable ever. So that definitely added to it. A lot of the reason for me wanting to get those specific internships has to do with the fact that I was just interested in that stuff and was proactive about trying to get and in to those kind of industries. Um and also I just like to network and like meet people so it's a good excuse to get in touch with people in different industries and learn about different jobs and different experiences and things like that. Um so that kind of was the impetus for my searching for them and then, for the junior year one, there was the added issue of wanting to find a job, an internship that would be a good full time job opportunity. Um and then once I was there freshman and sophomore year I wasn't really concerned with getting return offers I was more concerned with just learning a lot, being a good employee, getting a good review and contributing and creating the best experience I could and then junior year it was always in the back of your mind that you wanted to do well enough to get a job offer so I think I probably worked a little bit harder my junior year than my freshman and sophomore year just because I knew that the reward for doing so would be greater.

Initially, George was focused on learning about different potential jobs—assessing the risks and rewards of different possible paths—and developing his own skills and experience. The desire to get a job offer at the end of his internship senior year was a source of further motivation. For George as for most Americans interviewed, the objective of achieving success, of reaching a certain level in the occupational hierarchy, provided the motivation for years of work to amass skills and experience necessary to be successful later on.

Similarly, when asked what the positive effects of work might be for an individual, American responses emphasized achieving success and improving oneself so as to be more upwardly mobile. Kevin, an articulate and opinionated junior studying business at Chapman University, offers an explanation that is indicative of both:

It can make your life better in terms of salary and quality of life, that kind of thing. Um it can make you diligent, organized, um it's like a self-improvement thing. Kaizen is the Japanese term for continuous improvement which is what you always want to be doing, it's like a philosophy of operations management. Yeah so there's

regularity, you learn to like interact with people professionally, meeting more people.

Work is a means to achieve success by accumulating property, being upwardly mobile, and it also has the capacity to improve people so that they might be more successful in the future. Specific jobs were metaphorically described as a space for personal development and advancement, an image that is confirmed in the speech of the American interviewees. The scope of the notion of self-improvement from work among the American interviewees was quite narrow, however, nearly exclusively referring to skills and experience relevant to being more productive, efficient, and successful at work. Samuel explains what people can learn from working:

Interaction styles of co-workers; how to bounce back from failures um—how to manage your time. That's a big one and opportunity cost. You're constantly making decisions to do one thing or another. So I think like all those things can be perfected over time and can be really managed well so I think those are the things you can learn. That's more like the macro level, each individual thing can get broken down.

Some people may consider social competency, persistence, time management and effective opportunity cost analysis as inherently virtuous attributes, but they evidently become most virtuous in the context of work and beneath the imperative to succeed and move up.

On the whole, the reasoning of the Americans I talked to confirms the model of success suggested by the metaphors analyzed above: success means moving up the occupational ladder, upward socioeconomic mobility, and constitutes a generally desirable objective. In his own analysis of American interviews, D'Andrade (1984) identifies a similar cultural model of success: "it seems to be the case that Americans think that if one has ability, and if, because of competition or one's own strong drive [a link further explored below], one works hard at achieving high goals,

one will reach an outstanding level of accomplishment [...and] one will be recognized as a success” (D’Andrade 1994:95). The parallels suggest this particular American model of success has been enduring and dominant over time.

While D’Andrade (1984) goes on to suggest that the cognitive incorporation of such a cultural model of success is powerfully determinant of individual motivation and desires, Strauss (1992) responds, based on her own interviews with working class Americans, that while this may be the case for white-collar workers, the motivational force of the success model varies according to class differences. Even though her interviewees invoked and shared the dominant success model, they did not necessarily subscribe to it in their actual behavior. The insight that people can recognize values as values without accepting them as their own values helps to clarify certain contradictions in the reasoning of the people I interviewed. We saw, for instance, that Arthur was aware of and utilized the typical model of success among the Americans, defining professional success as “getting to the top of the ladder I guess in whatever profession it is.” Even so, later on Arthur established himself as the only American who was critical of this model of success as upward mobility. His skepticism is clear as he explains why he wants to start a non-profit:

In an ideal world yeah [I would like to be self-employed at a non-profit that tries to solve a social issues with technology]. I mean I just don’t think that—like part of being raised in that business environment like I kind of know—and I guess like the general environment I was raised in—I kind of know what sort of life I would lead if I were, you know, super successful in the business world. And you’d have a lot of money but it’s not really the best of lives, like they don’t really have any time, they don’t really have any other interests cause that pretty much occupies their thought and like thinking. So I think if I were able to do something that is, you know, on the periphery of the business world, where I’m doing my own company and I can feel good about what I’m doing, like I’m helping people in some way, then I think I would be happier with my life. I think I would be pretty unhappy pretty quickly in the business world, cause I’m going to miss out on those ten years of, kind of the illusion

of things will be way cooler in just a couple more years. Cause I've already seen that. It's like, that wasn't really that cool to be perfectly honest, so, so yeah.

Arthur signals awareness of the American success model described above as culturally dominant, contrasting the accepted value of being "super successful in the business world" with his own desire to be "on the periphery of the business world." For him, however, the price of achieving success in the business world outweighs the actual benefits because the time and energy necessary to be successful leaves no room to find fulfillment in the rest of his life. He sees the American model of success, shared to some degree by the rest of the Americans I spoke to, as an illusion, and a dangerous one at that. The case of Arthur demonstrates that the particular American model of success identified here is not universally shared nor accepted, and that individuals are capable of reflecting on and critiquing the cultural values that permeate their social lives. In addition, Arthur raises two important and related questions, suggesting the course of the analysis: what is the relationship between success and personal fulfillment?

It seems logical that success, upward mobility, and personal fulfillment should be related concepts, but how? Curiously, the notions of personal fulfillment or happiness were only rarely explicitly associated with success by the American participants, and mostly by Arthur for the purposes of critiquing the standard model of success. Equally surprising were the responses I received when I asked what constituted a good life; here, it was success that was conspicuously absent from the American responses. Instead, they revolved around finding fulfillment, as David, the CEO of his own online marketing firm, illustrates:

I guess a good life is a happy life, you have joy in your life day in and day out. Um and that can come from a variety of different places whether it's friends, you having good friends and good friendships. I think strong, you know, for me at least strong family connection with both with my wife's family and my family or I guess our family; having time to like spend on your own; activities outside of work as well. I know my balance of that has not been fantastic but the way I look at it this is my hobby of sorts. You know my business is that right now. So it's not, for me personally, it's not about like having enough money or any of that, it's really just...am I happy? I get that through my personal like spiritual practices in large part. It doesn't matter what's going on outside in the world because like internally I'm at peace and I guess that's what comes down to a happy life for me. Am I doing the things that keep me at peace? Because you know some weeks I don't some weeks I do.

Though David is atypical among Americans in downplaying the importance of money, his explanation of how people find fulfillment is emblematic. The central shared assertion is that, in George's words this time, what makes a good life "depends on who you are and what you value." Americans expressed broad tolerance of people's preferences for different sources of fulfillment, be it friends, family, hobbies, books, watching sports or work itself (though rarely). On the surface, deemphasizing the importance of success for having a fulfilling life seems to imply that success is not all that important after all. But is this the case? How can this be squared with the imperative to succeed and climb the ladder?

The answer is that it cannot, as revealed by a closer reading of American interpretations of professional success. Many American interviewees generically defined the concept as climbing the occupational ranks without explaining why a vertical trajectory is desirable. Fortunately, other interviewees invoked the same model of success and elaborated on it, offering clues to its precise significance and purpose. Kevin, an articulate and opinionated junior studying business at Chapman

University, associates climbing the occupational ladder with increasing access to material goods:

Yeah professional success I think that, yeah climbing the ladder, climbing the ranks. Um, I don't know having like a wife, kids, house with a white picket fence, it's like 'alright we're doing better than last year, honey, here's like a BMW with like a red bow on it, you know for Christmas. (haha) woo!' Yeah.

To Kevin, success insures stability and prosperity, necessary to have what for him is a fulfilling family life. The key to that ideal is access to socially and individually desirable material goods, which success enables one to provide in greater and greater capacities. In contrast, consider the definition put forward by Ethan:

Professional success would probably be, reaching the point where people look up to you and you become kind of a trusted—at least in finance—become a trusted business advisor where you don't necessarily have influence over a certain event or anything, but the person who does comes to you and asks your counsel on it. Plus having subordinates would be great (haha).

Here, tied up in the notion of success are the esteem of others, influence and power, all of which are desirable for Ethan. Reflecting the tolerance of diverse individual sources of fulfillment evinced in American descriptions of the good life, it seems that exactly how someone derives fulfillment from success is variable: for Arthur, by virtue of greater access to valued commodities and influence to protect the environment; for Ethan, from influence over events and power over others; and for other Americans who share their model of success, fulfillment could conceivably come from a host of other criteria. Indeed, Samuel, a junior studying business with a minor in leadership and our third student at Chapman, explains that success is different for everyone because people find fulfillment in different areas:

Um, [professional success means] accomplishing whatever you think is important in life, I think it doesn't have to be with just work. I mean, I guess the word professional means like that, but I think if you're an accountant and you want to get

to partner, I think it's all about to you, what your goals are. I don't think there's no money value, no job goal value, it's different, what anyone looks at and sets out to be.

People have distinctive personal measurements of success in terms of what occupational level they want to reach, and in terms of where they find fulfillment in their lives. Moreover, the two are closely intertwined: being successful (in an overall, rather than occupational sense) in one's own terms entails balancing individual priorities for each domain in order to maximize overall fulfillment.

Returning to Kevin and Ethan's explanations of professional success, while they have different personal interpretations of the concrete benefits of vertically mobile success, they share the general premise—familiar from the model of work as a commodity—that freedom and independence are maximized by upward mobility and the pursuit of profit. Kevin more than anyone else I spoke to epitomizes this view, linking the pursuit of profit to the freedom to pursue his own goals in the world, which fortunately for the rest of the world happen to be environmental:

[...] once I'm actually working—first of all, I would, I can't wait to make money. Like making money is going to be sick. And then power is also a really sick thing. I can probably be more articulate than that, but like my main goal is like, where I want to be is like controlling a huge company or just some huge firm, having a lot of influence, so I can like, be an environmental fascist kind of. Um, I don't know just so I can. Yeah you get your, your, just make things better for everything.

As mentioned at the beginning of the present discussion of American views of professional success, a second group did not explicitly equate success with climbing the ladder, instead framing it as accomplishing personal goals. I argue that this is not necessarily because they hold a different model of success, but that the relationship between success and vertical mobility is implicit. Take Christina, an

ambitious sophomore studying business and political science at Chapman

University, for whom success means achieving her own personal objectives:

Professional success means – honestly it means being happy with my job and hopefully that will come with finding the right company or running for office, you know. If I can do what's best for the company or the country I guess, hopefully that'll make me feel accomplished and happy.

Christina has her own personal understanding of what success means, based on the goals she sets for herself. When we spoke, these were serving in public office or reaching a comfortable position in a marketing department. Meeting these goals would make her feel 'accomplished' and is fulfilling. However, as the nature of her personal goals hints at, Christina still values upward mobility as she demonstrates while reflecting on what constitutes a good life:

A good life. Job out of college, that can pay for rent and food and gas. Um, working my way up and then having a happy career, not just an intense career but a happy career, probably 5 years out, hopefully, family, home, stay in southern California, fun co-workers, and just feeling accomplished.

Interestingly, even though to Christina *success* means accomplishing personal goals rather than being upwardly mobile, she reveals that accomplishing those goals and in general living the life she finds fulfilling is contingent upon working her way up. Upon closer investigation then, Christina's model of success is not that different from Arthur or Ethan's: success means working your way up so that you have more freedom to accomplish your personal goals and find fulfillment.

The causal link from success to freedom to fulfillment is confirmed by looking more closely at American descriptions of a good life. Even more common than articulations of individualist particularism in finding fulfillment was the notion

of being free to do what you want. Typically, freedom in this sense is understood to depend upon having money, as Arthur's reasoning demonstrates:

Uh, man, that's pretty tough. I mean, well I guess going off the work thing and what work is ultimately providing is like, I don't really need to be super filthy rich or anything, but I would like to not have to worry about money. I would like to be able to go out with friends, or go on a trip, or do things without money being the focus. But ultimately money you need to buy most things and go most places. So I think I'd like it to be where I don't have to think about the money.

For the majority of my informants that hold this view, money then is the missing link between success and fulfillment. Just as Lamont finds in her own interviews, "Americans see [money] as an essential means to control and freedom" (Lamont 1992:66). In other words, success and upward mobility—via the pursuit and accumulation of property—maximizes individual independence and freedom *to pursue* fulfillment wherever it might be found.

Overwork and work-life balance

When I asked about the negative effects that working could have on an individual, the overwhelming theme was that of overwork. As Duncan, a recent MIT graduate working at a start up in San Francisco puts it:

[...] if like, even if someone really likes their job maybe it takes over all aspects of their life, right? If they—the investment banker who doesn't sleep and doesn't have a family and is sort of just like, you know like a person who are hyper optimized on their career path but just kinda lets everything else fall away.

As suggested by the shared metaphors of work-life balance, Americans overall recognized the risk of working too much and the threat it posed to an individual's personal and family life. What is the point of being successful if there's no free time left to capitalize on that success and find fulfillment in life? In contrast to the thesis

of the Protestant work ethic that holds that work is a moral duty in itself, there is no point, according to all of the Americans I talked to, further evidence that the ultimate purpose of success is to maximize freedom to find happiness in life. Indeed, a number of interviewees framed the problem of overwork precisely in terms of limiting freedom to find fulfillment in the rest of life, as David does here:

Um, you know it can, having to work can interfere with what you feel you were divinely inspired to go do. Again, it's one of those you got to pay the bills and thereby work and sometimes to do so can really, it does get in the way of what maybe you feel you were on this Earth to do. My wife is a good example of that. She feels probably right now that she really just wants to paint. That's something she is so passionate about, she loves and yet because we're kind of still in a spot where we have to pay the bills, um and she's not in a place with her career as an artist that she could just do that full time um work kind of gets in the way of that, so that's definitely can be a negative impact I guess of just society and needing to keep up the, keep up the mortgage payment.

The obligation to work limits a person's freedom to spend time doing other activities that make them happy—"work kind of gets in the way of that." Moreover, David's wife's ability to pursue her passion of painting is limited by how much money they make. In other words, the pursuit and accumulation of private property maximizes individual freedom to pursue fulfillment in life.

However, as David also suggests above, the obligation to work in order to accumulate private property itself represents a certain loss of freedom and potential for fulfillment. I argue that the metaphors of balance so prominent in the speech of the American informants serve to mediate the complexly symbiotic yet oppositional relation between fulfillment and success. Duncan evokes the concept of balance when asked about the good life:

A good life. I guess you know it's probably when you have, you know when you feel like you're happy in sort of all the different facets of your life, right. It's one thing to say oh I really like my job, but if you know if you didn't have a family or struggle in

your relationships with others and were very unhealthy, that wouldn't be a good life. But I think that when you find, not just like that you're content but like that you're legitimately satisfied and you feel good about all these different areas. So you feel good about your social life, you feel about your work, you feel good about relationships with your family, you feel like you're taking care of your body and your mind.

He evinces the reasonable and widely shared position that the ultimate purpose of life is to be happy. We've seen that work is generally conceptualized as an important means to greater freedom to find happiness and fulfillment via the accumulation of wealth. However, since different people have different jobs that bring different degrees of material rewards and freedom, and since different people have different interests and find happiness in different areas, finding the right balance is ultimately a subjective matter of cost benefit analysis. Success, as upward occupational trajectory, is generally valued as representing greater freedom, but that freedom becomes essentially useless if someone has to sacrifice the rest of his or her life to achieve it. Balance between work and life, then, emerges as the key to optimizing for *overall* fulfillment in life by reconciling the pursuit of success, wealth and freedom on the one hand and opportunities to find happiness on the other.

American exceptions

Before moving on from the problems of balance and overwork, an exceptional case among the Americans I spoke to deserves some attention. As we will see in the following chapter, French interviewees conceptualized the problems of work and overwork very differently, emphasizing the risks of psychological harm and alienation. Without going in to further detail here, it's worth noting the contrast with the Americans, who rarely discussed these potential threats explicitly. Instead,

we saw their anxieties over the proper place of work revolve around the potential threat to individual freedom to find happiness. Yet again, one notable exception to the pattern is Arthur, the only American to express concern over the potential danger of alienation. The first half of Arthur's reasoning on the negative aspects of work is typical among the Americans I spoke to:

Um but yeah it [work] can like, deprive you of—like it can break relationships. Like if I were to stay at this accounting job for instance at that company, apparently the average number of marriages for a partner is three. And I don't know if that's an exaggeration or not but I can tell you a lot of them are single, a lot of them never been married, a lot of them don't have kids or if they have kids they don't really have a good relationship with them, or like.

Just as we've seen above, work can pose a threat to one's free time and personal life.

However, Arthur continued to describe the nature of that threat in a distinctive manner:

So I think all of that it can deprive you of like, your humanity, you know. It can make you do the same thing over and over again. It can make you feel like kind of a robot, which is how I felt some days during my summer internship. Yeah it can just make you feel like you're not really worthwhile as a person for like, your individuality, like you're just sort of another useful, you're just kind of like another little cog in the wheel or in the machine.

In elaborating on the risk of alienation—losing some part of one's humanity, becoming a mechanical means to capitalist production rather than a human end in oneself—Arthur was quite alone. Along with David, Arthur stood considerably to the left politically of the rest of the Americans I spoke to.

While on the topic of exceptions, Arthur and David deserve additional attention in regard to their conception of personal fulfilment and its relation to work. As described above, the general pattern among the Americans who I interviewed was to consider success and general fulfilment as separate—or more

precisely, the former is seen as a means to the latter (even if success and the derivative sense of accomplishment can be fulfilling in themselves to an extent).

Arthur and David broke from the pattern emphatically asserting that work itself should be *inherently* fulfilling. When asked about the positive effects of work, Arthur said nothing of success, getting ahead, or developing work experience and skills:

Ok I think it should make them feel—it should use their humanity, I guess. Like I'm not sure if that's really the right word but it should use, they should be engaged in all of the ways that make them a person, you know. Like they should feel creative, they should engage with people, they should work with people, they should meet new people. They should, be able to think, have a diversity of tasks, you know, like not just doing the same thing over and over again. Um I think it should make you feel good about, like not just what you're doing as your small piece disconnected from everything, but like I think it should also make you feel good about like what the big piece is doing. Like what your company is doing, or your organization is doing or whatever. So I think those are all positive—and I think your, your work should blend nicely with your life. Like, you know I think that you should enjoy the people that you're working with and be able to hang out with them outside of work. And maybe even your families go out and like do stuff together. Like people that you're not just like, shit glad I'm leaving them at, you know, whatever time I'm leaving today.

“It should use their humanity:” Arthur's ideal of work is, in short, that it not be alienating but personally fulfilling. The activities undertaken at work should be inherently enjoyable, engaging, dynamic and bring emotional satisfaction by virtue of contributing to something morally good. The social environment of work should also be a source of happiness in itself—a theme picked up by David, overflowing with enthusiasm about the company he's trying to build:

Professional success being that I own this business and have been kind of crafting its culture and vision, it's not about money and again I know for a lot of people it's about money, but for me it's going to be about building, like building people, or helping people to grow, you know, in business, in their careers, and creating a place in that large part they want to come to work. Like I was talking about in my previous history, like I want, I hope to try to build a company that just like I wake up and am excited to come to work, that that's their experience too. And so that means that I going to have to learn how to and help put them in the position they want to

be in and then help them grow in that position and learn and... So to me it's not about a financial, it's not about a number, it's not about a number of employees. It just really about building a culture where people are happy and come to work and they love what they do. And if they don't like I want to help them, and this is the thing, I want to help them find out what they do want to do and give them the resources necessary to go do that. So whether that's helping them get back into school or helping them find a different job or finding a different job in my company. I never want to be a business where people don't want to come to work and if that what it's ever turned into I feel like I would have failed. It doesn't matter how much money we're making.

By beginning (and ending) with "it's not about money and again I know for a lot of people it's about money," David explicitly acknowledges the primacy of the model of success described at length above, and rejects it in order to position his own model in opposition. It's imperative not only that people *enjoy* coming to work, but also that they "grow," an objective that outweighs the bottom line for his company. What is unique about Arthur and David within this sample of Americans is the primacy they give to fulfillment over success as the most important positive aspect of work. This is not to say the rest of the Americans don't value fulfillment, as we saw they do, but that they primarily place fulfillment outside the context of work, in which the primary goal is achieving success.

Internal drive, personal responsibility and independence

Having reviewed the American notions of success and the complex interrelationships with personal fulfillment and work-life balance, we now turn to reasoning about other important mechanism highlighted by the American metaphors, internal personal drive, in order to examine in particular its relationship with personal responsibility. When asked if people can work too little, American

interviewees most often pointed to laziness, or the lack of work ethic. Kevin calls out the hippies and George laments the lazy:

Yeah dude you can be a lazy bum. Ayn Rand says that, what did she say, I can't remember if this is from a satire I read of Ayn Rand or the real thing, but calling people lazy bones. Ayn Rand definitely called out hippies dude. You have to be a productive member of society, productive member of the community, you can't just sit there and be a drain on resources. And the free market won't allow you to.

Well it's not people you want to work with or hire. They just don't understand that ...I think like I've seen often like there's kids that don't even meet the bare minimum, their quality be it studying or like putting in enough effort into some kind of presentation you're making for one of the higher ups at a company, you can definitely, you can easily not do enough work. For some people... like that would bother me if I felt like I wasn't prepared but for other people, they're just so apathetic they really couldn't give a shit.

For both, working too little immediately evoked laziness, and the absence of an internal work ethic. Lazy people are fundamentally lazy. What's more, their laziness is a sign of personal irresponsibility (by being "a drain on resources" or "so apathetic they really couldn't give a shit"). Thankfully, for Kevin, the free market disincentivizes laziness with poverty, though for George the problem remains unresolved. Similarly, Lamont (1992) found among upper-middle class American men that work ethic was a signal of moral character, implying the converse that its absence signals low morality. As revealed in the metaphor analysis, there is a strong imperative behind the individual internal drive to work and thereby achieve success—a link that Ethan makes explicit in very practical terms:

But, you can definitely do that, and working too little just even in a college setting you can see people's grades suffering, or the view of their colleagues, the people like looking down on them, and then if that happens people run the risk of their colleagues talking to somebody else who talks to somebody else and then eventually, either their manager hears about it or a future opportunity for them is kind of stomped out because of one review that someone else interpreted on them. So kind of managing your, ah I got off topic, but kind of managing the perception

that other people have of you is kind of critical on that, working too much or too little.

According to Ethan, working too little, the absence of work ethic, is bad precisely because it limits future opportunities for success. The imperative applies to both work ethic and success, which are intimately interlaced.

Americans provided another window into the imperative undergirding the work ethic when asked to consider whether everyone should have to work.

Christina, as most other Americans I spoke to, was willing to make an exception for those deemed incapable of being self-reliant, but she emphasizes that a work ethic is still desirable:

No. But I think that everybody should want to work. I don't think—I don't think that, you know, there are a ton of people with disabilities who really really can't afford an education and you know maybe like—maybe they like barely just got through high school and they have no money and their parents—like nothing. What are they supposed to do? Right? In an ideal world, yes, everyone should work, but this isn't an ideal world, there's people with disabilities, there's people who literally cannot work but everyone should want to do some sort of work. Like, you can still volunteer, go do something for a couple hours a week. I don't know like—but if you have the ability I think that people should push themselves to their limits, like really try as hard as you can. But obviously, probably never going to happen with basic sociology but.

Working, and especially the drive to work, are desirable because they signal personal responsibility. Since independence and freedom are sought by the pursuit of private property, it is logical that the drive to accumulate property is taken as a sign of responsibility in that it demonstrates at least the aspiration to independence. However, as within the diatribes against laziness cited above, the absence of the want to work is considered inherent to the individual, according to what must truly be a very “basic sociology.” In response to the same question, Ethan and George further elucidate the link between work ethic and personal responsibility:

Um. That is a good question... I'm going to say [everyone should have to work], yes, to a certain extent. I actually have a cousin who, she's a quadriplegic who does web design with a tool that she uses in her mouth, like on a track pad and stuff, so I mean if someone like that can make a living, and she makes pretty good money doing it, if someone like that can make a living I think that, there's a lot of people, I think Americans really have a problem with settling for jobs. There's an article that I read before that had, I can't remember how many billions of dollars in tomatoes died on the vine in like Alabama or somewhere like that, because they banned bringing in temporary labor from like Mexico or where they hire these people, and they just could not, they just could not profitably pick said tomatoes would do it for, well no one would do that back breaking labor for like 10 dollars, no one. So I think we're kind of, spoiled in our, in our ability to do that. Maybe it's because my grandpa had a farm and I was forced to do that kind of stuff that I have that view but (haha) um, I didn't even get paid at that time I think he gave me like a quarter a day or some obscenely low wage (haha). So I would say yes.

I think [everyone should have to work] if you're able to some degree, yeah. I hate the free rider problem that exists in a lot of different tax organizations and systems. Like I've just been someone who has earned, who feels like he has earned what he has worked for and I don't like the idea of people being able to latch onto that success without putting in the effort themselves. Um, so I think to some degree work is important, that is something that everyone should do but I think in our society we definitely require a lot of people to be working but I don't think that, like physically unable people or those who have put in their time per se are the ones who need to be working so...I think there's some latitude there.

For Ethan, everyone should work to make a living while for George everyone should work so as not to be a free rider. Evidently, these are two sides of the same coin that attaches important value to personal independence. Accordingly, both consider that people who don't strive for independence (those who are "spoiled" or "free riders") are irresponsible (for poor cost benefit analysis in deciding not to work or for unfairly benefiting from the success of someone else).

While the majority of Americans I spoke to shared the understanding of work ethic as an inherently internal and desirable signal of ambition to achieve the equally admirable status of independence, David and Arthur do not totally subscribe

to this perspective. David is a firm believer in the existence of an American work ethic, but its value is ambiguous:

I think internally Americans do have that internal drive, that drive to succeed and to win which I think is a valuable commodity so long as it's used in the right way.

Picking up the theme later,

I can't say wealth is determined by how hard you work because I know some God damned hard working people that you know do manual labor that don't get paid a ton but are extremely hard workers ...um and that it doesn't necessarily turn into additional dollars into their pocket. So to me again it's really 'what is your situation?' you know, as you grow up and where are you. Don't get me wrong there are people that... and what I see and what I read a lot is people who kind of come from one side or the other or come from down to up, they attribute a lot of their success to being lucky. And actually what to me what that means is that they actually attribute...they're very humble people. So even though they're normally extremely hard workers maybe they got a little bit lucky but they're also humble and they're willing to like, it seems like they're always willing to provide that "no this wasn't me. It was my great employees, it was my great..." It's never them which is an interesting, again, just an occurrence that I've kind of noticed that a lot of the people who seem to do very well in life are very humble people. Now of course you get, there are also outliers on the other side that are very, you know... who am I thinking like? Donald Trump who is not very humble. So you get those as well but you know. He's had a lot of success and a lot of failures so...

According to David, a work ethic can be valuable, but is not inherently so because it depends to what ends it is mobilized. He is also reluctant to associate work ethic with success based on his relationships with manual laborers. Next, he goes on to suggest that instead, environmental factors play an important role in determining how successful an individual will be, though in this regard David's view is not exceptional among the Americans. Where he does break from the pattern, however, is in explicitly downplaying the importance of the work ethic of people who are the most successful in terms of vertical trajectory. In addition to being "hard working," David (and they, allegedly) point to luck and external assistance as factors that enabled their success, suggesting humility as a tempering virtue in parallel with

work ethic. When David had trouble thinking of something that he was proud of in life, he explained that one aspect of his regular spiritual practice is “the deflation of ego.” It seems as though attributing individual success purely to internal drive and work ethic flies in the face of his personal moral principles. In this way, David provides an elegant example of how an individual subjectivity can reflexively rework cultural values as they are internalized.

Arthur provides an even starker contrast to the dominant American understanding of the work ethic. Just as he was critical of the model of success shared by most of the Americans I interviewed, he perceived the American obsession with work as potentially dangerous:

[I am not proud] That [in America] people are so obsessed with work that it consumes their lives, that people don't have a lot of outside interests outside of their work, people don't do a lot of things outside of their work. Uh, people aren't really thinking a lot, I think (haha) I think. Yeah, so people just kind of go with the flow a lot.

[I think our society is pretty fucked up because] I just think people aren't very educated, people work too much to self-educate. Or they just, basically most people just turn into kind of, blobs, you know. Like they work, they work in a pretty menial—like you call a menial job you think of that as like seven eleven, but really like my step dad is a commercial banker and deals with giving people huge loans to companies. But that even becomes, cause there are certain processes involved, you do those processes and then you come home and, you just, you know you blip out you watch TV you go to bed and you wake up and do it all over again. And maybe you sit on the couch all day on the weekend. And like that seems pretty messed up to me, to just spend your whole life working and watching TV and eating and sleeping and going to retirement and probably doing the same thing because it's probably too late to pick up a really cool hobby or something. So I think that's pretty, not super awesome.

Arthur evidently does not perceive the American work ethic as inherently good, though he too is a believer in it. In his view, people are excessively devoted to working, leaving no time for them to learn, think, and pursue other fulfilling

interests. Thoughtless commitment to repetitive jobs makes for repetitive people, and repetitive people are dull and sad. The celebrated American work ethic is not associated with unrivaled individual responsibility and capacity for success, but a disheartening and quite frankly stupid serial monotony, reproduced across our lives and our land. Recalling Arthur's prior concern over the risk of alienation posed by work and the primacy he attached to fulfillment over success, it makes sense that he does not attach the same significance to the work ethic as the rest of the Americans, instead considering it a sadly misguided priority.

Conclusion

The Americans I spoke to exhibited one dominant cultural model of work, which corresponds closely to Budd's model of work as a commodity. Two exceptions, Arthur and David, stand out in assigning particular significance to personal fulfillment derived from work, leading them to be more critical of the ideas of success and drive that they frequently perceived as dominant in their own culture. But the majority of Americans, in their metaphors and reasoning, indicated the paramount importance of success, understood as upward socioeconomic and occupational mobility. Being successful can be rewarding in itself, but ultimately success and the financial resources it entails represent greater freedom and independence to pursue fulfillment wherever the individual may seek it. In other words, working is essentially a disutility in service of consumption and the overarching ambition to pursue and accumulate property. The individual's regulation of work in the context of the totality of life boils down to an individual

cost benefit analysis. In order to be successful, people need to have an internal drive to succeed. By extension, this drive—an inherently individual characteristic that can't be learned—signals personal responsibility and the aspiration to independence, while its absence indicates irresponsibility and dependence.

On the surface, this dominant model of work seems quite compatible with neoliberal ideology: individualistic and atomic individuals motivated by material rewards rationally optimize work and other activities to maximize overall utility. But neoliberalism is more than a set of assumptions about human nature, behavior, and motivation; it pertains ultimately to a mode of political economic governance and policy directives. It is true that both neoliberal ideology and the model of work shared by the majority of the American interviewees are based in the same fundamental understandings of work and human nature as conceptualized according to the model of work as a commodity. However, it does not necessarily follow that these Americans embrace the policy directives that neoliberalism advocates on the basis of a conceptualization of work that is nevertheless shared. The extent to which they do will have to be reconsidered in light of the analysis in Chapter 6. Regardless of whether the Americans I talked to do accept the precepts of neoliberal economic doctrine, the fact that they do share an underlying conceptualization of work as a commodity and disutility makes sense, considering American neoliberalism's successful reformulation of the dominant paradigm of political economic governance in its own image. Again, my findings cannot be taken as representative of a particular class, much less the entirety of American society. Even so, what we can expect is for the American participants' views to be shaped by

the historical political, economic, social and cultural context of the United States where they've lived their lives, as they largely seem to have been.

Chapter 5

French Cultural Models of Work: Work as Personal Fulfillment and as Occupational Citizenship

The French and American experiences of neoliberalization demonstrate distinct levels of societal receptivity to neoliberal ideology, and different degrees of institutional reform along neoliberal lines. I argue that these contrastive patterns correspond, in part, to cultural differences (in conceptualizations of work, society, the state, the market, etc.). The analysis of American cultural models of work revealed that the majority of the group internalized the commodification of work, which also underlies the dominant paradigm of neoliberal governance in the United States for the past three decades. In Chapter 3, I argued that in France no comparable paradigm shift has occurred, contributing to politicians' on both sides difficulty to justify neoliberal reforms, and the slow pace of their advance. Accordingly, we would expect that the French business students and professionals I spoke to exhibit less acceptance of the commodification of work, in favor of other models. Indeed, they overwhelmingly thought of work as it relates to individuals as personal fulfillment, which is related to the model of work as occupational citizenship. As with the American interviews, I first collected and analyzed French metaphors before considering their reasoning on important concepts relating to work.

Analysis of French metaphors of work

After classifying the metaphors I identified pertaining to work, nine groups of metaphors emerged: subsistence, vertical levels, self-improvement, personal fulfillment, work-life balance, collective effort, alienation, psychological pressure, and exploitation. The first six groups together describe the nature and purpose of work as culturally understood, while the last three point to distinct risks associated with work. With the exception of exploitation, almost all the French participants contributed at least one metaphor to every group, suggesting their cultural distribution. Since the interviews were conducted in French the selections reproduced below are in my own English translations, conserving certain key words and idioms in italics.

The most basic metaphor was work as subsistence, exclusively in terms of providing food for oneself and one's family:

The ideal job for me is a job that you don't do at all in the interest... by monetary interest—well, I don't think that exists because you have to work to **win your crust [of bread: *gagner sa croute*]** ...

But I think you have to know what **the spoon that feeds you is** and I think that's why people shouldn't spit on work and say private life comes first...

These metaphors of subsistence (of which 'winning one's crust of bread' was the most common) serve to naturalize work as part of the human condition. The source domain of that most basic, eternal and ahistorical of human drives—to eat, to survive—is seamlessly transposed onto that very modern institution of work in a capitalist system. The link, however, is morally ambiguous. It can be invoked as a critique of the centrality of work in our lives, as in the first two examples above, or as a call to recognize its value and centrality, as the third example illustrates.

Whether approved of our not, however, work is metaphorically expressed as a basic obligation of human existence, if only to preserve it.

The group of vertical level metaphors elaborates on the structure of work in contemporary society. These don't only express upward mobility and a hierarchy of occupations, but how individuals fit into those levels (or don't) according to their abilities:

I'm pretty admiring also of, of one of my colleagues who started at **the very bottom level**. She was a bank teller, so she gave money to clients who came asking for cash, she took the money out of accounts, yeah it was really **the lowest level**, and twenty years later she's **number three** in the company

I mean [my current job at a bank] is a step towards an larger project of employment—which shouldn't be long by the way, I hope. Between now and a few months I should be able **to move**. And there I'll be in a job that corresponds to **my place, my real place**. Uh, I'm currently let's say at **a first level**, let's say in the corporation. And for me, **my real place** is at the **level above**. Because of my studies, my capacities, my skills, i think that I'm of a **higher level** than what I'm doing right now. So my place would be yeah in the **next level**, I think I'll be good there.

I mean I remember, I had just finished my studies and really wanted to be working at the **height** of my abilities and you feel like you arrive [at my old job] and you feel like you've gone **down three levels**, that's kind of the idea. And that's why I wanted to change pretty quickly and here [at my current job] I'm good. I think it's related to what I'm capable of doing.

These verticality metaphors together illustrate the individual arriving in “the world of work,” which is made up of different branches corresponding to different occupations. The particular vertical location of an individual on that branch (“my place”) is defined by the responsibilities of the job, which should correspond to one's abilities and interests, but don't necessarily. The ideal, however, is to “evolve” by developing one's abilities so as to take on more responsibility, ascending the vertical hierarchy of occupations:

[Some people at work see me and think] You've only been here three years. So you don't necessarily have enough experience to really know what's happening, to be ready to **evolve**, to know the market.

I think there are some sectors where you don't **evolve** much at all so the employee doesn't feel concerned **to grow** in the company.

And I think that [not working] is not fulfilling, you can't **evolve** in terms of—I mean I don't even know, you can't **grow** like that staying like that because you're not taking on any responsibility.

Rather than referring to honing one's skills, "evolve" or "grow" represents moving up a vertical level. The ability to evolve and take on further responsibility is contingent upon a worker's experience, knowledge, skills, social relationships, and the opportunities available above. Taken together, the metaphorical representation of the world of work is comprised of different levels of occupations entailing different responsibilities which particular individuals might be "suited for" at particular points in their lives according to their aptitudes, skills and abilities. This model takes into account individual psychological differences, which make someone suited or not suited to a particular position. Though it's generally good to evolve, the overarching objective is to arrive at a "place" where a worker's responsibilities are suited to their interests and abilities, which indeed might entail some evolving. Finally, the term "evolving" (as opposed to "climbing to ladder," the dominant metaphor of upward mobility in the U.S.) implies some intrinsic human value beyond climbing the ranks. It's to this complex notion of personal fulfillment that we now turn.

Personal fulfillment was the largest category of metaphors I identified among the French interviews. A smattering of terms that generally signify personal fulfillment are rendered quite awkward translated literally into English: success of

the self, realization of the self, accomplishment of the self. These metaphors are overshadowed by the much more commonly invoked (and poetic) term *épanouissement*. Literally “blossoming,” the word expresses thriving or flourishing, a certain fullness and richness associated with happiness. Here are several examples, selected to illustrate the complex meaning of fulfillment as metaphorically illustrated:

Yes I think that everyone should have to work in the sense that if they’re **blossoming** in their work, yes.

When you do a job you like, you’ll of course enrich yourself materially, because you have a remuneration and so, but you’ll also **enrich yourself in spirit** because you’ll be in something that interests you, so you’ll be gaining knowledge [...]

[Work is important] because I think it’s one of the first sources of **blossoming** if someone isn’t **blossoming** in their work, I think that after it has an impact on their personal life

[The positive effects of work] is the **success of oneself [la réussite de soi]**. When it’s **fulfillment of oneself [la réalisation de soi]**, feeling that you’re doing things well. It encourages you even more to do things well in your whole life in general.

But I think that what motivates people to work no I think there’s still, always the aspect of **blossoming** at work

When someone is really **blossoming** [at work] it’s possible to find something else than monetary compensation [as motivation]

Fulfillment is achieved by putting effort into a project of personal interest, which delivers intrinsic psychological rewards and fosters learning. It is thus a subjective experience—the where and how it is attained are dependent on the particular psychological constitution of every person. The third and fourth examples point to the central importance of finding fulfillment at work in the broader context of someone’s entire life. Work and personal life are psychologically inseparable, such that fulfillment at work becomes indispensable to fulfillment in life in general.

Fulfillment is also very closely linked to motivation, as the last two examples illustrate. Indeed, at their best, people are motivated by the subjective state of fulfillment at work, the absence of which is inherently demotivating.

Conspicuously absent from these metaphors of fulfillment is the notion of upward mobility, which “evolve” seems to express. Taken together, the various emphases on “one’s place” in the hierarchy of occupations, the importance of “blossoming” at work, and ‘evolving’ in responsibilities to find “one’s place” downplay the inherent value of moving up the ranks. Among upper-middle class French men, Lamont (1992) identified a similar tendency to downplay the value of success. Instead, what the metaphors surrounding work emphasize is the individual’s need to find fulfillment in a position that is interesting and suited to their abilities in order to improve themselves in a humanistic sense. Again, this may require evolving to get to a position that is more fulfilling, but the ultimate aim is nevertheless fulfillment. To take an example of the evolving metaphor cited above, “I think there are some sectors where you don’t **evolve** much at all so the employee doesn’t feel concerned **to grow** in the company.” Here the fundamental problem is not that there are no opportunities for upward advancement in some sectors, but that on top of already unfulfilling jobs, the absence of more fulfilling possibilities above is further demotivating. On the whole, motivation is less associated with an individual’s drive or work ethic, as in the US, but is metaphorically represented as a psychological state *deriving* from fulfillment.

To fully understand the notion of fulfillment, we have to look at work in the context of a person’s life in general, turning to metaphors of the work-life balance:

If you don't work enough and are dependent on something that's not good either, though. Yeah that's it. You have to find a **balance** of some sort.

People can work too much. Precisely when someone isn't able to find **the balance** between work and what you might do on the side, so your family, hobbies, vacations, everything, everything you might have on the side, you're going to lose things.

Now in my life in terms of, of what I think of day and night, no, [work] has the place that it's good to accord it, if you see what I mean. It shouldn't **take over** everything and make you **stuck in a circle of work work work** and that in the end you do nothing on the side, you go crazy.

The major theme of these metaphors is precisely the need to establish some sort of balance between work and the rest of a person's life. Work is an obligation to survive and a potentially important source of personal fulfillment, but there is much more to life: family, friends, hobbies, interests, leisure, etc. Metaphors that did not deal with balance explicitly all described the danger of assigning too much importance to work at the expense of these other important facets of life, as illustrated by the third example. Even though work can and should be fulfilling in and of itself to an extent, personal fulfillment in life in general depends ultimately on achieving a fulfilling *balance* between work and personal life. Furthermore, metaphors reflecting the importance of finding such a balance constitute a rarely shared emphasis by the majority of the French and American participants.

Together, these metaphor categories of subsistence, vertical levels and mobility, personal fulfillment, and work-life balance provide a sketch of a cultural understanding of the proper purpose and place of work in the life of an individual. However, in addition to overwork, three further groups of metaphors emphasize risks inherent in work itself. Ortner (2006), drawing on Weber and Geertz, points to the anxieties as one of the central axes of cultural subjectivities. Humans are

dependent on symbolic orders to interpret and act in the social world around them, but no symbolic order is perfectly descriptive or prescriptive. As a result, cultural and individual capacities to understand the world inevitably run into limits, reified in a complex cultural subjectivity as “a complex set of feelings and fears” (Ortner 2006:115). Drawing on these insights, I propose that these risks encoded metaphorically in the language of my French participants have a great deal to tell us, not only about cultural models of work, but the cultural subjectivities that house those models.

The most prominent group of these risky metaphors concerns alienation. According to Marx, alienation is an objective feature of the commodification of work under capitalism because in reality labor is not a commodity at all, but a profoundly human and social endeavor (Budd 2011). In selling their labor, workers are in fact selling a part of their humanity and are reduced to the lower status animals. One of my French participants, Emma, did indeed view work as an *objective* condition of alienation, answering, “What does work mean to you?” with “An alienation of today’s society,” and elaborating on the Marxist discourse of alienation summarized above. Even leaving her case aside, however, metaphors of alienation were quite common among the rest of the French interviewees. For them, alienation is understood to be a subjective condition contingent on the nature of the work in question. Even though this is not exactly what Marx himself meant by alienation, what is shared is the anxiety over the loss of one’s humanity through work:

The factory for me is the worst experience. I think for every human that doesn’t want to be **turned into a robot**. Because actually you’re in front of a machine and it’s repetitive. All day you do the same thing. All day, which is to say **you’re a robot** and you’d better not think too much.

Because if you consider that a human, in general, is a resource, I think you can get ahead of your competition because you will have the best people with you. People always prefer to be well considered rather than **taken for a tool** that people say to you ok do this.

But then for the jobs I could really never do, first of all jobs where you work really way too much like M and A [mergers and acquisitions] it's really good but I'm not... I'm not **a slave**.

Metaphors for this subjective state of alienation all describe being treated as something less than human, or becoming less than human through repetitive or otherwise unfulfilling work. As the first three examples demonstrate, alienation can be seen as inherent in the relationship between the human worker and the nature of the work demanded of them. The fourth example, however, also suggests that overwork can result in a state of alienation. The fact that it is a subjective rather than objective condition (for most) fits with the general concern for individual humans' psychological wellbeing and fulfillment. Indeed, alienation is the antithesis of personal fulfillment, as the loss of the individual's humanity is to the blossoming of that humanity.

Another psychological risk associated with work is expressed by the metaphor of pressure, which the obligations of work exert upon the individual:

I think [the negative aspects of work] it's **pressure, pressure** that after you retransmit to other people. When [works] takes too much time and you're not doing well in personal life on the side.

Mainly [the negative aspects of work] today it's stress. Uh, we spend—me I'm in a job that's very stressful, we have, a **pressure** that's very strong. Truly very very strong, so for us mentally it's difficult, you have to know, have to be able to make a break with work, to be able to recharge.

The demands of work exert a distinctly psychological pressure, closely associated with stress, but more overarching. In addition to being psychologically harmful if

mismanaged, this pressure can compromise people's effectiveness and satisfaction in every aspect of their lives. The notion recalls concerns with overwork, seen in metaphors of the work-life balance, though it is not associated primarily with overwork but rather the demanding nature of work itself. The central concern around the threat to workers' psychological wellbeing at work and in the totality of life is the shadow of the ideal of finding subjective fulfillment in that same balance and totality.

Thus far, the groups of metaphors discussed have all described the nature, place, and risk of work in the life of the individual. A parallel dimension of the cultural model of work has to do with the place of work in society, represented by metaphors of work as a collective effort:

[...] the responsibilities of corporations to the state, because all the money that is paid to the state and after redistributed, so that if the corporation is working it will **feed the whole circuit**.

In addition working, when you work you're making something so if you're working you're necessarily improving, yes improving, **enriching the country** be it in innovation, money, anything and everything. For me yes, everyone should work. It's a **collective effort**.

It's a bit sad in the sense that we're at work it's not necessarily to fight each other all the time, we're there to **move society forward** or move ourselves forward

According to this group of metaphors, work is not only something vitally important in the lives of individuals, but it's also indispensable to society itself. The effort people put in to their work is, to some extent, not merely for themselves but for everyone. Individuals' work enriches society, moving it forward in a process in which everyone is also dependent on the effort of others. Everyone in society should contribute and benefit from the collective effort of work.

If alienation and psychological pressure are the unpleasant shadows of personal fulfillment, then exploitation is the dark side of work as a collective effort. Exploitation, the third category of risky metaphors, was not as widely shared as all the other categories. Only three interviewees employed metaphors of exploitation, though for each of them the theme was quite salient. For this reason, this group is well worth including in the present analysis, but it must be emphasized that they don't represent a widely held or invoked understanding of work. Two examples should suffice:

If a company is true to its history, so it's French, I hope that it can stay as much as possible in France and also do good business, not **making money on the backs** of their employees to give it to the shareholders.

I think the lower classes deserve more recognition. They deserve to be recognized and yeah you're fired, we're moving a company of 2000 people because you're too expensive but in the meantime its an added value but we don't valorize that added value, we valorize only the part that's money, economy etc. to give even more to **fatten** the shareholders.

While the metaphors of work as a collective effort suggest shared responsibility for a society's economy and collective rights to the fruit of that collective labor, exploitation is the disruption of that model by greed. Both examples above invoke the greed of corporate management and shareholders, who ignore the fact that the creation of wealth is a collective effort on the part of workers, management and shareholders.

Work as personal fulfillment and occupational citizenship

Across all the categories of metaphors reviewed above, with the exception of subsistence, the central concern is for the psychological wellbeing of the worker, at

work and in life. The culturally salient aspects of work highlighted by these metaphors correspond to two logically coherent and distinct (though not unrelated) conceptual models of work identified by Budd (2011): work as personal fulfillment, and as occupational citizenship. Of course, as for the American participants, the correspondence is always partial. The whole of the French interviews cannot be characterized by either or both models, nor can any individual's understanding of work. Nevertheless, both conceptualizations of work identified by Budd have elements that recur consistently and saliently across the French interviews, suggesting they can inform our analysis of a French cultural model of work.

Conceptualizing work as personal fulfillment entails emphasizing the positive and negative physical and psychological aspects of work. From this perspective, humans are psychological beings with psychological differences, and are not simply motivated by economic incentives but also by intrinsic psychological rewards. According to Budd (2011), the ideal of finding joy in work was inherited from Catholic and Enlightenment thought, though today it's more associated with the idea of job satisfaction. Within this framework, non-market ethical concerns of distributional and procedural justice at work, in addition to job satisfaction, are seen as the source of motivation. The central assertion is that work and labor are not market commodities, but deeply human psychosocial efforts.

Among the French metaphors identified above, we saw similar concern for personal fulfillment and psychological wellbeing in general. The conceptualization of the workforce emphasizes people may be suited for particular positions according to psychological differences. Personal fulfillment, finding *épanouissement*

was the paramount ideal to strive for, in work and in life. Furthermore, we saw the same causal link drawn from personal fulfillment as the source of motivation at work. Anxiety over psychological pressure exerted by the burden of work and the potential for alienation also fits neatly into an overall vision of workers as psychological beings.

Along with the personal fulfillment model of work, an occupational citizenship conceptualization of work also strives to decommodify work, asserting that workers are equal citizen members of society with particular economic, psychological, social and physical needs of high moral significance. Such a stance puts ethical standards of human dignity over the ethics of supply and demand and holds that citizens are most free when markets work according to the laws of humanity rather than those of the jungle (Budd 2011). Indeed, the market is seen as imperfectly competitive and fraught with power differentials, so that ethical working conditions depend on workers having bargaining power beyond individually setting the price of their labor. Absent institutions to curb the power of capital, the market creates inequality, which constitutes a threat to political freedom. As equal human citizens, workers are entitled to fairness in the distribution of economic rewards, employment security, and meaningful voice in workplace decisions. Lurking behind the overall concern with social and political rights is the implicit role of the state in upholding non-market ethical standards of human dignity and preventing the anarchy of the market.

Again, the French metaphorical representations of work identified above are largely compatible with the occupational citizenship model. The basis is the same

emphasis on work as a human, psychological and social endeavor. Metaphors of work as a collective effort stress the core notion that workers are members of society pursuing common ends, irreducible to atomic self-interested rational optimizers of utility. Indeed, this implies that workers are entitled to certain rights in the production and distribution of society's wealth. The importance of finding fulfillment, the anxieties over psychological pressure, alienation (and for some, exploitation) all point to the primacy of ethical standards of human dignity above the ethics of supply and demand.

Though the model of work as occupational citizenship is invoked by the French participants' discussion of work and its relation to the individual, the extent to which it structures their beliefs about society will mostly be revealed in Chapter 6. For now, it's sufficient to point out that the two dominant models of work that structured the speech of the French interviewees are related. They are in fact perfectly compatible: both reject the commodification of work, emphasizing instead that work is an activity undertaken by psychologically distinct and motivated humans in a social and political context, which implies that non-market ethical apply to considerations surrounding work. While the personal fulfillment model of work extends this logic to a concern with the psychological wellbeing of individual workers, the occupational citizenship model uses the same foundation to assert the social and political rights of workers in society.

Again, in this chapter we are primarily concerned with a basic model of work and its relation to the lives of individuals. In order to reveal how these understandings structure their thought, we now have to attend, as we did for the

Americans, to their reasoning about work, taking the areas highlighted by shared metaphors as indicators of accepted and significant meanings.

The imperative of personal fulfillment

When I asked the French participants what work meant to them, their tentative definitions touched on the some of the same elements evoked by the shared metaphors of work: obligation, personal fulfillment, and contributing to a group or collectivity. Édouard, a business student in Paris, covers all three:

Work for me, man has always been destined to work, precisely because we don't have innate knowledge. We have to cultivate certain ideas, or culture in order to succeed at accomplishing things. We can't do something without having learned, well. For me work is, it's actually accumulating competences to after be able to accomplish tasks and be productive. Not necessarily in the sense of making Euros or dollars but productive, in what you do, for your personal fulfillment (*épanouissement*) and that of your company.

Work is naturalized as an essentially human obligation, indeed the one that makes us human giving us culture. As such, the value in work lies not in economic production but the production of higher moral ends: improving oneself, finding fulfillment and contributing to collective endeavors. Édouard's response contains the most important aspects all the French interviewees used to describe work, though they might emphasize different aspects. For Christophe, an economics student at Rennes, at its core work is "the individual effort that for us, for the collectivity, the little part that I would bring to the world." But in general personal fulfillment was by far the most important notion for the French participants, as Paul, a business student in Paris, exemplifies:

Work I think is a notion that's essential. It's very important and you shouldn't live from your work but you should be passionate about what you do, I think. Uh and if

you don't do something interesting—well me I start from the principle that if I don't wake up the morning saying to myself I'm happy to go work, that's not life... in part because I've clearly failed my life.

Paul was somewhat atypical in the overall importance he attaches to work itself, but the importance he gives to finding fulfillment and happiness in work was shared by all the French people I talked to. This was particularly clear when I asked if people could work too little. Whereas the Americans tended answer by criticizing lazy people for their lack of personal responsibility, the French often framed the problem around fulfillment. In the words of Édouard and Paul:

Yes yes you can not work enough too. Um, for instance not caring about anything and not doing anything, so you sit in your chair all day on the internet, there's nothing interesting. And I don't think it's fulfilling (*épanouissant*), you can't evolve in terms of—yeah I don't even know, you can't grow like that staying like that because you don't take on responsibility.

Yes in the sense that, for example if you don't work enough... well in the sense that if you're not fulfilled (*épanoui*) in your work, I think after it has repercussions on your personal life.

For both, the criterion for not working enough is precisely the absence personal fulfillment, which has a host of negative implications we will examine more closely later. It's worth noting that none of the French interpretations of not working enough had anything to say about laziness, lazy people, or irresponsible people. Édouard does propose that responsibility is necessary in order to grow and be fulfilled, but he does not suggest that people who don't take on responsibility are irresponsible people. Primarily, they're sadly unfulfilled people. This is not to say none of French people I spoke with think that some people are lazy and that laziness is bad; some do emphatically, and they will be heard later. Yet it does suggest that the notions of success, work ethic and personal drive so significant to the majority of

the American sample were not the same ones with which the French approached the same question of not working enough. Once again, the distinction is supported by Lamont's (1992) findings that upper-middle class French men tend to downplay the values of work ethic, personal drive and competitiveness relative to Americans

Indeed, I argue that the frequency and conviction behind the usage of terms for fulfillment across the French interviews suggests it holds a status comparable to the notion of success for the Americans I spoke to. The French defined professional success not in terms of upward mobility, climbing the ranks, but mostly in terms of finding happiness. Thierry, who works at a French bank as a money manager for diverse clients, offers an illustrative explanation:

For me professional success is accomplishment of the self. Which is to say that to—you get to a level where what you do will have for yourself in terms of remuneration as your salary, which permits you to live, uh the interest you have in your work that it gives you, the satisfaction in doing that work and the place where you do it, and who you do it with, these five criteria need to be united and positive to consider for me that it's successful. If you do a job that you like, in a place that you like, with people that you like, that bring you satisfaction and give you a decent remuneration, what more could you ask. If you're able to have all that, you can consider you're doing well at work.

According to Thierry, in order to be considered successful work must be inherently fulfilling intellectually, socially and morally. For the Americans professional success invariably meant climbing the ranks or accomplishing personal goals, but French interpretations revolve around the importance of finding fulfillment and happiness. Workers are less understood to be competitive market agents working as a disutility to support greater consumption, and more as psychological creatures engaged in meaningful activities. Upward occupational mobility was never presented as an end in itself. Instead the imperative is on finding the level or position that corresponds

to the individual's interests and abilities, where they can grow and find fulfillment.

Nicolas, a maritime and oil industry analyst for a French bank and the most conservative French person I interviewed, describes what professional success means to him:

I think it's up to everyone's personal choice. Now there are some people who want to be civil servants and then, they have a good job and then they surround themselves with three or five people and that. If they're satisfied and think they're successful, that's good. I think that professional success is being satisfied with what you've done and having done it to the best of your capacity. Not to feel as though you could have done more, but then that could be at another level. Someone who has a plumbing company with 5 or 6 people, he's making money he's living well that's a professional success as much as the CEO of a company in New York.

There's no objective standard of professional success, nor is success contingent upon being upwardly mobile. Just as the metaphors of occupational levels and evolving encoded, the imperative is not to "climb the ladder" but to find that rung of responsibilities most in accord with one's abilities and interests so as to grow and derive fulfillment from working there.

Fulfillment from work is evidently very important, but how exactly does working contribute to a sense of fulfillment? While describing the positive effects working can have, the French participants elaborated on the meaning of fulfillment and pointed to three major sources: social integration in the workplace, contribution to a collective effort, and satisfaction derived from personal effort and accomplishments. Thierry cites statistics to demonstrate the inherent value of social interactions at work:

So I think [the positive effects of work] are self-accomplishment. Work provides the opportunity to, to sort of to knit relationships with people. We have a statistic that's rather impressive, that concretely 50% of the people you meet in your life you meet at work. So if you don't have that you're losing 50% of your life, so I'm sorry but it's very important.

The social relationships people gain at work are not seen as important only to be happy at work, but to be fulfilled in the totality of life. It should be noted that Americans also mentioned the pleasant addition of social interactions at work, but on the whole they did not attach it significant importance relative to the French. When it comes to fulfillment, working life is generally understood as being quite inseparable from the rest of life because of the (ideal) psychological unity of the worker—a fact with important implications considered below.

Another important source of fulfillment at work comes from contributing to a collective project. In the words of Édouard, it's "gratifying to feel wholly integrated in a team, that people can count on you like you can count on them." Arnaud, a student studying economics at Rennes, expresses a similar sentiment with a story from when he worked at a fish-packing factory one summer:

I felt like I was contributing to some purpose because at the beginning of the day we had an objective to meet, and generally at the end of the day we met it. And we did that because it's a fish factory so had them delivered to the supermarkets, and some times when I went to the store I saw the fish I had packaged, and I felt like I contributed to something.

The theme that working in a team towards some collective end is gratifying in itself was prominent in the French talk about work. The emphasis on the cooperative and collective aspects of work was reflected, as we saw, in metaphors representing work as collective effort.

A third source of fulfillment from work came from the emotional satisfaction of accomplishing projects and goals. According to Nicolas, the positive effects of work are:

Very much in the realization of the self, as long as you're satisfied with your what you've done, then... When it's not going well it transfers over to your personal life, even if some people are very good at separating, but me I have trouble. I think that it's that, it's success of the self. When it's the realization of the self, feeling you did things well, it incites you even more to do things well in your life in general.

Generally, work provides the chance to accomplish things according to one's abilities, which leads to a sense of pride in those accomplishments. This sense of accomplishment, in turn, gives the worker greater confidence that enables him or her to rise to their human potential—the metaphor of blossoming is quite apt.

Again, Nicolas points to the psychological unity of worker since fulfillment in work makes for all-around better and happier humans. In his experience, the converse is equally true.

One final benefit of working, though not associated with personal fulfillment, was independence or autonomy gained from having a salary. As Arnaud and Paul succinctly explain why people work:

Normally when you work you have a contract of several years so you have security for a few years. Then you have retirement so in the end it's assurance, the assurance to have money coming in constantly.

If you don't work you don't have any money, if you don't have any money you don't have a car, you're not autonomous, you have to depend on someone unless you win the lottery.

Autonomy and independence were important concepts invoked to explain the necessity of working. However, though employed to distinguish the status of someone who does work from someone who does not, there was no suggestion that independence could or should be increased by working more in order to accumulate more wealth, as most Americans considered. In fact, none of the French interviewees offered upward mobility as a positive effect of working, nor did they

stress self-improvement in their capacity to work as the Americans tended to. Instead, as posited by the model of work as personal fulfillment, for the French participants the benefits of work derived from *intrinsic* psychological rewards—integration in a social environment and in a collective endeavor, as well as an emotional sense of accomplishment—which together inspire people to rise ever closer to their human potential.

Personal fulfillment as motivation and the risks of their absence

The dominant model of work as a social activity undertaken by psychological human implies a very different theory of motivation than the inherent personal drive posited by most Americans. Widely shared by the French interviewees was the idea that motivation to work derives from the degree of fulfillment it provides. In the characteristically concise words of Paul, “Well if you’re happy at your job it’s motivating.” The notion that workers are motivated purely or primarily by extrinsic economic rewards was widely critiqued. Emma explains her perspective on whether hard work goes rewarded:

No because what the corporations don’t understand and maybe people don’t either is that we’ve always rewarded people in the form of money, and not emotionally. To say ‘that’s well done, what you did.’ That’s it, it’s always, or maybe you’re rewarded sometimes but no one will say anything. It’ll just be a little bit of money, or a bonus or something, but I think there’s not enough emotional revalorization at work. For the work that you bring. And I think that lots of people would invest themselves more if the people above them had a more human approach.

Though delivered particularly emphatically, in response to the same question as to whether hard work goes rewarded, the same argument that work should be valorized more emotionally was very common among the French participants.

Practically, psychological and emotional rewards make workers more motivated, and by extension more productive and fulfilled. The underlying logic and concerns reflect the conceptualization of workers primarily as psychological beings motivated in part by intrinsic rewards and the related moral imperative behind finding fulfillment in work.

But if emotional valorization and fulfillment represent the ideal subjective working experience, their absence is also of paramount moral concern. Édouard accomplishes the transition:

[The negative effects of work] can be disgust people can have toward their company for example, or if they're not recognized while they're doing their job well, they'll say to themselves 'OK, what was the point.' That can even break their family life. I think that if they realize it's useless, that they'd be just as well paid for not doing anything as for working like they're supposed to, it doesn't really motivate them.

The lack of fulfillment at work is consistently understood as having direct repercussions on someone's effectiveness and satisfaction in the totality of life.

Furthermore, the nature of the threat is often explicitly expressed in psychological terms, as Emma illustrates, describing the frustration she perceives among her peers:

I think that three quarters of the, at least of the students I know, they know what they want to do. I have friends who know what they want to do, have résumés, are crazy prepared, but unfortunately no one, no one offers, nothing is certain. And that's where people can start having depression and, and anxiety problems etcetera. Because you want to do something that you know you could do but no one gives you the opportunity to do it. And at that point you become frustrated and well, that's also why you can have depression, among young people, because you can't find a job because some times you studied for five years and after that well, you get nothing.

Being unable to find fulfillment in work, or worse, being unable to find work in which to find fulfillment, is nearly always associated not only with demotivation but also depression, anxiety and psychological harm in general. Once again, this

demonstrates how conceptualizing work as a meaningful activity undertaken by psychological beings, as opposed to a commodity, places the moral imperative on workers finding fulfillment in their work so as to blossom in their lives and very humanity.

Another potential risk if work is completely unfulfilling, is the subjective state of alienation, which, as described by metaphors reviewed above, entails a fracturing or loss of part of a worker's identity or humanity. All of the French participants except for Arnaud and Paul invoked this possibility. For Christophe and Édouard, for example, alienation is associated with the absence of fulfillment from work:

[A negative effect of work can be] a sort of alienation sometimes I think. Because once work is becomes laborious like something hard and forced it becomes a sort of torture. That can be very very negative.

Now professional success for me is not too much finding yourself on Monday waiting for Friday, you see. Uh, otherwise I think that you're screwed and there's no point—well that's it you find yourself in your little closed bubble where you—it's like the little mice in a wheel. You're waiting for Friday you run, there you go, for me it's that. And precisely to be able to get out of that little wheel.

According to Christophe, if work is inherently unenjoyable and becomes merely a painful necessity in order to survive, the worker will feel alienated. Similarly, Édouard maintains that if work is just a weekly, unfulfilling obligation, the worker's existence is debased to the status of a bored and boring mouse. To a certain extent, these concerns transcend the dominant psychological paradigm, instead basing their critique in humanist ethical standards for what constitutes a fulfilling existence. But anxiety over the prospect of alienation can also intersect with explicitly psychological dangers, as they do for Emma:

Everything that has to do with telemarketing—which I've done too. I did two days, never went back. At a company that made frozen foods that you had to sell to clients and that's, it was horrible. It was horrible. Because you take someone in, you lie to that person and you redirect them to thoughts that aren't even yours. Which is to say yeah it's, as soon as you betray your very way of being at work it becomes horrible. After you can have a double personality—you can go totally crazy, you know. There are some people who don't even recognize themselves and yeah the pressure and the personality change that you're forced to make is really horrible.

The risk here is that the role a person is forced to take on at work can be totally opposed to their values and very way of being, resulting in an alienating fracturing of identity and personality. The danger is also associated with the psychological pressure that this obligation exerts and the psychological harm that results (“you can go totally crazy”). French reasoning about alienation urges that if work is unfulfilling, which it can be for many reasons, a worker's very human existence can become unfulfilling and debased. The results may be psychological, but the problem is a humanist one.

Work-life Balance

It may be starting to appear as though the French people I spoke with consider work to be the most important feature of their lives and determinant of their psychological wellbeing. However, this is not exactly the case; more accurately, they consider finding *fulfillment*, which hopefully can come from work, the paramount imperative. Paul reflects on the importance of work in life:

The importance of work, I think that if I don't have work, I'm speaking for me personally, if I don't have work I'm bored. I think that I would be bored in my life I would have to attend to that absence, of having too much time by putting myself totally into a passion or a very important interest that pushes me to take full advantage of it and to perfect myself in that. But otherwise yeah otherwise I think I would be sad.

The reason work is important according to Paul—and he probably assigned it the most importance among the French with whom I spoke—is not because he values working or success in and of themselves, but because work provides a major opportunity to find fulfillment by dedicating himself to something and thereby improve himself. If he didn't have to work, he would have to find fulfillment by committing himself to some other interest in order to be happy.

Work can and should be a source of personal fulfillment in a person's life, but everyone agreed it shouldn't *be* someone's life. Too much devotion to work in terms of energy and emotional commitment threatens other sources of fulfillment and is considered detrimental to overall happiness, as Thierry illustrates with the example of an exceptionally upwardly mobile colleague:

Yes you can work too much. Precisely if you're not able to find the balance between your work and other things alongside it, so that would be your family, your hobbies, your vacations, everything, everything else you could have, you'll lose some things. Me, my colleague that I talked about earlier that I admire, who started at the very bottom and now she's basically one of the bosses at my bank, she has told me before that she sure she worked really really hard, but she missed the education of her two children. She has these children but she didn't see them grow up, and in my opinion that will be a hole in her life one day.

Nicolas demonstrates a profound difference between the primary American and French models and moral logics of work in valuing overall and balanced personal fulfillment in life derived from a variety of sources over the model of his colleague, who embodies American notions of success and personal drive. True, Americans also pointed to the problem overworking could cause for one's family life, but fundamentally the issue was framed in terms of a broader loss of freedom to pursue fulfillment, and a matter of subjective cost benefit analysis. The French interviewees much more readily discussed overworking as an *objective* threat to family life,

universally seen as an important source of fulfillment. Furthermore, very frequently the threat is presented as psychological, as when Arnaud, Édouard, and Nicolas frame the problem of overwork:

[The negative effects of work] can be things like stress... yeah and problems with employees or supervisors, well I don't know serious problems, working too much and then no more leisure time... And then you can get depressed and I don't know what else, and I think those are the negative effects.

The negative effects can be, for example pushing to the extreme uh, your capacities at work. So that after you just can't do it anymore. Um I'll take the example of my father where it's been twenty five years since he's been at the same company, it's been ten years since he's been, been, he's been depressed if you will, but it's chronic. My mom told me it's really actually because he gave him such a headache with work, working unbearable hours, precisely trying to reach objectives that were essentially impossible, that are—then that's not the only example depression is, uh ok it's a disease that can be, it's a disease for sure, but it can be completely, completely assimilated to work, also. That's one of the factors that sets it off, I think.

I think [the negative effects of work] is pressure, the pressure that after gets transmitted to other people. When work takes too much time and you start doing things badly outside of work. So it's, you get tired of it it's true, when I worked a lot a lot for the other company, I was given all the most simple tasks like doing laundry, doing the dishes, all that, it made me mad because I had to work late at night and I think that yes it creates a lot of stress, frustration that kind of thing.

Each of their responses holds that overworking and giving too much importance to work poses an objective danger to the psychological health of the worker, which will be felt in the totality of his or her social and emotional life. Their concerns reflect (and Nicolas invokes) French metaphors of psychological pressure which the obligation to work exerts on the mind of workers. Work is valuable as one possible source of personal fulfillment, but it also represents a threat to other sources of happiness and by extension satisfaction with life in general.

What, then, is the proper place of work in the life of an individual and in the quest for personal fulfillment? The answer depends, because of the ambiguous

moral nature of work. As well as an obligation that insures independence, work can be, in Christophe's words "one of the first sources of fulfillment (*épanouissement*)," but if unfulfilling work can be alienating, psychologically harmful, as can attaching too much energy and importance to work to the detriment of personal life. Therefore, in general work is morally significant *to the degree* that it provides fulfillment: when work is inherently fulfilling, it has an important place in life because it inspires people to perfect themselves, yet it must not usurp the role of family and whatever other sources of fulfillment a person may value; when work does not provide fulfillment, other sources of happiness and areas of dedication become more significant. Emma and Arnaud express this final point, when I asked ideally, what the place of work should be in life:

It depends how you understand the word work. If you understand—for example if tomorrow I have to be a cashier for seven hours a day or I have a shitty job, yeah there I would say it comes in last place... But if tomorrow my job is also sort of my passion, that's another thing.

In general it will depend of on the individual because everyone has their own perception of work so there are some people for whom work is life, that don't want to do anything other than work, and other people for whom it will be the opposite, there are some people that don't want to work because they can't stand authority, they find it tiresome and so well they won't have a very important place for work. But those people are rare though. But, I don't know ideally I would say it depends on the individual. Because there's everything else, leisure, family lots of things like that.

Wanting to work and being passionate about work are not moral imperatives, but finding fulfillment in life is. Hopefully, that fulfillment can come in part from work, but if it does not it must be sought in other areas.

Conclusion

The most common model that structured the speech and reasoning of the French interviewees was that of work as personal fulfillment. Indeed, finding fulfillment constitutes an imperative comparable to the American obsession with success. The French participants' broadly evinced an understanding of work as a meaningful activity undertaken by psychologically distinct and firmly psychological workers, motivated in part by intrinsic and psychological rewards. The imperative is for people to find work that makes them fulfilled, in the humanist sense of improving themselves through passion and effort to rise closer to their human potential. The converse of this conviction is that in the absence of fulfillment, work threatens to be not only demotivating, but also psychologically harmful and alienating. The psychological unity of the worker that this view implies is decidedly different from the conceptualization shared by the majority of Americans, which holds that consumers—whose identities as workers are conceptually fractured from their identities as consumers—work as a disutility to support consumption via the pursuit and accumulation of property.

Lamont highlights similar differences between the value accorded to success and money by upper-middle class men in French and American society, and points to some possible explanations:

[...] money is more central to [Americans'] quality of life and to that of their dependents, the welfare functions of the state being relatively underdeveloped in the United States in contrast to France. Indeed, in America, the quality of schooling is less uniform than it is in France because it is more exclusively dependent on local taxes and, indirectly, on local real estate prices. Also, health care and child care have to be privately purchased by the American middle class. College education is very costly, and most American upper-middle class men spend a considerable part of their life savings for the education of their children. [...] In contrast, in France, higher education is less expensive and the quality of schooling tends to be more consistent across neighborhoods, because elementary and secondary schools are

financially supported and controlled by the central government. Health care and child care, too, are free or available at low cost. [Lamont 2993:71]

In other words, success and money are more culturally significant in the U.S. because they actually *are* more important; relative to Americans, French people live their lives more autonomously from market mechanisms. This contrast is compatible with the differences reviewed in the parallel national histories of neoliberalization: in the United States, where neoliberalism has risen to become the new paradigm of governance, cultural subjectivities mirror more closely the logic of the market; in France, where there does not appear to have been a fundamental paradigm shift concerning the proper mode of governance, market thinking less profoundly penetrates cultural subjectivities, which hold on to other systems of beliefs, traditions and values. Furthermore, the distinction agrees with my findings among my own interviews that the Americans' conceptualizations of work are more governed by market logic, while the French understandings reject the logic of the market asserting instead the human essence of work. Again, it's impossible based on the scope of my research to extrapolate to the distribution of these understandings and beliefs in French society at large, but it is nevertheless encouraging that they agree with Lamont's (1992) own findings and what might be expected considering the distinctive historical contexts of each society and culture's neoliberal turn.

Chapter 6

American and French Cultural Perspectives on the Market and the State and the Influence of Neoliberal Ideologies

At this point, we've covered a great deal but at the same time very little has been put together. Separately, the historical contexts of the arrival of neoliberalism and the process of neoliberalization in both countries have been reviewed, suggesting differing levels formal and ideational cultural resistance to neoliberal ideology. The initial analysis of the American interviews showed that the majority of Americans conceptualized work generically and in the life of the individual as a commodity, and the subsequent analysis of the French discussions of work demonstrated that the dominant model of work in the same context was as personal fulfillment. Precisely how these different understandings of work translate into views on the organization of society and how these views, in turn, correspond to each particular historical national experience with neoliberalism, remains to be seen, and is the subject of this chapter.

If the French people I spoke to generically conceptualize work primarily as personal fulfillment, it seems unlikely that they would accept neoliberal policy directives founded upon the model of work as a commodity. Meanwhile, it seems reasonable to expect that the Americans I interviewed, particularly those who accepted the commodity model of work, would be relatively more accepting of neoliberal ideology and policy directives. However, Strauss' (1992) cautioning against assuming that beliefs about work in relation to individuals translate directly

into endorsements of the economic and social policies that logically correspond should be kept in mind. The extent to which the characteristically French and American underlying cultural models of work accept or reject neoliberal ideas will be explored below, by directly contrasting their reasoning about work in relation to society, the nature of the market economy, and the role of the state.

Work as a commodity versus work as occupational citizenship and personal fulfillment

I argue that my American participants' talk about work in society is primarily informed by the model of work as a commodity, while the French informants draw mainly on the model of work as occupational citizenship and the related model of work as personal fulfillment. Though this is the general pattern I identified in my analysis, it should be noted at the outset that among both national samples, there was much more variation in beliefs and opinions regarding the implications of work's relationship to society relative to its relation to individuals. I consider these differences in reasoning to be significant, often just as insightful as shared patterns of thought, and do my best throughout to indicate and give voice to minority positions and beliefs represented in both groups.

One question that I asked which gets to the crux of the distinction between the conceptualizations of work held by the Americans and French was quite simply, "Is work a commodity?" The Americans I spoke too were all able to see work as a commodity to a certain extent, even if they were unsure whether it was really a fair model for all work. Kevin was the most ready to accept the model of work as a commodity:

Kevin: Labor is, labor is a commodity.

NF: Explain.

Kevin: Anything that can be bought and sold is a commodity. Commodity generally implies like some kind of scale of thing, so is this specific pen a commodity no, but pens in general are a commodity. So yeah.

NF: Is there anything that distinguishes it from other commodities?

Kevin: I mean there's the humanistic, labor is the only commodity which thinks for itself and which is subject to social pressures and things like that. There's definitely a humanistic difference to it, do I think that we should reflect that in policy not necessarily. I think that, as long as people are freely willing to buy and sell their labor in voluntary exchange I think that you should let them do pretty much whatever they want with it as long as it's not some sort of illegal tort or crime, or civil contractual wrong—no that's a tort actually, never mind.

Kevin, as we will see throughout this chapter, most consistently and completely accepts the commodification of work, indeed demonstrating an impressively coherent and extensive internalization of the particular model, and of neoliberal ideology. Of course workers are human, but for Kevin this fact does not imply that labor should not be subject to the laws of supply and demand understood to be the most effective and fair mechanism to organize and reward labor in society. To emphasize the ethicality of this mechanism, he invokes contract law to argue that all labor is free, refuting the possibility of non-market ethical objections of coercion or poor working conditions.

Kevin aside, the majority of the American interviewees answered that work was a commodity at least in *some* sectors, namely industrial or agricultural work. However, the importance of human capital differentiates other kinds of work from the commodified sectors, as Duncan and George explain:

Huh. That's a, I don't know I've taken a couple of economic classes and I feel like you can definitely analyze it as like the United States is producing a certain number of

widgets every year and it takes a certain amount of man hours to produce those widgets. That's I mean probably a valid assumption for a lot of industries, right like traditional manufacturing or you know maybe parts of agriculture are like that, maybe parts of the energy industry. But then again on the other hand, I like to think that a certain set of people who are lucky enough to be well educated, have a certain background a skill set are getting treated as not a commodity either because you know they learn, they sort of train on the job or they've taken certain classes that have given them that background.

Ah, for some industries yes, but I think a lot of industries have special skill sets or backgrounds required that that's not true, that it's not going to be commoditized, like I can't draw or paint so I would be terrible at doing like home decorating or painting a house or something like that. It's just something that I, it's not a skill that I have whereas other people who doing that kind of stuff being able to do Microsoft Excel and financial stuff like I can so I don't think that it's that commoditized. Yeah.

Both of them reason, along with the majority of the Americans, that even though in some sectors work is treated as a commodity in the sense that it's undifferentiated labor, in other areas human capital—skills, education, experience and so forth—ensures that work is not treated as a commodity *in the market*; and therefore it is not a commodity. On the surface this may seem to be a rejection of the commodification of work, yet the logic of rejection is nevertheless the logic of the market, reified in their reasoning. Ultimately, Wadel's (1979) critique of the economists' conception of work as an activity sold on the market is applicable: by conceptualizing work according to how it treated in the market these Americans leave work to be defined by the organizations that pay and demand for work. The distinction will be clarified by the contrast with the French responses. Before turning to these, however, two exceptions should be noted among the American participants. David and Samuel each said they could see the perspective of work as a commodity, but were uncertain if they accepted it as a valid model because they also

saw work as an important human activity. Samuel's reasoning is illustrative of both of their uncertainty:

Yes and no. That's a tough question. I don't know how to answer that. Literally, yeah you're doing something and getting money for it. B it's more of like something you do in life to kind of keep you busy so I don't--that's why I would say it's not a commodity. Um, I don't know. That's a very tough question.

In contrast, the French overwhelmingly rejected the model of work as a commodity. Most frequently, they cited the inherently human essence of work, as Édouard does in response to the same question:

No in the sense that it's not a monetary exchange, do you see what I mean? For me a commodity it's really you give yourself something in terms of money, receive something that you bought because there's an added value to a raw material you see. What distinguishes work from a commodity is that in this case you're not bringing a monetary value but you're bringing your own value, to be able to transform—yeah to transform a product of the company with your own competence. So that's what distinguishes it from a commodity.

Work is not a commodity because first and foremost it's a human effort, so its value cannot be determined appropriately in the way that commodity value generally is.

The French participants often seemed confused by the question and had trouble explaining why exactly the commodity model did not make sense to them, as Arnaud exemplifies:

Arnaud: Uh... How so exactly?

NF: Well a commodity in the sense that it's something people buy and sell for money.

Arnaud: Not really because work is a human activity, in the end we don't do it, it's not really a commodity because we don't sell, in the end we don't sell services—well yes even if it is kind of that in the end—but no we don't sell the services of peoples who work, who make things. For me it's not, it's not a commodity.

NF: So what is the difference for you?

Arnaud: Well it's something apart, I don't know, how to explain. It's not a commodity it's, it's work (haha).

Even as his reasoning leads him to see how work can be understood as a commodity, the essentially human aspect of work inexplicably sets it apart. Arnaud's certainty of the special status of work despite being unable to articulate the distinction clearly points to the depth of his acceptance of the model of work as personal fulfillment—that is, work as social and meaningful activity undertaken by psychological beings—and its ability to structure his reasoning. Thierry, in contrast, offers a quite eloquent explanation why the commodity model is inappropriate:

For me work, well for me work is a resource, it's not a commodity. It has to be managed. Individuals are managements of resources. They're not objects that you can place, that you can put over here or over there. I consider that well it's a little bit in the spirit of Ford, where he paid his employees maybe a little bit more than the other companies so that they could consume his goods. That made it so his employees wanted to come work for him, and so that all the best went to him actually so for me it's a management of resources. Because if you consider that the human being, in general, is a resource, I think you can succeed at getting ahead of your competitors because you'll have the best working for you. People always prefer being well treated than being taken for a tool where they say to you 'OK you do that.' And you go in circles because they tell you to 'do that and then shut up, do that and we don't care what you think.' If you're considered to be a resource, you're going to feel more valorized so you will give that back at your job. For me that's how I think work has to be. It has to be a resource and not a commodity. If you—you can treat it as a commodity, in certain specific sectors. Uh, in the army for example or in the military they don't ask you to think they ask you to act so you do what you're told. But that's something that you've integrated from the start. In the private sector, uh to me work has to be a resource. If it's a commodity, you can have, you can make enormous profits, but you won't necessarily have a sustainable business. And what matters most is that your company lasts through the ages, that it doesn't last five years and that it makes you the maximum amount of profit in five years.

Here we see precisely how the model of work as personal fulfillment rejects the model of work as a commodity: because workers are psychological beings, they have to be treated as resources, which entails providing good working conditions, fair rewards, and emotional valorization. Furthermore, doing so makes workers and

companies more economically productive, efficient and sustainable. In contrast, treating work as a commodity entails denying the psychology of the worker, asking them not to think but only to act (as in the military), which is inherently alienating. Though this can be profitable in the short term it's not a sustainable way to run a business. If the model of work as a commodity is incompatible with the conceptualization of work as personal fulfillment, it also can't be squared with the model of work as occupational citizenship, which provides another potential logic of rejection of work's commodification. Paul makes use of both perspectives:

No no. I don't consider work to be a commodity, no that's a notion I don't really understand in the sense that you work well it's for you, it's to make a living and all but in the sense that work is something essential in society.

Since work is also a collective effort, the fruits of which belong not merely to the individual but to society at large, the functioning of society itself depends on people working. The model of work as a commodity—which entails a picture of atomic self-interested workers and employers determining the price of labor according to supply and demand—is inadequate from the perspective of the social collectivity, according to which the responsibilities and benefits of working are, to an extent, shared. On the whole, the French participants who rejected the conceptualization of work as a commodity based their logic in either a humanist or a collective representation of work.

Three of the French interviewees, however, agreed with the commodity model of work. Even so, Emma and Christophe's acceptance of the model as accurate for French society ultimately served to critique it as unjust. Politically, these two were the furthest to the left among the French I spoke to, employing Marxist

discourse of class struggle and frequently describing work in inherently exploitative terms. Consider Christophe's take on the question:

Christophe: Yes, yes yes I'm sure. I'm sure yeah work is a commodity.

NF: How so?

Christophe: Well, we work for a financial compensation so as soon as we're working for financial compensation it's a commodity. But then it's surely also because I think that work today isn't remunerated at the level it should be, so there's a sort of imbalance between work and the monetary reward we receive for it.

NF: Why is that?

Christophe: Yeah it's, it's because of the evolution of the mentalities among us I think, I don't really know but I think that, in any case society has always had those who are dominant and those who are dominated and the dominated have always worked for the dominant in an unjust way, well never remunerated at its fair value, not considered at its fair value, in fact. There you are. Even if it's a lot better today I think we still work for, not just for us and not just for everyone but for a small part of society.

According to both Christophe and Emma, the characterization of work as a commodity is quite accurate, but also immoral. Even when price of work is determined by the laws of supply and demand, the determined value is neither fair nor accurate. Both consider that non-market ethical standards of the value of work (based on the nature of work as human effort) have primacy over values determined by the market. Once again, their responses reflect an emphasis on the essentially human nature of work, and correspond to the occupational citizenship model which considers workers as equal citizen members of society and holds ethical standards of human dignity over the ethics of market forces (1979).

At the other end of the political spectrum, Nicolas was the most ready to accept the model of work as a commodity:

Well, yes most workers are commodities, if tomorrow I'm no longer able [to work], either I leave or I'm not able to work anymore they'll take someone else. Then, he might be less good because, coming back to your previous question, because my, the personal aptitudes and interests of a person have a role, but yes the person would maybe be a little less good but otherwise... Work, but a worker is a commodity.

In general, Nicolas accepts the model as an accurate description of work, but it's worth noting he also acknowledges the role human psychological differences play even if in the end he doesn't attach to them much significance.

Another area in which the French and American interviewees conceptualizations of work contrast around the acceptance of the commodification of work was in their definitions of work itself. Beginning this time with the French discourse, the most common defining feature of work was as an obligation in distinction to leisure, representing a certain loss of freedom. Édouard and Thierry exemplify this view, when I asked them what distinguished work activities from non-work activities:

Maybe in work you can say constraint, too. Because you don't necessarily want to do it all the time, or that we're a little bit quote unquote, obliged to work if you will. Being in the society in which we're in today you kind of have to. An activity for example that would be, in leisure you really want to do it you're ready to give the fruit of your work to do it, it's something different if you will.

Leisure. Well, in work you necessarily have constraints. All work imposes constraints, otherwise it's not work. Uh, I'll take a stupid example, but NBA players with huge salaries, compared to a simple French laborer for example. They're going to have constraints even if it's a job we're they're having fun etcetera, they're going to have time constraints, they're going to, quote unquote, play every day. They're going to have dietary restrictions, they're going to have to follow a certain diet. They're going to have to be in shape, they're not going to be allowed to do certain dangerous sports. In short they have, they're going to lose certain freedoms. Uh, for me, work necessarily imposes constraints. However for the rest, I don't see who would do anything for their personal pleasure that doesn't interest them. That, the rest is a choice.

As discussed in the previous chapter, for the French work represents fundamentally an obligation and a loss of freedom, though an ambiguous one that also provides the opportunity to find personal fulfillment and to contribute to collective ends.

Dissimilarly, the Americans I spoke to frequently defined work in terms of making value for someone else. David reflects on the same question:

That's like a deep question. That's good, no that's good... So why is this work [we were in his office] versus right like cleaning the house. Um, I guess it comes down to who are you doing it for but I guess I still work for me but... so like I walk the dog, let see I clean the house but it's more for me to provide like intrinsic value internally whereas when I work I'm providing that value for someone else for a client basically so that's kind of the difference for me. Am I doing this for myself or am I doing it for someone else. However for me, personally cause it's my business, I'm kind of doing it all for myself to some extent but um I think that's kind of the dividing line. Am I doing it for me or someone else would be my feeling there.

Ethan and Samuel evince similar reasoning when defining what work means to them:

Um, creating something to either... to create something of value, for someone. I guess that's very very vague but that's what it is.

Work means doing something that you, has a value for someone else, or something in return whether it's money or some other asset or something you're getting in return.

With the exception of Arthur, at one point or another every single American I interviewed described the essence of work in these terms, of creating value *for someone else*. For the French, work had certain inherent characteristics.

Overwhelmingly among the Americans, work is defined not by some inherent value of labor but according to whether or not someone is buying the value created by that labor in the market economy. In so doing, they leave work to be defined by what activities the market rewards as work. Such a perspective is essential to the commodification of work by shedding it of its social, cultural and moral significance.

From this foundation, it then becomes possible to conceptualize people primarily as utility motivated consumers rather than workers, and assign ethical primacy to market mechanisms and outcomes.

On the whole, the American participants were much more prepared to consider work as a commodity than were the French. With the exception of Nicolas, the French rejected (or critiqued) the commodity model by deploying the logics of work as a meaningful activity undertaken by psychological beings or as a collective effort. In contrast, the Americans who rejected the model of work as a commodity for some sectors did not mobilize non-market ethical understandings of work, but instead looked to the logic of the market to structure their reasoning: in some sectors work is not a commodity because it's not treated as a commodity in the market economy. Though in the end they end up rejecting the commodity model of work in many sectors, by looking to the logic of the market in their reasoning, they nevertheless ultimately leave the definition of work to the entities that pay and demand for work. This refusal to conceptualize work separately from how it is treated and constructed in the market is in fact the most basic premise of the commodification of work. In addition, when defining work itself the Americans consistently looked again to the market economy, invoking the model of work as a commodity by defining it as an activity that creates value for someone else. The French, however, with the notable exception of Nicolas, defined work in terms of a psychologically, socially and politically meaningful activity undertaken by individuals: work represents a loss of freedom but an opportunity to find fulfillment and contribute to the pursuit of collective goals. From such perspectives, the

commodification of work stripped of all social, political, personal and cultural meaning was quite senseless to them. Taken together, all of these patterns along cultural lines suggest that the model of work as a commodity and the implied acceptance of market ethics are much more entrenched in the consciousnesses of the American participants, while the French understandings are instead grounded in conceptualizations of work as personal fulfillment or as occupational citizenship.

To illustrate the implications of the distinctive conceptualizations of work invoked by the two groups, consider their reasoning around the very basic question of what constitutes a worthy individual. In an attempt to get at these general values, I asked every participant what kind of people might make them feel inferior and superior. With astonishing consistency, the central values that emerged from both admiring and condescending perspectives were knowledge or culture for the French, and market virtues for the Americans. Because of their length, one representative example from each perspective (inferior, superior) will be presented for each national group. Consider Christina, explaining why kind of people she might feel superior to:

Christina: Superior? Um, people who don't go to college. Um, people who do minimum wage jobs as a career. That sounds—I'm such a brat. I hate saying this. I obviously never show it. I'm still nice to everyone and say thank you and whatnot.

NF: How come? For both of those.

Christina: Just because I know in my head the potential that I have and that what I want to accomplish in life and I could just- in my head I couldn't picture just stopping after high school, working at minimum wage for the rest of my life, and it kind of makes me think, like, 'Really? Are you really aren't motivated at all' it makes me, like, angry at them and want to push them but obviously that doesn't work. Yeah I guess just because I know in my head that I have the potential and I feel like everyone should have that but.

Christina feels superior to people she perceives as lacking work ethic or the internal drive that she knows she personally possesses, because they're not motivated to be successful in life. Lack of drive was a typical signal of individual inferiority for the Americans, along with lesser experience and efficiency at work. Looking up to those deemed superior, productivity, success, and internal drive also emerge as the criteria of moral evaluation. Arthur shows a typical admiration for personal drive, despite his skepticism towards the standard view of success:

Uh I mean someone I guess who has been like, very like persistent. Like it could be, like my mom I feel kind of inferior to. She's a crazy person she like does so much stuff. Anyone really who is really persistent and like keeps doing something without being told to do it. Very self-motivated people I really feel kind of like, wow. Like I don't really feel that inferior to like some like business person who's been there forever and has some important title. Like they just followed the rules basically to get there, but like someone who doesn't follow those rules and has still like done something crazy like even Steve Jobs like I think he was like pretty terrible person, like pretty mean, but what an impressive like, he did so much stuff, like Pixar, Apple it's crazy that he could do that. So I would feel inferior for sure to someone who's like done that much or like has a lot of knowledge. Like this one political science professor who just drops knowledge bombs all day. Like you feel kind of inferior, yeah at my school—like intellectual superiority is kind of scary.

All in all, the criteria Americans used to assess individuals' inferiority or superiority are the same that represent—or are perceived as determinant of—superiority (as successfulness, in the typical American sense) in the market economy. Asking the same question (which I borrowed from her), Lamont (1992) found similar responses among upper-middle class American men who generally are more ready to draw socioeconomic boundaries as criteria for the worthiness of individuals: "the American men I met with were considerably more prone to describe themselves as feeling inferior to rich, powerful, and successful people" (Lamont 1992:65). In contrast, the French men in Lamont's study "were often uncomfortable with probes

concerning their ‘success.’ They almost never describe their friends as ‘being successful,’ this notion itself sounding uncouth in French” (Lamont 1992:65). The contrast rings true with the differential importance of success for the American and French interviewees in this study, and the distinctive conceptualizations of work as a commodity or as occupational citizenship.

By what criteria then, do the French assess individual superiority or inferiority? Arthur, also a young scholar of French culture, offers a clue. At the end notes that he might additionally feel inferior to people who are more knowledgeable—this is atypical for the Americans, but the norm for the French. The domain of knowledge that is important to each French participant is different, but quite universally the criterion of evaluation is knowledge. Again, this is confirmed by Lamont’s study, where she finds that for many of the French men, “intellectual achievement is the achievement par excellence, beyond the money and the worldly success it can bring” (Lamont 1992:92). Paul describes those before whom he might feel superior, and Emma those who could make her feel inferior:

Uh, compared to someone who’s starting out in life. A person who I could teach things, to whom it wouldn’t be like a son but like an educator, you see. In that case I think yes I would take a position of force at that point.

Ah someone who would have literary knowledge, that would really impress me, that’s what has always impressed me. Knowledge, be it in, but especially literary knowledge, or knowledge of philosophy, music, art etcetera. Those people have always, or especially in the same domain as me, and those who are better than me, well then I just feel like ‘wow.’

In valuing the degree of knowledge a person has, the standards that the French participants use to determine inferiority or superiority reflect the underlying moral imperative behind fulfillment, in the sense of perfecting oneself by dedicating effort

to a domain of personal significance. In the same manner, the Americans' preoccupation with market virtues and signals associated with success corresponds to the imperative behind being successful, seen as essential to ensure fulfillment in life. Both of these patterns reflect Lamont's (1992) general finding that upper-middle class American men draw socioeconomic boundaries most sharply, while French men draw cultural boundaries with the same decisiveness.

It remains to be seen, however, exactly how these contrasting logics around the nature of work and general values of individual worthiness translate into views on the nature, effectiveness, and ethicality of the market economy. Taken together, the patterns along cultural lines reviewed thus far suggest that the model of work as a commodity and the implied acceptance of market ethics are much more entrenched in the consciousnesses of the American participants, while the French understandings are instead grounded in conceptualizations of work as personal fulfillment or as occupational citizenship. But before turning to French and American views of the place and meaning of work in society, it should be emphasized again that beliefs about work as it relates to individuals do not necessarily translate into logically parallel opinions on public policy. Regarding American public opinion, for instance, Strauss (1992) cautions against conflating values of personal responsibility—which have to do with individual—with those of the free market—which concern the organization of society. While the neoliberal free market discourse asserts that market outcomes are ultimately fair, the discourse of personal responsibility is more nuanced, proposing that individuals should receive economic rewards according to their commitment to economic

virtues. According to Strauss, discourses of personal responsibility “posit a moral economy where the deserving are rewarded, not one where the bottom line rules” (Strauss 1992:216). In other words, the emphasis by the majority of the American interviewees’ on the importance of success and personal drive does not necessarily imply that unregulated markets are sufficiently ethical institutions upon which to organize the entirety of societal production, consumption, and distribution of economic rewards. To see if and to what extent it does, once again we have to attend to their reasoning, this time concerning markets and the state. Strauss’ research concerns American public opinion, but the central point that beliefs about individuals do not necessarily translate into faith in corresponding policies holds for the analysis of the French interviews as well.

The ethicality of the market

In an attempt to get at cultural perceptions of the fairness of the market, I asked the interviewees two questions about the distribution of economic rewards: is hard work rewarded in society? And does everyone deserve the rewards they receive for their work? To the latter question, the French participants all responded no, evincing widespread distrust of the market’s distribution of rewards as fair and a view of the market as imperfectly competitive. Several lines of reasoning emerged, the most fundamental being that what the market rewards is not necessarily in line with higher ethical considerations of what constitutes productive and socially useful activities. In the words of Emma:

No [everyone doesn’t deserve the rewards they receive]. Of course not. No no no there’s tons of people you wonder why they’re so rewarded, but that’s how it is. And

there you are it depends on status and now you're maybe more rewarded according to the image you give off or the size of your wallet than because you walked on the moon. Today you'll be rewarded because you put so and so amount of money in the right place that's going to make a profit of a million, two million, etcetera. Yesterday you were rewarded because you'd walked on the moon, or you'd discovered something, so.

In some way or another, just about every French person expressed the view that the activities the market rewards are often not ethically desirable. Another line of critique depicted the market as imperfectly competitive. Consider Nicolas and Christophe, reflecting on whether hard work is rewarded in society:

No, it's not always fair, that much is clear it's going to have a lot to do with who you know, all that, it's still kind of like that. No it's still, that's, that [the notion that hard work is rewarded] is too optimistic. It's not always the best who wins even more reason to be clever. It's not always the best who wins and even while trying to be clever you can lose, that's how it is.

Hm...no. Still because of the issue of the distribution of wealth because some people don't have enough and some people have far too much, and so, I think that you can never, personally, you can never make too much, that's stupid, you can't really say 'ok, now I'm making too much.' However you can say that's a problem to be avoided, to say 'ok I can't make much more than this because otherwise I'm hogging a too big slice of the cake.'

For Nicolas, the market is an imperfectly competitive because better connected people are at an advantage, and in any case the market seems to reward luck just as much as those who are hardworking and clever. Christophe employs another line of critique, pointing to power differentials in society determined by the unequal distribution of wealth, which makes it so that market rewards are not fairly distributed. Both of these widely shared perspectives reflect a view of the market economy as imperfectly competitive, and illustrate significant concern and demand for higher standards of fairness. Indeed, the French also demonstrated a non-market ethical understanding of what exactly a good reward means to them, for it was in

response to these questions surrounding market fairness that concerns over emotional rewards and valorization came up. These have been reviewed at some length above so one example from Paul will suffice:

Uh, no [hard work is not rewarded] No I think that we should, we should do kind of like in other countries where they have the best employee, the employee of the month where they put up a board with their photo, I think that makes people happy and it's good for morale to do that kind of thing. In France we don't do that, when you do your job well they tell you 'yes that's good' and that's it, but then you can have bonuses or whatever and that can be interesting, but you won't really have, that's not the notion of reward I would use.

The American participants were much more ready to evaluate the market's distribution of economic rewards as fair and deserved. Half of the Americans considered that hard work was adequately rewarded by the market economy, though only two—Kevin and Christina—made the case that everyone deserved the rewards they received (in contrast to zero and zero for the French interviewees). Beginning with the most conservative vision of work as totally commodified, take Kevin's responses to both questions:

NF: Do you think that everyone deserves the rewards that they receive for their work?

Kevin: Well deserve is a valued judgment.

NF: According to you?

Kevin: I don't think there's such a thing as deserves. The earth doesn't really have any intrinsic morals there, it's just you get what you make. You get what you create for yourself. So are there people who I don't think deserve what they're making, sure, do I think that, banks are easy to skewer, I'm going to choose, I mean it's easy to say pro-athletes are overpaid. I reserve the right to say that for myself, but that said I mean it's not up to me, the market says they're worth a certain amount that's what everyone's kind of collective perception is that they're worth that's what everyone is willing to pay to see them. So yeah does it seem like a lot of money to me yeah, do I think that LeBron James is overpaid yeah probably he's not a very nice human being sometimes to some people, so maybe I just personally think that but it's what the market at large is willing to pay. And yeah I'll say the banks because

they got there by being in cahoots with the government, so they basically got there by force. So no they definitely don't and that's not the result of a free market, so they don't deserve it. I'm willing to say people deserve what the market accords them.

And later,

In America, yeah [hard work is rewarded]. I mean yeah, the market does reward hard work, and I think society does too. I mean you can be, I think in my personal philosophy is kind of that government is standing in the way of rewarding most hard work. The hard work that goes unrewarded is the result of well intentioned but ill-fated government policies, altruistic government policies. For example, the minimum wage. Where it prices the people with the least skills out of the labor market. It makes it illegal to hire the people with the least skills and to develop those skills and for them to start moving up the ladder. So in some cases hard work does go unrewarded. Same as with illegal immigrants. Yeah our immigration policies are in flux kind of so it's kind of a tough call on, if the immigrant who works—I mean at the end of the day, I'm not in it to reward what you deserve. You shouldn't, you don't—nobody deserves anything. It's the services the goods or services that you provide to other people, and they reward you for that. So I think it's up to other people to decide whether you're working hard to meet their needs. You can work hard and not meet other people's needs, in which case you won't be rewarded.

The entire subjective notion of “deserve” is problematic for Kevin, because it constitutes a personal judgment, which is grossly inadequate compared to the infinitely more complex judgment of the market that takes into account everyone's collective perception. In this way, the question of whether something is deserved is subordinated to the judgement of the market economy according to its distribution of economic rewards: “nobody deserves anything. It's the services the goods or services that you provide to other people, and they reward you for that.” Once again, Kevin demonstrates how this vision depends on seeing labor not as inherently containing value, but rather as receiving value in the market according to the willingness of other market actors to purchase what is produced. The free market's determination of prices is the most effective and fairest way to determine rewards because it's infinitely more complex and intelligent than any individual could hope

to be. Government policies that regulate labor and capital are understood as impeding the efficiency of the market mechanism, and thereby can be considered “unfair.” In his views on the market and the state, Kevin rarely strays from the commodity model of work and the neoliberal paradigm founded upon it.

Other Americans, however, were less inclined to totally subordinate ethical considerations of deservedness to market mechanisms. Samuel, for instance, thinks that some people are rewarded for relatively insignificant things:

They could be given way too much money for what they’ve done. I mean yeah demand is calling for it, like people are paying that price for it by giving them that much money. They’re running everything right but like it may not be an important problem in the world, so that someone hardworking who achieves success in like a cure for cancer might not get rewarded as much as Mark Zuckerberg made for Facebook, right? I mean they both work hard, one worked harder I think at a harder issue.

Similarly to the majority of the French participants, Samuel, along with a few other Americans, is willing to concede that market demand is not all there is to the question of deservedness. Some accomplishments and problems have social importance that is not reflected in their market value.

George exhibits even broader distrust of the market’s ethical allocation of economic rewards, when asked whether hard work goes rewarded in society:

Um, not always, I think there are some industries, not even industries but just some, but there are plenty of instance of hard work and people toiling who are not, who don’t earn the same amount in some capacity whether it’s money or like recognition than other people are for the same amount of amount of like raw effort. So certain types of work are more visible to the public, are more lucrative than other types of work and the ones that are more lucrative and more public are the ones that are probably lead to higher success for hard work.

Particularly significant is the criterion according to which George judges whether workers deserve rewards, namely hard work. Market outcomes are not necessarily

fair; rather, they should be allocated according to the practice of economic virtues. George presents and exemplifies a discourse that posits a moral economy and does not necessarily accept all market outcomes. The same line of reasoning was occasionally invoked by many of the Americans, though notably none of the three students at Chapman University. The scattered presence of this moral economy discourse across the American interviews implies that conceptualizing work as a commodity does not necessarily lead to the acceptance of all market outcomes as ethical, and potentially leaves room for state regulation to bring market forces more in line with standards of morality, which are nevertheless derived from the logic of the market.

Finally, the most fundamental line of critique of market fairness was advanced only by Arthur and Ethan. Reminiscent of Christophe's reasoning above, these two argue that the distribution of economic rewards by the market can be unfair because of structural inequality—for Ethan in American society, and for Arthur in the world:

Um.... I'm going to say no. I think there's a huge, income inequality within this country um, that I think should be mitigated by tying high end management salary to low end salary, because with regard to the minimum wage thing, that I think is all relative, and something that is minimum wage in California or New York would be, actually something that's decent living standard of living in the Midwest. So like if a doorman's making 60 000 dollars in New York he's barely, barely getting by but if he were able to transfer that over to the Midwest he would be, in the upper middle class um, spectrum. So, doing like the same amount of hours in the US for a CEO could be the equivalent to a couple years for a, for a minimum wage worker, so I don't necessarily think that's right and I think there should be, something tying those two things together. I was going to say don't quote me but you're taping me—I think it was Japan the highest wage worker can't make something to the effect of like 50 times more than the lower page fulltime worker. And I think something like that, being instituted in the US I think would be beneficial, because is a CEO, uh necessarily worth 20 million dollars a year, are they adding that much value? Maybe, or is it a matter of, trying to purchase talent and compete with the other

people. So with the example of IBM versus HP, they kind of say like HP and Oracle are paying their CEO 15 million so let's pay ours 20 million and then we'll attract the best talent. I think there should be some restrictions put on that because it's definitely more of a focus on, even within my own company you see a lot more emphasis on shareholders than you do on employees. So I think that's something that could be corrected in this country.

No. Um, well especially if you look at the world. Because basically, like once we stopped paying people just a little bit of money to make things for us then we told China to get just a little bit of money to make things for us and some of them are committing suicide, which is probably bad. And now they're going to Africa and saying you should make stuff for us. And so, they're definitely not getting paid very much. Because there's no way that you can, that we'd be able to afford a TV really, unless they weren't paid very much.

Ethan questions the level of rewards that the American market economy has determined that certain CEO's "deserve," according to non-market considerations of fairness. Furthermore, the absurd differentials in earnings are seen as *caused* by the market competition itself—a very rare position to take among the Americans with whom I spoke. Accordingly, he calls for the state to impose some kind of ratio regulation on the market to bring the distribution of economic rewards in line with his more reasonable notion of fairness. Ethan provides a further example of Strauss' (1992) call to caution emphasized above: he considers success and personal drive to be signals of personal responsibility, but he, too, posits a moral economy in which not all market outcomes are fair, as the neoliberal free market discourse would have it. Arthur goes even further than Ethan, pointing to global economic inequality as the source of an exploitative element in global capitalism, rendering it quite unfair. For these two Americans, widespread inequality in the distribution of wealth constitutes a threat to the fairness of the market mechanism—a significant if minority view.

On the whole, it seems as though the American participants are more willing to accept the market economy as generally efficient and fair, though this view is often tempered with other ethical standards in light of market outcomes that make exceptionally little ethical sense. The nuance suggests that they do in fact posit a moral economy, in which people deserve to be rewarded to the extent that they exhibit market virtues. Strauss (1992) points out that such a perspective can be squared with a desire for the state to regulate and intervene in the market economy if market outcomes do not correspond to the understanding of market morality. The extent to which this applies to the Americans I interviewed will be of interest, and considered below.

Contrastively, the French interviewees overwhelmingly expressed broad distrust of the ethicality of market outcomes. The differing patterns of acceptance and rejection of the essential fairness of the market economy between the American and French participants also reflect historical patterns of institutional resistance to the neoliberal extension of the market mechanism in both countries. In Chapter 3, we saw that on the whole, French politics are significantly to the left of their American counterparts, as universal social assistance programs enjoy broad popular support. In the United State, no widely accepted political party has put forward a fundamental critique of capitalism (as evinced by Democratic anxiety over appearing “anti-business”), while in France, there have been no successful appeals by political parties to the ethics of the market. The only episode in which a political party adopted a neoliberal discourse in the mid eighties—Chirac’s brief adoption of a discourse of increasing personal responsibility and independence by overseeing

the retreat of the state from the market economy—failed to gain political traction and was hastily abandoned, never to be revived. More recently, in the wake of the 2008 recession Sarkozy publically rejected Anglo-Saxon liberalism, declaring “the market that is always right is over” (Amable, Elvire and Palombarini 2012). To this day, the French state has a huge presence in the economy, especially relative to the United States. In 2009, French state expenditures and revenues both made up about 50% of national GDP, dwarfing the United States’ expenditures that add up to just over 30% of GDP (OECD 2011a; OECD 2011b). The same persistent distrust of the ethical adequacy of the unregulated market to organize production, consumption, and the distribution of rewards in society underlies the history of French reforms in the face of the transition to the flexible mode of capitalist accumulation as it does the reasoning of the French I interviewed.

Across the Atlantic, the Republican Party has identified itself with a neoliberal discourse of individual responsibility and retreat of the state to the market for decades, with considerable success. The Democratic Party has to a lesser extent also taken the neoliberal turn, though less overtly, in a manner reminiscent of the predicament of the French socialists. Whereas French neoliberalization has been incremental and cautious, the dramatic paradigm shift with the “Reagan revolution” in the United States suggests the Fordist compromise was less ideationally entrenched. In further contrast to France, no widely accepted political party has diffused a fundamental critique of capitalism, and epithets of “socialism” are coded accusations of anti-Americanism as if patriotism were inseparable from faith in the free market. This is not to say that all, or even the majority of Americans accept

these ideas (not all the Americans I spoke to did), yet their political effectiveness is a testament to their wide dispersal and resonance among a portion of American society. Indeed, relative to the French the American participants exhibited much more faith in the free market: Kevin and Christina accepted the neoliberal discourse of the fairness of essentially all market outcomes, and the rest tended to posit a moral economy where hard work is rewarded. In either case, morality is delegated to the logic of the market, be it in a completely practical or an ideal sense.

The question of the necessity of the minimum wage

By examining closely French and American appraisals of the desirability or necessity of a minimum wage, we can start to see how these contrasting patterns of acceptance and rejection of the fairness of the market translate into beliefs about policies. All the students at Chapman, joined by Ethan, concluded that the minimum wage was bad for the poor and bad for the economy. As usual, Kevin presents the most elaborate case:

NF: Do you support a minimum wage?

Kevin: Absolutely not. Because just economically it creates a price floor on the price of labor. A price floor is just like a price ceiling, never works, that benefit those who are already privileged at the expense of those who are the least skilled. Those who are willing to sell their labor for the least amount of money are those who are the most desperate. So by putting a floor on the price of labor, you're prohibiting those who are most desperate from working for a price that they would work for, voluntarily. If we're talking about slaves this is something different if they're compelled to work, but in a free market nobody is compelled to work. So you should let those who are willing to sell their labor for the least amount of money to sell it, because otherwise what you're doing is you're creating structural unemployment. And structural unemployment resides with those who need employment the most. You keep them from getting on the job training, skills that let them move up to a higher position and a higher grade of pay. I saw a cartoon the other day it was two boats, and there are drowning people and a lifeboat that are like off the side of some

huge military ship, and the one said like ‘conservatives’ and the other said ‘liberal’ and the conservatives were lowering like a ladder and it said like ‘freedom’ or like ‘liberty’ on it or something like that and then the liberals were like lowering a pail of fish to these people who are like drowning on the raft, so I thought that was a pretty good representation of welfare versus like the ability to better yourself through work, or however it happens.

Reading like a neoliberal textbook, Kevin reasons that since in the United States work is based on contract law all labor is bought and sold freely and willingly, erasing any possibility of exploitation or coercion while denying differentials of power and wealth. From this perspective, far from protecting the poor, the minimum wage in fact makes it illegal for many of them to be employed, creating structural unemployment. Kevin’s cartoon reference endorses the naïve association first posited in the eighteenth century by Adam Smith between individual freedom and prosperity, citing the superiority of improving oneself by being more free to work (here, for a low wage) “or however it happens.”⁴

It’s worth examining a similar position, advanced by Samuel, since he appears to contradict his views most recently cited above:

No. I think economically it just doesn’t make sense. Everybody should be paid what they deserve, market value –Um, that would help drive a more balanced population.

⁴ According to Temperley (1977), Adam Smith and the classical economists mistakenly believed that slavery was unprofitable because they assumed “that freedom and prosperity went hand in hand. This happy conjunction existed because the most favourable conditions for creating wealth were those which gave men the greatest freedom to invest their energies in those activities which would earn them the highest rewards and which allowed them the most security in the enjoyment of those rewards once they had been earned [...] This had been the British experience [and that of the North American colonists]. Enjoying a larger measure of liberty than other people they had also attained a high degree of wealth” (Temperley 1977:108) Sadly this was not the experience of the over twelve million African slaves transported to the Americas to live, work and die on cotton and sugar plantations that in fact tended to be very profitable for their owners despite the massive restriction of individual liberties. The debasement of freedom and prosperity can quite happily go hand in hand.

We have way too many people who are doctors. Why are they getting paid this much when really the market is demanding this much and should be paying this much right. People would then realize 'Oooh, I need to make more money or I want to make more money' and they'll go to another field that has higher demand, lower supply. I think they like supply and demand, minimum wage does just not make sense at all.

Curiously, when prompted by the issue of the minimum wage Samuel is quite prepared to say that people deserve market value, despite the concern he expressed earlier about the deservedness of rewards as distributed by the market. It may be that he considers Mark Zuckerberg and others like him to be exceptional cases or relatively unimportant ones, because he clearly believes that the market mechanism of supply and demand is the most efficient and fair way to determine the structural distribution of occupations as well as the distribution of economic rewards in general in society. Removing impediments to this mechanism, such as the minimum wage, would result in "a more balanced population." Consistent with the model of work as a commodity, this process depends on an understanding of people are utility maximizing rational optimizers, working as a disincentive in order to support consumption.

Not all the Americans demonstrated such faith in the superior ethicality and efficacy of the "free market" to labor regulations. Duncan and George were able to see two sides of the argument and were unable to come to a firm conclusion.

Consider Duncan's reasoning on the matter:

I don't know it's like, you know I don't know all of the like economic details. I think based on my limited understanding of economics like as kind of this process at a certain level the minimum wage is going to lead to more unemployment because you're not finding the appropriate, sort of the market fair wage. But I think I understand the argument that you know our economy is inherently inefficient and there's a lot of actors who aren't like, aren't perfectly rational. So I understand in order to protect a certain group of people it's probably appropriate to have a

minimum wage. I guess that's probably the most vague answer you can imagine but, I think it's pretty hard to say one way or the other, yeah there should definitely be one or definitely not be one.

Similarly to George, Duncan approaches the problem first from the commodity model of work, presenting the view that when wages aren't set according to supply and demand unemployment will result. But he goes on to critique that model's assumptions, and expresses a concern over exploitation in the absence of a minimum wage. In the end, neither is able to come to a sure stance on the matter.

David was the only American who expressed great certainty as to the necessity of the minimum wage, a position worth reproducing here:

Yes, I definitely do. Um I think in a lot of the country it's still too low. Oregon has one of the highest minimum wages. Um, in the service sector I think that's much more important because a lot of times you're getting people that are sometimes uneducated and so they try to get...people take advantage of them, so it's a good way to protect workers. [...] There are definitely negatives to the minimum wage in terms of you know then having people send work overseas and all kinds of thing back and forth but I would rather live in a society where you're protecting people that need to be protected from corporations or businesses that are trying to take advantage of their employees. Normally those are the businesses that are just worried about that bottom line and so I don't really care if they go away anyways. Do whatever they got to do.

Though David too is aware of the economic arguments against the minimum wage—namely that it can create unemployment and incentive outsourcing by corporations—he “would rather live in a society where you're protecting people that need to be protected from corporations or businesses that are trying to take advantage of their employees.” In other words, given the differentials in wealth and power in American society there is an inherent risk of exploitation in the American economy, which represents an ethical threat that outweighs whatever macroeconomic benefits abolishing a minimum wage might bring.

Exceptional among the Americans in attaching such significance to the risk of exploitation, David's perspective is in fact quite in line with the French participants reasoning on the minimum wage. Only one French interviewee, Nicolas, thought that the minimum wage was not necessary. For the rest, the most common argument was that the minimum wage is necessary to ensure a minimum standard of living for the lowest paid workers, as Paul illustrates:

The minimum wage, well is it necessary in itself, I think it's necessary in the sense that when you have a place to live, when you have bills in any case it's kind of the only way so yes it's necessary, then there are countries like Germany for example where they don't have a minimum wage uh where you see big disparities created. So for me yes it's necessary.

This common line of reasoning that Paul illustrates derives from the occupational citizenship model of work in considering workers to be equal citizen members of society entitled to certain ethical standards of human dignity, and in suggesting that the unregulated "free market" creates inequality. Other arguments largely drew on the same model, as Thierry demonstrates, for instance, advancing several justifications for the necessity of the minimum wage:

It's necessary, but it depends what level you put it at. You can't not have a minimum wage because there's a minimum necessary to live. Uh, today when you live in an apartment you have to pay rent, uh if you with your salary that you work fifty hours a week for, if you're not able to pay that rent, uh what do you do, you know? You're not going to work, well you're not going to work twenty four hours seven days a week just to be able to feed and clothe yourself. To me the minimum wage has to be sufficient to house and feed you. Beyond that there's no point in making it too high either, because you're going to penalize corporations that will have to pay too much to hire people, and they won't be able to develop themselves, do research, create employment in short. The minimum wage is necessary, but then it's the level at which we have to set it. The neoclassical theory that supply and demand always balance at the fair price, it's not true. We know that, it's been three hundred years since we've known that theory is wrong. According to them there would be a stock market crash every three hundred years. In ten years we've still had two though, so uh, you have to look at the reality in front of you. You can't let the market decide everything. You have to at least give it a framework, otherwise, at that point, if you

don't have a livable minimum then you can't set the price for gas, housing, for everything. And uh, you return to a system that's a little archaic and uh, at that point—so I'll take a simple example, you don't have a minimum wage, you're not bothered are you, you pay the employee whatever, whatever you need. If you're in a situation like today where there are more people unemployed than open jobs, you can pay him two hundred Euros a month and he'll be—if he has nothing to live on, if he's got nothing, even two hundred Euros a month he'll take it. I don't consider that to be fair. The distribution of the wealth that you create, it has to go to the employer, to the employee, and to the state—because the state always takes a bit. So for me those three go together.

Though Thierry sees the potential for the minimum wage to harm overall employment he refutes the neoliberal position on the practical effectiveness and moral adequacy of the price mechanism, evincing the widely shared view that ethical standards of human dignity come first. Several of the French participants also demonstrated an understanding of the economic arguments against the minimum wage, but they too subordinated these claims to higher ethical standards. To Thierry, the unregulated and unsupervised market is seen as “archaic” and amoral, and therefore deemed quite unfit to regulate the entirety of our lives and society: absent labor regulations like the minimum wage, there is a very real danger of exploitation and inequality—a vision that also derives from the occupational citizenship model of work. Finally, at the very end of the passage in suggesting that workers are entitled to fairness in the distribution of economic rewards, he again draws on the model of work as occupational citizenship.

Christophe presents an interesting piece of reasoning, drawing on both the model of work as occupational citizenship and as personal fulfillment in order to justify the necessity of a minimum wage:

Yes I think the minimum wage is necessary. I've wondered for a long time, well for one or two years since I've been at school. And I've never been able to really persuade myself of the point of view—but I think that also to get back to what I was

saying earlier, for me work shouldn't be an alienation, it shouldn't be a toil, and we have to, work deserves a salary. So I think it's important that there's a minimum wage, defined that is the minimum receivable that will allow you to live from your work. Because otherwise I don't think people are going to see the point in working if they're not remunerated at a fair value. Because then the thing is the jobs that are paid minimum wage aren't the kinds of jobs people want to do either. I'm sure there are but for the most part, the work isn't necessarily endured in itself however the choice in work at the beginning, it's not really a human choice. I think that it's kind of imposed as work. So I think that that person can't directly find fulfillment (*épanouissement*) in work, if they aren't remunerated with a fair value.

Christophe agrees on the moral necessity of non-market ethical standards of human dignity in the distribution of economic rewards but also notes that, despite the existence of contract law in France, there is still coercion in work because minimum wage jobs don't tend to be inherently fulfilling—to have to choose one is “not really a human choice.” Because such jobs are unfulfilling—and because finding fulfillment is important—those who work them are even more entitled to (non-market) fairness in the distribution of rewards. The French understanding of fairness, illustrated here by Christophe, stands in stark contrast to the criterion of “market value” for deservedness advanced by a substantial portion of the Americans. Fundamentally, at the heart of either French lines of reasoning derived from the models of work as occupational citizenship and as personal fulfillment is the basic premise that workers are first and foremost human beings with psychological and social needs in addition to material ones. Such a perspective is totally at odds with a vision of work as a commodity and workers as consumers, each shed of all social and psychological significance. It's hardly surprising that the ethics of the free market are just as incompatible, recalling the insurmountable contradiction in French political discourse between neoliberal policies for increased labor market flexibility and national values of social solidarity.

Before moving on from the debate over the minimum wage, however, Nicolas deserves some attention as the only French interviewee who argued against the minimum wage:

No... Because—it's debatable I'm not an economist but I think there's no, even if, for example, it's stupid but say you live in Missouri in the United States, to give you a reference do you need the same minimum wage as the guy working at Starbucks in Manhattan? So then I think it's just, it's up to you to know if you can live decently by taking the job. If with six hundred dollars you can have a fifteen meter squared apartment in Missouri and eat some pasta with meat, you buy a bike on sale, you can go to the library and you have a TV, there you go with those six hundred dollars you can live from them. However, in Manhattan, it's up to the company to be responsible and then it's up to the employer to not be so stupid and say with six hundred dollars I can't live here. I think it's up to the company to be responsible, and even have an index according to where they're hiring, which would allow a lot of big factories to stay in Missouri it could be more competitive relative to China. But for me the minimum wage is—it's really up the employee to be intelligent and then up to the company to be responsible. But for me it's not good for competitiveness. But I'm also not the guy being a big jerk, 'yeah everyone gets two hundred dollars all that matters is to maximize profits,' the best is just to allow, I prefer that someone in Missouri works for six hundred dollars rather than not having any work and it's someone in China doing the same job for two dollars and commits suicide after. That's my point of view.

Nicolas was distinctive among the French in giving paramount importance to macroeconomic competitiveness. However, far from suggesting that by abolishing the minimum wage the mechanism of supply and demand would more fairly determine the price of labor, he argues that the minimum wage just doesn't make sense because of the geographic variation in the cost of living (presumably he was really speaking about France while referencing Missouri and Manhattan, where there are in fact different minimum wages). Extending the domain regulated by supply and demand is not an ethically adequate solution for Nicolas, because in addition to individuals needing to make responsible choices, it's the responsibility of *corporations* to ethically distribute economic rewards and offer livable wages at a

minimum. The logic he uses to refute the necessity of a minimum wage derives from a conceptual area we have yet to investigate, the notion of corporate social responsibility.

Corporate Social Responsibility

The French participants consistently espoused the position that a company's first and foremost responsibility is to its employees. This understanding was suggested in Thierry and Nicolas' reasoning about the minimum wage, as it was by Édouard, who considers that while a minimum wage is necessary, it would be harmful to raise it further; instead, corporations are responsible to value their employees' contribution more correctly:

I think that it's up to companies to valorize the value of work rather than giving dividends to shareholders who make hundreds of millions every year. It's the employees that create the real value of a corporation. Without the employees it wouldn't work, without investors either. If there's a big gap between what employees and investors receive even if its normal that in society, investors get the huge majority, maybe it's too much and I think that the redistribution of wealth should go towards the employees and I think could stop at a salary that represents no more than what they merit.

The view that workers are those who create the wealth for the company was shared by just about all the French interviewees, for whom this implies that workers are entitled to fairness in the distribution of economic rewards. From this perspective, workers don't merit what the market is willing to accord them, but a fair piece of the corporate pie, determined according to the nature of their contribution to the baking of that pie. The emphasis on corporate responsibility to employees among the French interviewees confirms Brejning's (2012) argument that in France, CSR exists largely implicitly, in the form of shared understandings and norms that assert

a corporation's foremost responsibility is to its employees. Once again, this reasoning is founded on a conceptualization of work as occupational citizenship, entitling workers to certain ethical standards of fairness and human dignity (Budd 2011). Another significant aspect of corporate responsibility concerns society as a whole or alternatively the state, which stands in for the collectivity by virtue of redistributing the wealth for collective ends, as Arnaud illustrates:

I don't know the responsibilities of a corporation would be to assure, to assure that their employees are happy in their jobs and that they receive their salaries, yeah that they strive to take on responsibility towards their employees, and also the responsibilities of a corporation to the state, because all the money that's transferred to the state is retransferred after like I was saying redistributed, so if the corporation is functioning it will feed the whole system.

Evidently, the responsibility of corporations towards the state stands in for their responsibility towards the wellbeing of society as a whole. The French emphasis on corporate responsibility towards the state draws on another feature of the model of work as occupational citizenship, which holds that work is in part a collective endeavor that produces wealth for society in addition to individuals. Via transfer payments to the state, everyone has a collective share in the wealth created by corporations, which is then redistributed in order to reduce inequality created by the imperfectly competitive market economy—all in the name of maximizing political freedom. Notably, though they argued employees deserved a bigger share of the wealth that was created, none of the French people I spoke to mentioned providing benefits or welfare as part of this responsibility. As Arnaud explains, social welfare passes through the state, albeit funded by the contributions of corporations. Again, this view is in accord with Brejning's (2012) research that suggests CSR is widely perceived in France as an unnecessary "Anglo-Saxon

invention,” because of the firm French belief in the role of the state to providing social welfare rather than leaving it to private corporations. Before moving on and in the spirit of comprehensiveness, consider how Nicolas explains corporate social responsibility to society without invoking the state or welfare benefits:

So it's true that, then again it always makes me laugh a bit when people say that business is something for business and all that because in the end, and we're realizing this more and more in Europe as in the United States, it's that outsourcing by corporations, when a company sends everything to China, all that, the first ones impacted are us, so ultimately the responsibility of a corporation is also to be in accord with its history, and sort of with the people who've worked for her. Which is to say that a French corporation, if 68% of the workers are in China being paid very cheaply and all that, to me that's not really responsible. If you're in accord with your history, so in this case that is French, I hope that everything can stay in France as much as possible and then also do good business, not making money on the backs of their employees just to give it to the shareholders.

Because a French corporation exists, employs, produces, sells and so on *in* French society, it has a responsibility to ensure that the benefits of its activities are felt, as much as possible, in French society. Even without evoking the state, Nicolas' reasoning parallels Arnaud's above, both grounded in the same understanding of work as occupational citizenship, the labor and fruits of which are in part collective.

While the French generally agreed that a corporation was first responsible to its employees followed by its shareholders and society at large, there was a great deal more disagreement among the Americans I interviewed surrounding the proper role of the corporation. One area where the Americans did in fact agree with the French and with each other was that a corporation is responsible towards its employees, with the exception of Kevin:

Uh... Most people would say to make a profit but I think I would say to be beholden to its shareholders interests as long as they're legal. Yeah you can't break the law but a corporation is just the sum of the interests of those who form it. So it should obey its charter and the shareholders, yeah.

Demonstrating continued logical consistency, Kevin refuses to put forward any ethical criteria for responsible corporate behavior, trusting in the decentralized sum of individual interests freely associating in the pursuit of profit to lead to ethical and productive outcomes. Christina's response is rather more representative of the perspective that characterized most of the Americans:

Christina: [The responsibilities of a corporation are to] Pay their employees accordingly, based on their work. Um, follow the rules, You know, no crazy stock shit happening, do their best to grow their business, you know I've heard a lot of stories about CEOs who will try and raise all this money so that they can leave and go start their own company but really their attention should really be true towards the betterment of that company. Um, and then, going along with the rules things I guess they do have—they need to like to do—like if an employee gets hurt they need to pay that employee for that time because, if they get hurt on the job, that's not the employees fault. Not many responsibilities to society, like that was talked about in the last presidential debate.

NF: How come?

Christina: It's—it's not their position. I just don't—it just doesn't make any sense in my head. When that was brought up in the presidential debates I was like what does a corporation owe to society in general? Like if I were to start a business selling pictures, I don't know, selling someone, how does that make me responsible for anyone else besides my employees, people working for me, my stockholders. I just don't get that whole outside responsibility thing. And like, I'm sorry, I'm so like to the point I sound really harsh

As mentioned above, with the exception of Kevin all the Americans agreed that corporations are responsible to treat their employees legally and fairly, though there was less agreement than among the French as to what precisely "fairly" might mean—variation that will be attended to shortly. Also typical, if atypically explicit, is the absence of corporate responsibility towards society or other stakeholders that Christina asserts, a view that conforms to the neoliberal assertion that free market agents have no social or political responsibilities beyond obeying the law. With the

exceptions of George, Samuel and Arthur (who, we will recall, advocated and aspired to social entrepreneurship “on the periphery of the business world”) the Americans consistently omitted any notion of social responsibility of corporations, reflecting the same implicit faith held by Kevin, namely that the free market maximizes social welfare by incorporating the sum of individual interests. But George and Samuel’s side too deserves to be heard; Samuel exemplifies both of their reasoning, arguing that corporations also have external stakeholders in society, to whom they are responsible:

Um, wow in the business world to maximize shareholder revenue but I think personally to provide a good or service that’s beneficial to more than just a handful of people and by doing that you’re employing people and then you also have a lot of bad things like you could be polluting the earth, you could be disrespecting people, you could be forgetting about people or you could not be making money or you could be making too much money, I don’t know.

I mentioned that there was considerable disagreement about what corporate responsibility towards employees consisted of. In fact, I identified two distinctive models many of the Americans were mutually aware of. One of them corresponds to the model of work as a commodity and a disincentive, while the other asserts the model of work as personal fulfillment. Kevin demonstrates his awareness of each, and indicates a predictable preference:

Kevin: I mean there’s also the alternative—like there are basically two philosophies of business that I’m going to have to choose when I do a career. You can either do, get really high pay and just work for a Goldman Sachs type company where they just pay you as much as possible and they have an awesome gym in the basement, they have a great cafeteria, and you just work from like five am to four pm and you just work like crazy and you get as much money as possible. And you have a chauffeur to drive you to work and stuff and someone cooking all your meals at home just because your time is that precious and you make a ton of money. Or you can go like the route that like all the kind of Bay Area startups are going where it’s like you take care of the employee really well, you pay him like, the amenities you give him at work to make the experience more pleasurable. And this is the supposedly more

effective way, in terms of leadership it, it fosters better employee development, where you enable the employee, like you just give them the Google-plex around them.

NF: Is that what a corporation should do?

Kevin: I think it's better for the corporation's point of view because I think it does make your employees more productive. I think it's up to the corporation that said. And as an employee I might not necessarily choose that you know, because Google it doesn't care if it pays you forty thousand dollars more or if it pays for your healthcare. I think I would rather just go to another company that doesn't pay for my healthcare and just gives me the extra money and then I could just spend it as I see fit.

On the one hand, under the Goldman Sachs model work is treated as a disincentive that has to be very highly rewarded financially in order to maximize worker productivity. Contrastively, in the Bay Area startup model the emphasis is on providing the worker with a satisfying and fulfilling environment, which will make them more productive, motivated and thereby encourage personal development—a line of reasoning that would be old news to the French participants. Even though Kevin sees the value in this model, maximizing corporate economic liberty is even more important (“it's up to the corporation that said”). And on a personal level, maximizing individual economic liberty also trumps the benefits of the “Google-plex” since this means greater freedom to pursue fulfillment on his own terms (“then I could just spend it as I see fit”).

To varying degrees, what Kevin refers to as the Bay Area startups model, which we might for present purposes term the personal fulfillment model, was internalized by Duncan, Arthur and David. These three are not very surprising: we've already seen the exceptional importance Arthur and David assign to personal fulfillment from work, and Duncan, after graduating from MIT chose to work

precisely for one of these Bay Area start ups, since “it’s really a great way to you know take on a lot responsibility.”

In sum, the French participants tend to agree that corporations are first and foremost responsible to their employees. Drawing on the model of work as occupational citizenship in calling for fairness in the distribution of economic rewards, they also think workers generally deserve a bigger share than they receive of the wealth the help to create. None of them expressed the view that corporations should be responsible for providing benefits beyond remuneration, but the suggestion that corporations are responsible to the state in the form of paying taxes was common. This pattern corresponds to prior research that found that the French state is entrusted as the only entity to provide social welfare, implying a certain irrelevance of the notion CSR (Brejning 2012). The majority of Americans accepted that corporations were responsible for their employees, with some variation in what being responsible entails. But the majority of Americans also rejected the notion that corporations had any responsibility to society at large, and none of them mentioned any responsibilities to the state. The contrast between the dominant model of work as occupational citizenship used by the French to think about corporate social responsibility implying a strong role for the state, and the Americans’ relatively deeper faith in the market to integrate the sum of individual interests to ethically maximize social welfare highlights another major area of difference in cultural understandings related to work and society: the proper role of the state in relation to society and the market economy.

The state

For neoliberals just as for socialists, the state has a key role to play in putting in place institutions to ensure a fair society and fair market competition. It's the extreme divergence of opinions around what constitutes "fair" that underlies the different prescriptions for the particular form and role of the state that are advocated. In France the state enjoys much greater legitimacy than in the United States, and is widely considered responsible for ensuring equality and the wellbeing of its citizens. In her own study, Lamont (1992) points to the considerable influence in France of the historical national themes of the republican ideals of the French Revolution, which "include the Jacobin obsession with equality, universalism, and national unity," and the cult of Reason, which "sustains the view that society can and should be organized on the basis of a preconceived master plan that transcends idiosyncratic interests, and especially class interests" (Lamont 1992:137-8). Indeed, among my own French participants a firm belief in the moral standards for the organization of society and the need to transcend class interests combined to reify the legitimacy of the state. Christophe's reflection on the role of the state provides a useful point of entry to glean the relationships between the state, society, and the republican ideals of equality and solidarity:

I think that a state has to, it's kind of the mission of the state to ensure that the social contract is respected for every individual in society. And I think that we can't, we live in society but we don't live for society which would be in total alienation, I wouldn't do it, I would rather go live in the forest rather than being totally, to work for others, to live for others actually. But on the other hand if the contract is respected, for me, we live for others. We live together, that's what it is we live for each other but we live by choice and not by obligation, for example.

And continuing later,

[The state's role is important] Because I don't think humans are rational beings. Humans are not capable of... by the sum of individuals to maintain a society that works for everyone.

The second comment is in fact a large part of the source of the French state's legitimacy: the sum of individual interests is considered a wildly insufficient basis upon which to organize society, which means that the state has the crucial responsibility to ensure that the social contract is respected for all. Citizens are equal and when the government ensures their equality in practice, it becomes possible to live *together* in society where individuals are free, as opposed to living for oneself or for the state. Thus, the model of work as occupational citizenship, and more specifically the view of work as a collective effort bearing collective rewards, necessarily depends on the state's role in mediating individual and class interests while ensuring equality. But what exactly does Christophe mean by "social contract"? Thierry offers some insights, elaborating on the specific role of the state:

In France we have what we call the welfare state (*l'état de providence*). So—actually there are two, two schools. It's either the regalian school. Which is to say it's sort of like in the United States, the state takes care of justice, the army and uh, that's pretty much it. Or there's also what we call in France the welfare state that takes care of justice, the armies but also the wellbeing of its people. Which is to say it will create, if necessary, jobs to help companies, it will give subsidies to companies to help them develop themselves, uh it will intervene in the market economy. In France the state intervenes, today, maybe too much, actually. It doesn't leave enough flexibility to businesses, but it always intervenes in the aim of helping. It's always trying to make the situation better. So from time to time that has unintended negative effects, or effects that are counterproductive relative to what was desired, but uh, the aim is always to help its citizens. So it's a role that is very important.

NF: So for you state intervention is not negative in principle?

Thierry: If it becomes negative we become—well like you guys, and us too, we have a revolution. Uh why did the federal states rise up against England, because they judged that the English didn't bring them enough wellbeing. [...Thierry enumerates and describes a series of revolutions...] So yes, the government has to help its

population. If it's just there to, quote unquote take in money and not do anything, that doesn't work, it's not a situation that will last long.

Most broadly then, the state is responsible for the wellbeing of its citizens.

According to Thierry, this responsibility is not only a moral imperative but also a political imperative that determines the legitimacy of the state, in the absence of which revolution seems inevitable. A major function of the state in acting responsibly is to "intervene in the market economy" when necessary and always in the interest of its citizens, by creating employment and subsidizing French companies, for instance. Thierry is more than aware that such actions can have negative and unintended repercussions, but this does not lead him to question the practical necessity and moral desirability of the French welfare state. To illustrate the shared acceptance of this model of the state among the French who I interviewed, compare the perspectives of Arnaud, Édouard and Paul:

Arnaud: No [the government does not intervene too much in the market economy], for me no. No no it doesn't intervene too much. Maybe even some times it doesn't intervene enough precisely because the market economy I don't know I get the impression that everything has a tendency to burst it's banks and so I think it's necessary for the state to intervene, by supervising everything from above, no I don't think the state intervenes too much but then I can't think of any particular examples.

NF: Why is it important that it intervenes?

Arnaud: Because if it didn't intervene well it would be too much like survival of the fittest actually, the anarchy of the market, and I think everything would be derailed and it would be bad (haha).

Édouard: The role of the government is to put in place institutions that aim to ensure a certain quality of life for the citizen. The index of wellbeing is the most important one. If the index of a European country came in last, I don't see how the country could be prosperous. The role of the government is to assure prosperity by putting in place institutions like public health care which already exists for example, or other things that permit citizens to love their country.

Paul: Yes, yes yes yes I think it's important that it [the state] intervenes, but then is it too much I don't know. But yes it's invested in several companies to help them grow, so I think that's good in the sense that, there's a lot of civil servants so it's the state who pays them, they try to help companies grow for example Quick [where I work] we belong 95% to the state, so it's only because of them that we're still standing and that we can compete with McDonald's, so yeah I think that's good.

Each of their responses reflects a certain acceptance of the role of the French state, including its intervention in the market economy, as natural. Arnaud expresses the view that people are most free when the market is contained in a framework ensuring certain ethical standards of human dignity and fairness. Otherwise, the result is predatory capitalist anarchy—each individual living for him or her self, in Christophe's terms. Even if the French participants sometimes complained about certain labor regulations or market interventions by the state, none of them argued that dismantling the framework of the French state would result in a better, fairer, or wealthier society. Édouard explains that part of the state's responsibility for the wellbeing of its citizens entails providing a certain degree of welfare or social insurance, which, in addition to being morally desirable makes people love their country (in a way reminiscent of the link between individual motivation or commitment and personal fulfillment—an intriguing argument, but one advanced only by Édouard). Arnaud and Édouard's comments are nevertheless linked, since redistributing of wealth according to non-market ethical standards of fairness is understood to mitigate the inequality created by the imperfectly competitive market economy, thereby ensuring greater social wellbeing and equality. Finally, Paul's reasoning emphasizes that market efficiency and state intervention are not perceived as contradictory but as complementary: the large public sector and state

investment in industries benefit overall French economic power and competitiveness on a global stage.

Especially telling and frankly, to me at least, surprising, was Nicolas' take on government intervention in the economy. Despite consistently establishing himself as the most conservative French person I spoke to—opposing the minimum wage and berating most harshly welfare recipients—Nicolas nevertheless called for *more* state intervention in the market economy in the form of a return to protectionism:

Nicolas: No [the state does not intervene too much in the market economy]. No and by saying so it's, it's not at all capitalist, but I think that the state still needs to regulate certain sectors of activity if only because if not you have, you manufacture in China, you sell in France, the capital goes to a fiscal paradise, that's not how you make as many people as possible profit from their work. I'm totally OK with capitalism and all that but I think it also needs to always be done in an intelligent way, because when we say yes I'm a capitalist, whatever, what you have to understand is that now capitalism also means that detachment because, you have to, you have to compensate the risks taken in a certain sector but I think the state also needs to regulate certain activities to avoid exhausting our population.

NF: Ok, but isn't that the opposite of what you were saying regarding China? Weren't you saying tariffs and all that were obstacles?

Nicolas: Ah ahh that's precisely what I think we need. What I mean is that, for example the United States have tariff barriers for certain products especially for cars, simply because Chinese cars, Korean cars that are manufactured by Chinese or by Korean people that are paid two dollars a day, compared to an American who's working in Detroit for more money, obviously that car is going to be a hundred times cheaper in theory. Once you put up a tariff barrier so that they're the same price, you make your neighbor work. That's all, but that's why for me the United States aren't so stupid. However there are tariff barriers on Roquefort for example, there I don't agree (haha). For me that's all, it's clearly, it's just economic patriotism and solidarity.

According to Nicolas, the international flexibility of capital represents a threat to the model of work as collective effort, undertaken in part cooperatively for the good of society at large (“that's not how you make as many people as possible profit from their work”). Regardless, the model of work as occupational citizenship is still

morally desirable and should be practically pursued by the state, even though “it’s not at all capitalist,” by regulating the flow of capital and erecting tariff barriers. The overriding theme for the French, including—even especially, for Nicolas—is that the state is responsible to provide an institutional and legal framework so that the market works according to ethical standards of distributional justice and human dignity, in order to curb the anarchy represented by the rule of supply and demand that always threatens to increase inequalities, thereby threatening political freedom and social equality.

The strong belief in the French state’s legitimacy and essential role in providing a framework for the market economy among my participants as well as the model of work as occupational citizenship that structures a great deal of their reasoning recall the historical resilience of the French state, ideationally and formally. From the very beginning, French neoliberalism was handicapped by an internal cleavage precisely over the role of the state, whether intervention or its absence made a market economy more “free.” In the postwar period, the model of state *dirigisme* dominated, asserting (like so many of the French speakers here) that only the state can identify and pursue the common interests of the nation, seen as superior to the sum of its citizens’ individual interests (Babb and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2002; Schmidt 2002). Related is the French distinction between morality, which pertains to universal principles, and ethics, which are subject to individuals (Brejning 2012). In this sense, the market represents the sum of individual interests governed by individual ethics, and therefore is at best an amoral, if not an immoral basis upon which to organize society. Only the state can

govern according to morals, investing it with the exclusive responsibility for overseeing the interests and wellbeing of society at large, in addition to the social inclusion of all its citizens. These traditional values of governance are manifest in the universal and inexpensive access French citizens enjoy to social services, in particular education, and social insurance and welfare programs provided by the state. The latter have continued to enjoy broad popular support despite the economic problems they pose, and many French see their own national identity at stake in the surrender of their state traditions (Meunier 2004). All the French people I spoke to almost totally accepted this vision of the role of the state, further suggesting conceptualizations of the state as a major ideational obstacle to neoliberal reforms that demand its retreat. Especially telling is the fact that the most conservative French participant, Nicolas, called for the opposite of neoliberalization in the form of increased protectionism and state intervention in the market economy.

American views on the role of the state and its relation to the market economy are decidedly different. For the sake of contrastive drama, we begin again with Kevin's point of view. What began as a rhetorical sideswipe at the federal government quickly snowballs into a neoliberal discourse on markets and the state:

NF: Any other negative effects of work?

Kevin: If you work for the federal government that can only be negative (haha). No I just hate the federal government because instead of being productive system you're basically just spending all of your time interfering with markets.

NF: Yeah but the government provides services too.

Kevin: Yeah there are some essential functions of government, I'm exaggerating but the department of education, that's just a drain all of those people should be working in private education instead of slowing down private education.

NF: How are they slowing it down?

Kevin: Because they're working in a bureaucracy kind of regulating this thing whereas if you had the market you know, let markets control education and you'll have it conform to the demands of the consumers of it. So instead of having a bunch of people saying 'oh no child left behind' at the department of education, all of those people could be working at, you know there could be a huge education corporation and they could be making it more efficient, leaner, uh they could be teachers for example and they could be improving what actually exists instead of slowing it down, is the way I would put it. Like people who regulate like, I'm trying to think of a good example. Like I guess there aren't really that many smart people at the SEC—like I was going to say, there are smart people at the SEC but, like if those people working at the SEC were instead participating in the market, it would take care of itself instead of like achieving like objectives counter to what we're trying to do.

NF: Just by having more competition there wouldn't be any problems that the SEC is supposed to regulate?

Kevin: Yeah because the SEC is supposed to regulate a lot of things but they'll never be as smart as the market, the market is like everybody, and so you can't have one person at the SEC outsmarting the market, that's why things like Burnie Madoff and stuff like that happens. So instead of participating in the market and you know, automatically correcting it, you're having them like slow down markets by having them interrogating everyone and saying 'yo don't do insider trading', that kind of thing. I'm not expressing that as well as I should but...

And later on,

Kevin: The government should insure prosperity but the government cannot guarantee prosperity. The government has no role in creating that prosperity, only individuals can create prosperity. Can you say that this building creates—well actually that's a bad example. You can't say that a fictitious entity creates prosperity it's only the result of the hardworking people who are out there creating it themselves. So the government's role is to provide an environment in which individuals can create prosperity. Um when the government is ensuring welfare of other people, it's redistributing prosperity but it's not creating any prosperity. You're taking money from someone else to put it into something else, you're not creating any money. The only way prosperity can be created is through exchange and trade, basically, specialization and exchange. Yeah so the government has an important role in providing the right environment, whether that's through defense or a police force or something like that. Or not bailing people out for example, but

yeah the government has to insure and environment in which everyone plays by the same rules.

There's a great deal here but at the same time nothing particularly new. Unregulated markets are by a very long ways the most effective mechanism to organize the production and distribution of goods and services—it seems *all* goods and services—and whatever demand might call for, short of illegality, is ethical since demand called for it. By virtue of internal competition and apparently superhuman intelligence, the market is also self-regulating, though only in the total absence of external regulations. Furthermore, government regulations and regulators face a task that is practically impossible—because the market is smarter than any individual—and morally reprehensible (to the extent that the creation of wealth is an inherently moral end)—since regulation will inevitably “slow down,” “distort” or “interfere with” market efficiency. Indeed, just about all ethically undesirable market outcomes are ultimately the result of acts of state interventions in the naïve pursuit of non-market ethical considerations. Accordingly, the proper role of the state is to “provide an environment in which individuals can create prosperity” with a level playing field (meaning without state regulations), since all prosperity is ultimately the product of individuals trading goods and services in the market economy. This means that state efforts at redistributing wealth in the naïve pursuit of equality is counterproductive in addition to being unfair, since it reduces the incentive for rational utility maximizing individuals to create wealth in the first place.

Even if Kevin's position is extreme in the depth and coherence of the internalization of the neoliberal paradigm, he nevertheless represents a majority

position among the Americans interviewed. Ethan was unsure about implementing greater state intervention in the economy, while David and George considered the contemporary level of intervention to be just about right. Others shared Kevin's conviction, if not all of his passion, in the supreme effectiveness and ethical adequacy of the unregulated free market. Christina and Samuel reflect on the role of the American state today:

They should provide opportunities to an extent, to people who need it. Provide for education, provide like, you know, mentorships, whatever that entails. But there's been a sense of our idea of equal opportunity has kind of moved to this idea of equal outcome which is really messed up because yes I think there should be an equal opportunity, you know, it should be merit based. Everything should be equal to all races, sexes, genders, whatever but that doesn't mean that the government needs to ensure that you will be prosperous from those opportunities. Does that make sense at all? Ok. Um, I hate the idea of equal outcome and no one wants to say it because no one wants to believe it. But that's definitely what we've come to, people think—back to minimum wage people think that 'Oh cause I'm working this many hours and that person is working this many hours, we should both be getting same pay' and it's—it's messy with the market, it's not—it doesn't work in economics, you can't—I don't know.

I think that the whole tax situation is terrible. I think that, like X and I talk about this all the time, I think one argument he has, that there shouldn't be stepped up taxes for baseline income levels everybody would pay the same tax rate, everyone would feel the same pain, or everyone would not feel the same pain or whatever. You're making ten grand, you're being taxed this much. You're making a million dollars and you're taxed exponentially more. How is that any fairer to that person making a million dollars when they've worked hard enough to earn that million dollars, in fact probably worked harder than the ten thousand person, right. So you are incentivizing people not to work harder. That's how I see it. All the benefits that people get, low income or people that don't have jobs, to me there's way too much of that right now. Like I say you're now incentivizing people not to go to work, or not to make this much money-- you're incentivizing these people to meet these qualifications so they can get more money in return than if they went and worked got a job, right. So I think that these people that get paid a million dollars shouldn't be help ransom thirty - fourth percent, if our society welcomed sharing and being nice to others and caring for others it would donate that money in some form right, do it's like, instead of just grabbing it from them because they worked harder than another person to me that's not fair. So I think by raising taxes and having more spending you're only making it worst, your making incentives way, way worse.

Both of them fundamentally object to attempts by the government to hold and enforce non-market ethical standards of equality and fairness above the ethicality of market outcomes. Even though Christina isn't able to express exactly why, evidently she firmly believes in the ultimate fairness of economic outcomes as determined by the market mechanism, as opposed to non-market considerations of the meaning of "fair." Samuel's reasoning reflects a similar conviction, considering progressive tax rates and welfare transfer payments to be disincentives for individuals to work and create wealth. Market inequalities indicate non-market inequalities, so grabbing wealth disproportionately from those who worked harder is not fair.

Though the American views of the free market and the state reviewed above represents the majority of the American sample, those who did not subscribe to those views merit some attention of their own. As mentioned above, George considered that "the government only intervenes when it needs to and I don't think it will intervene just because it has the power to do so." Similarly, David argues that "in the US it's a pretty free market and a lot of decisions that, like anti-trust, bailouts and all that kind of stuff makes sense to me. And I think it's...a lot of the time the government only intervenes when it needs to and I don't think it will intervene just because it has the power to do so." Ethan, however, presented a surprising argument for "the right mix of socialism and capitalism in this country:"

I think that, we should guarantee that work is, work is rewarded to a certain extent, um, what that extent is I leave that up to philosophers, but we shouldn't be, we shouldn't necessarily subsidizing people that don't work, I'm definitely not for that. Um, but trying to have the right mix of socialism and capitalism in this country I think would be ideal because we do have unreasonable pay at the top end, and the we do have a lot of people running into poverty issues at the bottom end... so... it's hard to set like a minimum standard and I think that's what the minimum wage tries to do, but it is kind of an imperfect system because it increases the cost of capital so

it also increases the incentive to get rid of those people altogether. So does that, in the long run, help people or hurt people? It's hard to argue in there. So I think it should, it should have a role in there to try and reign in the top end a little bit, whether it would be imposing like a ratio law which I think would be the fairest way to do it, because I don't think taxing people that get paid a lot is really the issue, especially because the wealthy tend to make most of their money on investment income.

But later, when asked, "Do you think the government intervenes too much in the market economy?" Ehan replied:

Um, certain things yes, and certain things no. I think it does not intervene when it comes to implementing things like, a fair pay ratio kind of thing, and that's more of catering to the top end. And I think when it comes to, let me think of a good one where it intervenes too much.... Um... but like farming subsidies and stuff like that for sugar, or whatever, where you're lowering the price and that may have a lot of unintended consequences by, by people consuming more of it. So you're originally doing it to help out family farmers but then that contributes to an obesity epidemic, so doing, doing things along those lines, for example on stuff like inequalities may have unintended consequences. So maybe the ratio thing it's a good idea in theory but I can't think of a reason it might be creating poverty in some manner.

By "the right mix of socialism and capitalism," Ethan means putting in place regulations to bring the market economy in line with a more ethical standards for the distribution of economic rewards, which, in its present state is "unreasonable." However, he also accepts the economic arguments that transfer payments represent a disincentive to work and create wealth, and that state intervention in the market can have negative consequences despite having the best intentions. The latter argument causes him to reevaluate the regulation he proposed to institute a ratio for the distribution of economic rewards, since it too "might be creating poverty in some manner." In other words, Ethan has trouble squaring his belief in the efficiency and unknowable complexity of the market economy with his desire for state regulation to curb inequality by distributing wealth according to non-market standards of fairness.

The conviction held by the majority of the American participants that state intervention in the market economy inevitably causes more social harm than good, while the market is seen as a more efficient, intelligent, and fair mechanism upon which to organize society conforms to the particular history and form of neoliberalism in America. In Chapter 2 we saw that the Chicago School version of neoliberalism in particular strives to undermine the state's legitimacy by reducing the actors and functions of the state to the identical ontology of neoclassical economy (Mirowski and Van Horn 2009). This logic maintains that the state is merely a vastly inferior means to achieve outcomes than the market whose efficiency is unrivaled. This anti-state paradigm was imposed decisively in the United States with Reagan's massive social deregulation, removing the state from the market economy to unleash the productive power of freely competitive industry, and has been carried forth by the Republican Party to this day. Given its age and political prominence, it's unsurprising that the majority of the American interviewees accepted this anti-state discourse to varying degrees, which combines with notions of individual responsibility and freedom.

To illustrate and summarize the stark differences between French and American understandings of the state and its relation to the market, it's worth briefly invoking an example from each group's accounts of what they're proud of in their society. Compare the responses of Arnaud and George, selected for their representativeness:

Arnaud: I don't know I think that, as opposed to the United States or I don't know other more liberal countries let's say, France is going to be more, we're all going to take care of everyone, actually. Like with social security, health insurance, all that.

And uh well I think that's, I think it's good. You see education is free all that. I think that's really good, that's what I'm proud of in French society it's those things.

NF: And why?

Arnaud: Because they're, all that is accessible to everyone. There's no need to have, no need to have money—that's what it is actually, you don't need to have money to have access to education, to have access to medication, to have access I don't know...Uh but there's tons of examples, to have plenty of money saved to continue to live when you're done, at retirement, even though I don't know exactly how it works in the United States or in other countries, but there's quite a bit of aid for foreigners, the disabled, all that.

George: I think like American society is a place where if you work hard you will get rewarded for it. It's not...and you can move up in society too, you're not stuck in some kind of caste like if you... There are plenty of examples of people who come from low-income families and work their way up and become high income or like huge success or become great leaders or something like that. And it's not.... and the great thing about the US is that there is no fixed way to do it. You don't need to go through some kind of government program to be like the top dog or to be someone successful here. I think a lot of it is up to the individual to take their chances.

With near universality, the French stressed France's humanist tradition and the nation's commitment to a more "human approach to capitalism," "social solidarity," or "a team spirit." Their responses suggest impressive confidence in, and indeed identification with, the French model of the state that strives to provide an institutional framework such that the market economy functions according to the laws of human decency. This view is in line with the history recounted in Chapter 3, where we saw that French social insurance and welfare programs have been publically popular for decades, such that early neoliberal reforms by both parties focused on the more popular privatization of state-owned industries. Furthermore, the French responses are in agreement with Meunier's (2004) claim that ideationally French national identity is closely entwined with the national state

traditions, posing an even more fundamental obstacle to the process of formal neoliberalization.

In contrast, the Americans I spoke with were mostly proud of the nation's foundation on individual rights, and a timeless American character that stands for personal responsibility, internal drive to be successful, and upward mobility. Each version was closely associated either with historically unrivaled American prosperity or the American dream, even if some of them believe that dream to be over. In consistently emphasizing the possibility for individuals to achieve success and upward economic mobility, the Americans internalize and identify with a model of free and responsible individuals, whose self-interested determination alone ensures prosperity, not only for themselves, but for the nation as well. The role of the American government, however, is quite absent, implying a conviction that America is a nation built by free individuals unhampered by supra-individual governmental influence. The trends among each national sample in praising their society reflect and reinforce the distinctive significance that either group assigns to the state.

Social welfare

The final area where we must contrast French and American cultural understandings is in regard to welfare. The debate around welfare brings together the major themes of this chapter: work, in relation to both the individual and to society, the market economy, the state, and acceptance of neoliberal policy reforms. The following discussion will reference the three welfare discourses introduced in

Chapter 2: redistributionist (RED), social integration (SID) and moral underclass (MUD) (see Brejning 2012). Each of the Americans' evaluations of welfare all invoked elements of MUD, which were sometimes combined with SID. Kevin exemplifies the pure MUD perspective:

Um, no I mean you can help people with welfare to a certain extent but—there's another thing I read the other day, we say please don't feed the birds at the park because then they'll become dependent and they'll lose ability to find food for themselves and things like that, and I think that welfare to a certain extent is the same thing. Am I, would I say no welfare whatsoever, not necessarily, but there's more room for private charity than I think there will ever be in a public welfare system. Margaret Thatcher said socialism is great until you run out of other people's money to spend. So yeah I think there is room for both but I think it's really hard to put into perspective what's appropriate. A lot of people just think that whatever they decree would be appropriate, I want some kind of objective standard for welfare. And I don't think that, for example paying people enough to sit around and do nothing is a good idea. I think you should give them just enough so you know they don't starve or something like that, but so that they should continue to search for a job, something like that, get back on their feet, help themselves. It's important that you're not creating a disincentive to work.

Consistent with MUD, overly generous benefits are perceived as creating a culture of dependency among welfare recipients. As we've heard at length above, the redistribution of wealth is itself unfair and unproductive, because it impedes the incentives to create wealth while subsidizing a state of dependency. The policy solution is to tighten benefit eligibility while restricting generosity in order to incentivize the poor to help themselves. Moreover, the fundamental problem is not that welfare recipients don't have the resources to get ahead, but that they lack personal responsibility: they need to "get back on their feet, help themselves." Indeed, displaying personal responsibility by looking for work and demonstrating a willingness to improve oneself in order to be upwardly mobile frequently emerges

as the criterion for whether a person deserves benefits or not. Consider the examples of Christina and Samuel who, along with Ethan, also invoked MUD:

Christina: Ok.... It [whether the unemployed deserve assistance or not] depends. If they can't find work because they don't—they really don't know their opportunities, they're really stuck, um, they have a disability, they can't drive, they don't own an apartment, they don't—endless amount of things, they deserved assistance, not monetary assistance, absolutely not, there no good in that, just feeding someone money, that does nothing to them. They don't grow at all. I think they should have some sort of mentor maybe or you know get discounted community college to learn a few things. They really just need the skill-set far more than they need the money. You can't just throw money at someone and think that they're all of a sudden going to go and find this huge job and get an apartment. You have to give them the skills. That would be the only assistance that I would agree to giving someone. And it has to be for a very needed reason, it can just be like 'Oh man, I didn't find a job this week. I applied to one place and they didn't call back. Shoot. I didn't get a job.' No, that doesn't count, you have to show a real need for it in my opinion.

Samuel: Um, to some degree going back to persistence right? They've exhausted every possible scenario for them to find work and they can't? Yeah, definitely, I don't think it should be frowned upon and I don't think it should be socially unacceptable to have that help. But, if you're lazy or you haven't tried some of the verticals, well no, you definitely shouldn't receive help, like you're just not working hard enough. I think that should be held across the board for everybody unless there is some—I guess, like if let say there's some like a retarded person, they would have some of verticals that they couldn't achieve because like of a mental block of some sort. But if they've exhausted everything else than they should have help. Now an average person would have more verticals to reach and if they, like say like, OK I'm visualizing it which is going to be hard to go back, but like say they achieve all the same verticals as the mentally ill person, right and a mentally ill person can't achieve the rest of the verticals but the average person can. The average person can't do that, they shouldn't need help. They shouldn't be able to get help. The mentally ill person should because the mentally ill person has done to their capacity what they can do, Um, so I think yeah, if you're exhausting every possible scenario, yes.

For Christina and Samuel, in order to be eligible for welfare benefits people have to demonstrate real need *and* real personal drive in looking for work. For Samuel, this entails exhausting every possible opportunity. As we saw in Chapter 4, personal drive is a signal of personal responsibility: “if you're lazy or you haven't tried some of the verticals, well no, you definitely shouldn't receive help, like you're just not

working hard enough.” Christina goes on to argue against any financial benefits, because just “feeding someone money” doesn’t make them “grow at all.” Again, this reflects the belief that the problem is not a lack of resources, but rather a deficiency in personal drive to improve one’s own socioeconomic position. Help in the form of training and education can come from outside, but in the end the onus is on the individual to improve his or her position, thereby escaping the moral underclass of dependency.

Arthur and David represent two exceptions to the pattern of MUD reasoning among the Americans. Though they both see a real risk of benefits creating dependency, they eventually conclude the welfare system is valuable despite the presence of “a few bad eggs.” Arthur’s reasoning is illustrative of both of their perspectives:

Like I think that the government should be a last resort, because I’d rather if your parents are ill you not just assume oh the government will take care of them, I don’t have to. Like I would rather hear like, oh I feel responsible to my parents and they’re sick, I should take care of them. So like I look at the government more as like a safety net and like they should be there, because a lot of people aren’t taken care of, but I’d hate to see—like I’ve hear Sweden because the government does so much that there’s a certain loneliness, that people don’t rely on each other as much like their family and stuff because it’s kind of like, oh well if you’re in tough times or whatever you will be taken care of, like I don’t necessarily have to risk my livelihood or like my time. So I’d say there needs to be a balance but ultimately you know if people can’t find a job you know, I’d like for them to get help. Not necessarily a check but like I’d like for them to like maybe get a check for their necessities, but also like pay for them to go to school or something, or somehow help them get a job. Like realizing, you know like I don’t think that people should be permanently dependent on assistance, like if they don’t have to be. Like I’d like for them to try to get opportunities to, and like help with those opportunities, to do whatever it is that they want to do.

David and Arthur both employ MUD terminology of dependency to characterize those who don’t exhibit personal responsibility in looking for work. Moreover,

Arthur sees the risk that Swedish-levels of benefit generosity can have the perverse effect of making people less responsible for themselves and their families. Where David and Arthur deviate from the rest of the Americans and begin to subscribe to a SID vision is in conceding that most people who can't find work are in fact deserving of assistance. Paid work is seen as the route to social inclusion, rather than becoming more individually responsible. At first glance, Arthur's reasoning about offering training and education at the end of the section above might seem identical to Christina's, which was classified as MUD. The distinction is subtle: while Christina maintains that people should be given training or education to enable them to help themselves, Arthur is willing to do that and more, helping them "with those opportunities, to do whatever it is that they want to do." Unsurprisingly, as we saw in Chapter 3, David and Arthur are the two Americans who attached greater significance to work as personal fulfilment, in contrast to the general American tendency to conceptualize work as a commodity. MUD, as we have seen, exists at the intersection of the economic rationality of incentives and disincentives and the imperative to be personally responsible and driven. SID, in contrast, gives greater attention to the psychological wellbeing of the unemployed, for whom work represents social inclusion and emotional valorisation.

Once again, it appears as though the American interviewees' reasoning on welfare is largely aligned with the logic underpinning institutional reforms of the American welfare state during the historical process of neoliberalization. In Chapter 2, we saw that the transition from AFDC to TANF under President Clinton reflected a shift in the logic and discourse of RED to MUD by making benefits temporary and

conditional. Indeed, the MUD discourse is itself an American product and can be traced back to the neoconservative preoccupation with high levels of state social expenditures during the 1980s. With the exceptions of Arthur and David, the American participants consistently reasoned according to MUD, which plays off of American values of success and personal drive as signals of responsibility, arguing that overly generous benefits have created a culture of dependency and that benefit eligibility should be further tightened in order to incentivize the poor to be more personally responsible and improve themselves. In addition, the importance of signalling drive and work ethic in order to be eligible for assistance reflects the importance of work ethic in the American institutions that distribute both public and private welfare, with wealthier workers receiving the most substantial benefits from the public sector subsidized by the state, those unable to work considered worthy of public assistance, and those who are perceived as unwilling to work receiving the strictest access to assistance. In France, where reforms to the welfare state have encountered powerful popular resistance, as we might expect, reasoning on welfare looks very different.

As foreshadowed by the American exceptions who particularly value personal fulfilment from work, the dominant welfare discourse among the French interviewees was SID. The only exceptions were Nicolas, who reasoned firmly in terms of MUD, and Christophe, who invoked RED when asked if those who kind find work deserve special assistance:

Yes. Yes yes of course. Of course to be able to face everything, the concreteness of society. I think that, well, I think that nobody, even the guy who's considered the most successful, nobody is really capable of, uh, of being fully conscious of all the factors that determine the environment of society. Because we still all live, a little in

a, for ourselves, we can't master everything you know. So from that point, I think that there are people who are in need and I think for those people things aren't going very well so it's necessary. It's important yeah, it's even obligatory.

Christophe subscribes to RED in defining social exclusion and eligibility for welfare in terms of who has financial resources and who doesn't. The poor are not to blame for their condition but are the victims of society, since "nobody is really capable of [...] being fully conscious of all the factors that determine the environment of society." And redistribution of wealth instead of paid work is seen as the "obligatory" policy solution to poverty.

Thierry's view of welfare was more typical for the French participants, drawing on SID for his reasoning:

So everything depends if they're looking or if they're not looking [for work]. If they can't find anything, because they're looking, it can be because they don't have, maybe the right training. Maybe they didn't specialize themselves enough in a particular domain, maybe the region where they are doesn't have enough employment. It's important to help them, to incite them to move regions to find a better job, or just to find a job. So if someone is willing, you can help them. Someone who is not willing, who doesn't want—OK I'm not saying don't give him anything because there's still what you might call respect for human dignity. You can't decently leave someone with nothing without him expecting it, if he has major health problems, insurance—at least a small health insurance, mutual, for example. Because I know that in the United States people make a lot of noise because of, or supposedly because they work for millions of Mexican immigrants, that's another debate. So there you go then someone who doesn't want to work, you're not necessarily going to help them beyond that. You're not going to let them fall into deep misery either, because I still consider that there's a certain level, humanely you can't cross someone in the street who's totally deprived with nothing. They have to at least have something to live on, to be able to eat, at least to be able to eat and house themselves that's the essential. But then someone who doesn't want [to work], there's no point in helping them beyond that.

According to Thierry—along with Édouard, Nicolas and Paul—whether someone is willing to look for work determines whether they are deserving of state assistance, evoking one aspect of MUD. Those who are willing can and should be helped to

improve their situation, while those who can't work are deemed unable to be helped. Even so, drawing on the logic of SID, society and the state are considered responsible to ensure for the latter basic necessities to survive because of "respect for human dignity [...] humanely you can't cross someone in the street that's totally deprived with nothing." Drawing on social solidarity, the implication is that since all are formally equal citizens of the same society, all are entitled to a certain baseline considerations of human dignity. In other words, even though the imperative behind the will to work as the criterion for deservedness recalls the majority of American attitudes and MUD, its severity is tempered by the moral and political imperative of the state to ensure ethical standards of human dignity, resulting in an overall SID on welfare.

Emma and Paul pursue different courses of reasoning to arrive at SID, drawing respectively on models of work as personal fulfillment and as occupational citizenship. Emma explains why state assistance is necessary for the unemployed:

Emma: Well precisely to revalorize them, to help them to, when you get fired you're in a world, in a situation well the feeling of having nothing and when someone encourages you and says to you here you go, you can do this, well it's obvious, it's obvious. It's obvious that will help you. But that's instituted in France, it's not, maybe not for everyone there's not enough but in any case there's that approach.

NF: It seems like you're saying aid should be more in terms of that revalorization, rather than unemployment insurance for example.

Emma: Ah yes, no no financial assistance is necessary but there's no point in giving more for the sake of giving more what's more important is to have a support behind it, of psychological revalorization.

Here, Emma uses the model of work as personal fulfillment to reason that the unemployed aren't to blame for their situation, since being unable to work constitutes social exclusion and a major impediment to personal fulfillment. Even

more important than financial assistance is “psychological revalorization,” or emotional support to make the unemployed feel better about themselves and their abilities, thereby motivating them to *find* their personal drive to improve their condition. In other words, the absence of that drive is not an inherent characteristic of the individual, as the majority of Americans and several French participants hold.

By way of contrast, consider Paul’s reasoning on the matter:

Paul: Uh yes and no in the sense that I think that in France we help people a lot, uh enormously people with benefits and aid etcetera. Uh I think that there are lots of people who are resting on their laurels let’s say in the sense that they’re not working because they know they’ll have assistance and they know that without working they’ll get money, and I don’t think that notion is at all interesting for France. Then again there are people who are in real need, and in that case yes we have to help them, but at that point you have to sort them out. But how to do the sorting that’s the real question.

NF: But now it’s not working?

Paul: No no the problem is that we help everyone and some people don’t work so they’re unemployed and they get the same salary as someone who is working, and as further compensation they’re doing little jobs on the side [not recognized by the state: *au black*] and they’re making even more money and, they’re not making the economy work.

In parallel to Thierry, Paul distinguishes between the deserving and undeserving according to willingness to work, and looks down on those who choose not to work.

The logic behind Paul’s disapproval however merits further examination: the issue is not framed in terms of these individuals lacking personal responsibility, but in terms of them reaping economic rewards without contributing to the collective effort that is work—“they’re making even more money and, they’re not making the economy work.” According to the model of work as occupational citizenship, this amounts to a breach of social contract. Whereas Thierry drew on the value of social solidarity to justify a minimum level of aid according to human dignity, Paul invokes

the same value from the model of work as occupational citizenship to designate certain people as undeserving.

Lastly we must attend to Nicolas, who had the harshest view of welfare recipients:

Someone who can't find work which is to say he has a real physical mental limiting capacity or whatever there's no problem social assistance and whatever you like. However someone who says 'Oh nice, welfare, hey there's housing, there's whatever I'm staying and home and watching soccer while scratching my balls,' that is, that's out of the question. And in France I think that you can have up to twelve years of unemployment insurance and all that, it's obvious that there are some people in France who reason that 'Oh la la I'm not working this month' because they get more by not working and receiving benefits. It's evident, the French system creates lazy people, there's no secret there it's another culture, it's another way to incite people to stay, to stay inactive so that now the Frenchman is seen as lazy. But quite clearly you've got too many incentives to do nothing, not to work. And I mean me personally I'm unemployed I do everything I can to have a job, I wouldn't take anything but I do whatever it takes to get back on my feet. Me, while there are some people 'oh this is nice life is beautiful I'm not doing anything anymore,' and no. To me it's, you have to force people too to go look for work even if it's 500 kilometers away, even if to come back you leave every two weeks to see the wife and kids, even if you need to get more training, even if you have to work at night, there are too many people who say to themselves 'Oh no, I had a thirty five minute commute ah no I don't want to, Oh no I have to work Saturday morning ah no I don't want to, oh no I have to wake up early ah no I don't want to,' well you see what I mean. In any case you'll still have money for unemployment and all, but I think you have to put people in a situation where they're up against the wall and forced to look for work. On that I'm pretty American (haha). On that, very much so. It's cultural history, you give money to people not to work they won't work. But people who abuse the system and all they're not my friends, I wouldn't be able to be friends with someone like that, or in any case they'd be teased constantly, 'Hey you fat lazy fool look I'm going to work today!' there you go it's, I think that's also Europe's problem now, we incentivize people too much not to do anything. And it's kind of our fault, that's why Europe is in decline. That's my perspective.

Nicolas completely adopts a MUD vision of welfare concerning people who choose not to work, which he considers to be "pretty American:" a culture of dependency has been created by overly generous welfare benefits, which "creates lazy people" according to the logic of economic disincentives. He draws strong moral boundaries

between himself and the moral underclass of dependency—“they’re not my friends.” Consistent with MUD, the policy solution according to Nicolas is to tighten benefit generosity to incentivize individuals to be personally responsible and seek work in order to improve their conditions. He presents quite an exceptional perspective considering the French pattern regarding welfare, dominated by SID, and he signals his awareness that his views are atypical in French culture.

The dominance of SID among the French participants’ reflections on welfare also parallels the logic behind the institutional reform of welfare in France during the 1990s and early 2000s. In France, as we saw in Chapter 3, the discursive and policy shift concerning welfare can be characterized as a transition from MUD to SID, and a compromise between neoliberal demands for labor market flexibility and the French state’s traditional commitment to social solidarity. Except for Nicolas, the French interviewees maintained, consistent with SID, that social exclusion is defined by exclusion from the labor market, and finding paid work is the solution. The RMI that offered assistance on the basis of poverty was perceived as overly generous, and in 2004 the RMA was introduced with stricter obligations for benefit recipients to find work, reflecting the perceived need to eliminate disincentives to work. When the French people I spoke to were critical of their welfare state, it was overwhelmingly in terms of the disincentive to work represented by overly generous benefits. However, except for Nicolas, these concerns did not combine with the characteristically American imperative for individuals to be personally responsible, resulting in anxiety over a moral underclass of dependent welfare recipients. True, several of the French distinguished between the deserving and

undeserving in terms of looking for work, but the implications of these criteria for deservedness were tempered by more overarching commitments to social solidarity. Furthermore, as Paul illustrates with his reasoning on the matter, the main reason that people who don't look for work are not considered deserving is not necessarily that they're not being personally responsible; it can also be that they're not collectively responsible by reaping collective rewards without contributing to the collective production of wealth by working outside the domain overseen by the state.

Altogether, we've seen that the dominant discourse on welfare used by the Americans was MUD, while the French interviewees mainly reasoned in terms of SID. These patterns correspond to the underlying models identified as dominant in each group: MUD derives from an understanding of work as a commodity by reasoning according to notions of dicensentives and attaching moral significance to personal responsibility in the case of a perceived absence of market virtues of hard work and internal drive; SID, in turn, derives primarily from the conceptualization of work as a occupational citizenship in asserting the state's responsibility for the inclusion and wellbeing of all its citizens, thereby rejecting the ethicality of market outcomes according to the higher moral value of social solidarity. Furthermore, these dominant patterns reflect the historical rise of the discourses and logics of MUD and SID in both political discourse and actual reforms to the welfare systems of the United States and France, respectively.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to unite the many themes of this project; an effort I hope has proven fruitful. The crux of this endeavor has been to analyze and contrast the ways in which interviewees' cultural models of work structured their reasoning about the relationship between the market economy and the state—a relationship that neoliberal ideology defines itself in near total opposition to. But I've also attempted to relate these patterns of reasoning and belief to the historical experience of each country with neoliberalism: to show the correspondence between micro-level patterns of acceptance or rejection of neoliberal ideas according to distinct cultural logics, and macro-historical patterns of institutional change involving the incorporation of or resistance to those same ideas. Again, the nature of this study does not warrant making any firm claims concerning the extent of the distribution of any of the cultural models I've identified in either society; I can only demonstrate that these are certain cultural models relating to work that exist and are shared to some extent in their respective societies. Even less do I consider my findings as grounds to argue that in either country's history, cultural differences satisfactorily account for the different forms and processes of neoliberalization. As a theory, this would explain a great deal of my own findings; but my findings are far too narrow in scope to confirm or refute any theory on a national scale. What we must content ourselves with instead is an intriguing collection of corresponding patterns between culture, ideology, social institutions and historical change. Now, I wish only to summarize the contrasting systems of cultural beliefs and values

analyzed above, leaving the implications of other overlapping patterns to the next and final chapter.

In considering work in relation to society, the state, and the market economy, the American participants primarily reasoned in terms of work as a commodity, while the French interviewees mainly utilized the model of work as occupational citizenship, less often employing the related model of work as personal fulfillment. The Americans tended to look to the reality of the market to provide definitions of work and typically defined work in market terms: as creating value for someone else. Meanwhile, we saw how all of the French people I spoke to, with the exception of Nicolas, either critiqued or rejected the commodity model of work by asserting its human and meaningful essence and its collective nature.

We then explored how these generic models of work translated into beliefs about the market economy, with some surprising results. Predictably, the French emphatically denied that the sum of individual interests and ethics represented in the market constitutes a sufficient basis upon which to organize society, considering the market to be imperfectly competitive and its outcomes often ethically questionable. On the American side, there was much less agreement. Kevin and Christina extended the commodification of work to neoliberal free market ideology, which holds that all market outcomes are ethical. Most Americans, however, weren't as ready to make the leap, occasionally making the case instead for a moral economy in which market virtues are rewarded.

I suggested that this latter stance left open the possibility to call for state oversight and regulation of the economy when the moral precepts for deservedness

of rewards are broken. However, when we looked at the same Americans reasoning about the role of the state, they mostly established themselves as firmly against, or at least strongly suspicious of, government intervention and regulation of the market economy. Almost all of them opposed (or were unable to come to a conclusion concerning) the minimum wage, according to the accepted belief that governmental regulation disrupts the market mechanism and incentives, which more efficiently and fairly accomplish the goals of naïve regulatory policies when left alone. Even more firmly they decried social welfare programs, invoking similar notions of disincentives and disruptions of market mechanisms. They also mostly subscribed to a MUD discourse—consistent with both the total commodification of work in neoliberal ideology and the more tempered positing of a moral economy—maintaining that overly generous benefits create a culture of dependency. Indeed, it seems as though the Americans' conviction in the futility and harmful nature of state intervention in the economy was even more powerful than their faith in the inherent fairness of the market itself.

The state was perhaps the domain where conceptions contrasted most strongly according to cultural lines. All of the French participants expressed a similar belief in the legitimacy and necessity of state oversight, regulation and intervention in the market economy. Their position derives from the model of work as occupational citizenship, understanding the unregulated market to be an anarchic and immoral basis upon which to organize society, pointing to the need for the state to govern in the common interest and according to the moral values of solidarity and equality. From this perspective, a minimum wage is quite necessary (except for

Nicolas, who suggests it's up to corporations to treat their employees more responsibly) and the SID paradigm informed their reasoning about welfare, reflecting the imperative behind the same value of solidarity in the context of an imperfectly competitive market that creates inequality.

To finish, these French cultural beliefs and values concerning the state constitute one domain where I would break from the cautious precedent I set for myself, and hazard an assertion of historical causality. Perhaps this formulation is too bold since the argument is one that other scholars have already made, to which my own study might supplement an illustrative vignette of cultural analysis. In particular, Meunier (2004) makes the case French political institutions and traditions in the legacy of *dirigisme* have represented a major locus of resistance to neoliberal ideology and globalization, which “requires abandoning, to a large extent, state control over the economy—and thereby over society” (Meunier 2004:128).

I would advance the same argument, on the basis of cultural patterns as revealed by the history of institutional change in France. Over decades, we've reviewed how neoliberalism has continuously conflicted with traditional French values of governance. Neoliberal ideology was hampered early on by an internal schism among French neoliberals, precisely over the contentious issue of the proper role of the state in making markets operate “freely.” The establishment of the French *dirigiste* model after World War II coincided with the deflation of the enthusiasm of French neoliberals, who would gradually fall out of the international project of the Mont Pèlerin Society.

Institutionally, programs at the heart of the French state's commitment to social solidarity, equality, and the wellbeing of its citizens—particularly the welfare system and labor market regulations—have proven resistant to neoliberal reforms over time. These have received substantial popular support and when reforms were enacted they tended to be unpopular, encouraging successive French government to concentrate on the privatization of state industries. Research into French attitudes towards the state has confirmed the centralized power and role of the French state to be widely taken for granted and approved of (Brejning 2012).

Discursively, all French political parties have struggled to justify neoliberal reforms seen as necessary in the context of globalization and Europeanization, as also being desirable and in accordance with French values of governance. The exception proves the rule: Chirac's adoption in the mid 1980s of a neoliberal discourse of increasing individual responsibility by overseeing the retreat of the state did not extend to social programs, where a discourse of solidarity remained. In any event, his project was unsuccessful in addition to causing a schism among conservatives, and the Right has since dropped the full-fledged free market discourse. Most recently, President Sarkozy came closest to reviving it, but in the wake of the economic crisis in 2008 he, too, had to position himself in opposition to "Anglo-Saxon" neoliberalism. The politician who most successfully discursively resolved the inherent contradiction between neoliberal policy directives deemed necessary and the traditional French values of governance was Prime Minister Jospin, who insisted that the uneasy processes of liberalization and Europeanization would ultimately act as a shield against the excesses of the Anglo-Saxon "market

society.” This amounts to more of an inversion than a resolution of the contradiction, but its success points to the effectiveness of positioning traditional French social values against neoliberalism and globalization.

Taken together, these patterns of all point to the ideational resilience of the traditional paradigm of French governance as a major explanation of institutional resistance to neoliberalization over time. The analysis of my own French interviews revealed how the model of work as occupational citizenship implicates a set of moral social standards of fairness, equality, and solidarity whose oversight is delegated exclusively to the state; and how such a view rejects neoliberal ideology and the extension of the market mechanism as the basis of organization for society. Again, my own findings do not substantiate but rather illustrate my argument that French beliefs concerning the state have been a major obstacle to the process of neoliberalization, which is grounded in the historical analysis of political institutional change. They do, however, reveal the particular ways in which conceptualizations of work may reject or accept the premises and prescriptions of neoliberal ideology.

Chapter 7 Conclusions

The ultimate purpose of this project was not to make any claims about causal relationships between social structure, culture and ideology in order to explain historical processes as they have unfolded. Rather, my aspiration has been much more modest: to illustrate and elucidate certain interrelationships between these various levels of description of social reality by analyzing the impact of similar sets of ideas in two distinct socio-cultural environments over time. I hope to have succeeded in this endeavor throughout, but in this conclusion I would like to summarize these interdependencies as revealed throughout the analysis and reflect upon their implications.

First of all, ideas matter. We've seen that conceptualizations of work influence our subjective experience of work, our goals, our decisions, but also our standards for the organization of capitalist society itself (or for our rejection of it). When these ideas are reasonably widely distributed across and integrated in the hearts and minds of members of a society, they are said to be cultural. But ideas don't have to be cultural to be powerful. We saw how neoliberalism initially arrived in both France and the United States as a free-floating idea, unanchored in the cultural subjectivities that they hovered above. Through the hard work of determined individuals and the institutional organizations they put in place, neoliberalism came to be grounded as an ideology, if a minority one, among important sectors of both French and American society. However, neoliberal ideas

were not left unchanged by this process, as people reconfigured and repurposed them to suit local ends according to pre-existing cultural values. In times of crisis, ideas—the old, the new, the recycled—see their potential to drive social change heightened. In the context of the economic crisis of the 1970s and the ensuing transition from a Fordist to a flexible mode of capitalist accumulation, neoliberalism enjoyed particular relevance in light of its compatibility with the flexibility of capital over labor—the opportunity for widespread ideational and institutional influence had come. In the United States, neoliberalism jumped, as Reagan oversaw the social deregulation of the economy, the gutting of welfare programs, the crippling of labor and massive tax cuts. But in France it staggered, incrementally achieving reforms over decades typically seen as necessary in the new global economy but frequently undesirable in terms of traditional values and practices of governance. Evidently, cultural and institutional factors play a role in determining social receptiveness to ideas and the extent of their transformative power. In other words, ideas can have transformative sociopolitical force, but they are nevertheless grounded in and altered by the social and cultural processes of life and politics.

Considering the differing patterns of neoliberalization in France and the United States, it further becomes clear that institutions matter. In the United States, neoliberalism benefited from greater coherence and organization by virtue of the close ties between the Chicago School and the MPS. By contrast ties between the MPS and French neoliberals slowly withered away. In addition, in the United States business interests were institutionally able and willing to throw massive financial resources behind neoliberal think tanks and publications, to a degree unrivaled in

France. The overall greater coherence and influence of American neoliberalism cannot be explained without reference to these institutional forces.

But if institutions are important to ideas, they are even more important to culture. Since cultural agents inevitably spend a great deal of their lives operating within the bounds of all sorts of institutions, these constitute an important facet of their social reality and powerfully structure their subjective experience of life. For instance, in France, where social assistance programs are universal and broadly supported by the public, they also happen to be funded by a combination of “invisible” sales taxes and visible taxes indicated as specifically targeting welfare programs that benefit everyone. In this way, the institutions that determine the form of the state’s taxation and redistribution of wealth reflect traditional French values of universalism, social solidarity, and the state’s ultimate responsibility to ensure the inclusion and welfare of all citizens. And in the United States, the fact that success and personal drive are valued more highly than in France certainly has to do with the fact that money is objectively more important in American life: the welfare state is relatively underdeveloped, meaning Americans benefit from fewer universal public services, public education is unequally funded geographically, higher education is astronomically costly and simultaneously more important in providing access to better working opportunities (Lamont 1992). Again and again, cultural values and social institutions exhibit a dialectical relationship, reaffirming and reforming each other. Indeed, this relationship aptly characterizes the rapid neoliberal turn in the United States, as Reagan’s reform of formal American institutions depended on his election, itself contingent upon a considerable shift in

political forces and their attendant values, beliefs, anxieties and desires among American political elites and the electorate. These complementary forces continue to play out to this day, which brings us to our third theme.

History matters. Despite occasional outward illusions of stability and coherence, internally social systems and meaning systems are remarkably volatile things. Meanings are constantly being reaffirmed and contested just as institutions are reified, questioned, reformed, abolished, replaced. And all the while people are being born, growing, ageing, dying. Change can be slow and it can be sudden. In either case, viewed through the historical lens it has something to tell us. In the United States, the rapid transition away from Fordism in favor of flexible capital and state retreat from the market economy suggests the Fordist compromise and the American state's prominent role were not particularly enmeshed in American cultural values. In France, the piecemeal, incremental and cautious pace of neoliberal reforms reveals certain cultural and institutional points of incompatibility, of persistent resistance over time. In particular, the traditional role of the state, the lingering legacy of *dirigisme*, continues to be invested with cultural approval, constituting a major obstacle to neoliberalization. And institutional change can signal ideational change—especially in democracies—as welfare reforms in both countries represent a shift in the paradigm underlying welfare itself, a shift dependent upon the public being convinced of the new logic.

The question of changing public opinion brings us to another important point I wish to emphasize. Discourse matters, here in two senses. In the first sense, political discourse matters. Within politics and the governance of democracies,

political discourse in some ways functions analogously to interpersonal communication: discourse endeavors to communicate ideas, arrive at shared understandings, and pursue social and political goals. It should be emphasized that around any social or political issue, there are a host of competing discourses, all advocating alternative interpretations of a certain reality and prescribing different programs for action. The particular form and function of discourses in politics depends a great deal on institutions that mediate them. In France, technocratic policy writers come up with proposals that politicians later attempt to legitimate to the public with particular discourses, while in the United States policy actors are more influenced by the popular discourses that happen to be in circulation among political institutions, the media, and their constituents. Moreover, the form of political discourses must inevitably be molded according to underlying cultural values, norms and traditions if they are to be effective. In the United States, the Republican Party has for decades consistently adopted a free market neoliberal discourse concerning the relationship between the state and the market economy with considerable success; and the Democratic Party has followed their lead to a surprising extent. The same discourse failed in France, and neoliberal reforms have continually been justified as necessary, if not necessarily desirable. These differences also suggest that the way people are exposed to political discourses matter. Taking neoliberalism, its adoption by the Republican Party and important Democrats in the United States means that just about all Americans are aware of the free market discourse, even if they don't happen to subscribe to it. In any case, a great many do, especially relative to France where neoliberalism is often framed in

political discourse as an Anglo-Saxon threat to French cultural identity and traditions of governance.

In addition, discourse in the ordinary sense as communicative speech, matters too. The interviews I conducted and my analysis of them reveals how beliefs, concepts, and arguments communicated in talk are structured by underlying cultural models that render communication effective on the basis of shared understandings. These cultural models in turn are overlaid by a slew of conventional public discourses that express the desirability of certain programs for action and outcomes (Strauss 2012). This doesn't only happen in interviews. In everyday communicative exchanges, we continually confront and attempt to communicate and understand alternative conceptualizations of concepts and the discourses that surround them. The interpersonal negotiation of understandings and discourses is a large part of what enables us to learn, to consider alternative perspectives, and to critically evaluate them according to our own beliefs and experience. In my personal opinion, this is one of the most enjoyable and rewarding aspects of social life. My central argument in this project has been that the different patterns that structure the French and American interviewees' discourse about work reveal cultural differences in beliefs, values and perspectives of the world, bringing us to the final point I wish to underline.

Culture matters. In the speech of my participants, I attempted to demonstrate that distinctive cultural models dominate conceptualizations of work in each cultural group. Among the French, the dominant models were of work as personal fulfillment and as occupational citizenship, both of which are founded upon a

conceptualization of workers as psychological beings engaged in meaningful activities and motivated by intrinsic rewards in addition to financial incentives. Though my small sample size means it's impossible to extrapolate the extent to which these models are distributed across French society, the fact that they explain a great deal of the historical resistance to neoliberal reforms, particularly surrounding the traditional role of the state, suggests that at the very least they are shared by some portion of French people. Leaving my interviews aside, the contrastive histories of neoliberalization in both countries does suggest that French cultural values of solidarity, republican traditions of state governance and general distrust of market outcomes as ethical posed obstacles to the influence of neoliberal ideas. History also suggests some transformation of cultural values as well, as mentioned above, especially concerning the shift from the redistributive to social integrationist logics of welfare provision. Similarly, the American historical experience of embracing neoliberalism much more readily is compatible with the dominance of the model of work as a commodity among the Americans I interviewed, suggesting it is also an important cultural model in certain sectors of American society. Cultural patterns of belief do not come into being and continue to exist on their own, however. As we saw, institutions such as the MPS and a brigade of think tanks played a key role in propagating the commodification of work within American society as ideology. Furthermore, the spreading of ideas depends on the effectiveness of a legitimating discourse, which in turn is contingent upon correspondence with preexisting cultural beliefs and values.

Finally, we saw that to every cultural pattern there are exceptions. Among the French, Nicolas adopted the moral underclass discourse to reason about welfare, a position he himself considered to be quite American. And among the Americans, David and Arthur deviated from the norm in conceptualizing work primarily as personal fulfillment, which entailed a host of opinions that diverged from the American pattern, veering more towards the French. Notably, Arthur is majoring in French in addition to accounting, and his reasoning about work was certainly the most “French” of the Americans I spoke to in emphasizing the psychological aspects of work, and the potentials for psychological harm and alienation. As such, he illustrates how ideas and discourses are mediated through institutions that organize and disperse them. Together, these exceptions illustrate the fact that though cultural agents may swim in a sea of socially and culturally grounded institutions, discourses, and conceptual models, we are nevertheless quite capable of perceiving the water around us, of reflection upon where the current of history is leading us, of critically evaluating if that place is in fact where we want to find ourselves tomorrow, and potentially to speak out employing alternative logics and discourses and take action in an attempt to shift the course of our human history.

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