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AFFLUENCE, POVERTY AND THE IDEA OF A POST-SCARCITY SOCIETY

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◆ Preface

As Anthony Giddens notes in the opening pages of this essay, we live in a world which — far from becoming more orderly and predictable — seems increasingly to run out of control. This sense of crisis and disorientation was a theme emerging repeatedly at the UNRISD conference on **Rethinking Social Development,** held in conjunction with the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen on 11-12 March 1995. At the event, ten distinguished social scientists and writers — Ralf Dahrendorf, Amitai Etzioni, Johan Galtung, Anthony Giddens, Eric Hobsbawm, Fatema Mernissi, Tetsuo Najita, Emma Rothschild, Wole Soyinka and Tatyana Tolstaya — explored and interpreted the current social crisis and sketched alternative scenarios for the future.

For Professor Giddens, what is striking about today's world is not that it is more uncertain than in previous generations, but that the **sources** of uncertainty are changing. If in the past the risks faced by most people were generated by forces (whether natural or divine) considered to lie beyond human control, we now increasingly confront new forms of uncertainty which are created by our own attempts to alter nature and to change the course of history. Thus there is a shift from what Giddens calls **external** to man-made or **manufactured** risk.

The "end of nature" and the attenuation of tradition, brought about during the past several decades as part of a process of accelerated modernization on a global scale, increase the need for conscious reflection on many aspects of life formerly considered to be givens. "A whole host of new decisions has to be taken (by somebody) in areas which were not 'decisionable' before", and this places many existing institutions — from the political to the economic and social — under strain.

The impact of such developments on the welfare state in advanced industrial countries is particularly noteworthy. In a very interesting aside, Giddens points out that the welfare state as traditionally conceived is an insurance system designed to cope with old-fashioned external risks. But to an increasing extent, it must confront manufactured risks generated by personal relations and social institutions that do not conform to earlier patterns.

Therefore Giddens suggests reforming existing welfare systems through "the active mobilization of life decisions rather than the passive calculation of risk". This is congruent with his more general conviction that the enormous expansion of the scope for reflexivity — the growing need for everyone to take specific decisions on many different aspects of daily life — is creating a new politics of "life decisions".

In developed and developing countries alike, new questions of personal choice and ethics (such as those so prominently associated with the abortion issue) form the basis for a kind of "life politics" which is different from — and supplements, but does not replace — the longer-established practice of "emancipatory politics", concerned above all with issues of social justice. In Giddens's view, it is thus no accident that the controversy over "the family" has come to play such a prominent part in the present-day politics of many nations, or that there is a resurgence in the political significance of religious fundamentalism. In important respects, these are "life political", rather than solely emancipatory, issues.

In the concluding section of his essay, Giddens suggests that "life politics" can form the basis for new strategies to reduce inequality and alleviate poverty. While existing prescriptions tend to be based upon the direct transfer of wealth or income from the more affluent to poorer groups (the first losing what the second gains), it also is possible to implement strategies in which everyone gains through improving some element of the quality of life. In such a "post-scarcity" setting, trade-offs might be established between different groups to redistribute access to paid work, to protect the environment or to improve health. To a certain extent, this is already being done by people who relinquish hours of work to others in order to gain more leisure; and by environmental groups in North and South who have a common interest in preserving natural resources.

At the same time, "few things can be more significant worldwide than the possibility of a new social contract between women and men, since sexual divisions affect so many other forms of stratification in societies of all types". This element of "life politics" holds the key to many positive-sum changes in human relations. A pact between the old and the young might also lessen deprivation within both groups.

In sum, Professor Giddens has provided a powerful reminder that societies are changed by personal decisions about how we want to live.

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My starting point in this discussion is a world that has taken us by surprise. By "us" I mean not only intellectuals and practical policy makers, but the ordinary individual too. In the West, at least, we are all the legatees of certain strands of Enlightenment thought. The Enlightenment was a complex affair. Various different perspectives of thought were bound up with it and the works of the leading Enlightenment philosophers were often complex and subtle. Yet in general the philosophers of Enlightenment set themselves against tradition, against prejudice, and against obscurantism. For them the rise of science, both natural and social, would disclose the reality of things.

Understanding was always itself understood as an unfinished and partial affair — the expansion of knowledge is at the same time an awareness of ignorance, of everything that is not and perhaps will not be known. Nevertheless, knowledge was presumed to be cumulative and presumed also to yield a progressive mastery of the surrounding world. The more we are able to understand ourselves, our own history, and the domain of nature, the more we will be able to master them for our own purposes and in our own interests. The underlying theorem, stripped bare, was extremely plausible. The progress of well-founded knowledge is more or less the same as the progressive expansion of human dominion.

Marx brought this view its clearest expression, integrating it with an interpretation of the overall thrust of history itself. In Marx's celebrated aphorism, "human beings only set themselves such problems as they can resolve". Understanding our history is the very means of shaping our destiny in the future. Even those thinkers who took a much less optimistic view than Marx of the likely future for humanity accepted the theorem of increasing human control of our life circumstances. Consider, for example, the writings of Max Weber. Weber certainly did not see history as leading to human emancipation in the manner envisaged by Marx. For Weber, the likely future was one of "uncontrolled bureaucratic domination" — we are all destined to live in a "steel-hard cage" of rationality, expressing the combined influence of bureaucratic organization and machine technology. We are all due to be tiny cogs in a vast and well-oiled system of rational human power.

Each of these visions of the imminent future attracted many adherents. Marxism, of course, shaped the very form of human society for many. Others, perhaps critical of Marxist thought, recoiled before the sombre vision offered by Weber, Kafka and many others. Marxism, as we all know now, has lost most of its potency as a theoretical perspective on history and change. But Weber's more sombre vision has also lost its hold over us. It does not correspond to the world in which, at the end of the twentieth century, we in fact find ourselves. We do not live in a world which feels increasingly under human control but, rather to the contrary, one which seems to run out of control — in the words of Edmund Leach, a "runaway world". Moreover, this sensation of living in a world spinning out of our control can no longer be said to be simply the result of lack of accumulated knowledge. Instead, its erratic runaway character is somehow bound up with the very accumulation of that knowledge. The uncertainties which we face do not result, as the thinkers of Enlightenment tended to believe, from our ignorance. They come in some substantial part from our own interventions into history and into the surrounding physical world.

I do not think one could say that the world in which we live today is more uncertain than that of previous generations. I do not see how such a claim could be validated in any case. It is the sources of uncertainty which have changed. We live increasingly in a social and material universe of what I shall call **manufactured uncertainty**. Manufactured uncertainty, or manufactured risk, comes from human involvement in trying to change the course of history or alter the contours of nature. We can separate manufactured risk from **external risk**. External risk refers to sources of uncertainty which come either from unmastered nature or from "unmastered history" — that is, history as lived by taken-for-granted traditions, customs and practices.

The debate about global warming — which is a debate about "nature that is no longer nature" — offers one among many examples of the advent of manufactured uncertainty. The majority of scientific specialists believe that global warming is occurring, even if all forecasts of its likely consequences are imponderable. Some scientists, however, believe that the whole idea of global warming is a myth, while there is a minority view that what is taking place is actually the reverse — a long-term process of global cooling. The uncertainties which surround the global warming hypothesis do not derive from "unmastered nature", but precisely from human intervention into nature — from the "end of nature". Since we cannot be wholly sure whether or not global warming is occurring, it is probably best on a policy level to proceed in an "as if" manner. As some of the consequences of global warming could be calamitous, it is sensible for nations and the larger world community to take precautionary measures.

Manufactured uncertainty is by no means limited to "nature which is no longer nature". It invades most areas of social life too, from local and even personal contexts of action right up to those affecting global institutions. Take as an example the decision to get married today on the part of someone living in a Western society. Fifty years ago, someone who decided to marry knew "what it was he or she was doing". Marriage was a relatively fixed division of labour involving a specified status for each member of the married couple. Now no one quite knows any longer what marriage actually is, save that it is a "relationship", entered into against the backdrop of profound changes affecting gender relations, the family, sexuality and the emotions.

What explains the increasing dominance of manufactured over external risk? Obviously the origins of this transition are bound up with the advent of modernity as a whole. However, a series of very basic changes sweeping through the world over the past several decades have intensified this transformation of the conditions of uncertainty and risk. Three great sets of changes are sweeping through the industrialized countries and also in some degree affecting most societies across the globe.

The first concerns the effects of **globalization**. The word globalization appears almost everywhere these days, but thus far has not been well conceptualized. As I would understand it here, globalization does not simply refer to the intensifying of world economic competition. Globalization implies a complicated set of processes operating in several arenas besides the economic. If one wanted to take a technological fix upon the intensifying of globalization in recent years, it would be the point at which a global satellite

communication system was first established. From that point onwards instantaneous communication became possible from any part of the globe to any other. The advent of instantaneous global communication both altered the nature of local experience and served to establish novel institutions. The creation of 24-hour money markets, for instance, a phenomenon that has an impact upon almost all the world's population, became possible only because of the immediacy of satellite communication.

Globalization is not just an "out there" phenomenon. It refers not only to the emergence of large-scale world systems, but to transformations in the very texture of everyday life. It is an "in here" phenomenon, affecting even intimacies of personal identity. To live in a world where the image of Nelson Mandela is more familiar than the face of one's next door neighbour is to move in quite different contexts of social action from those that prevailed previously. Globalization invades local contexts of action but does not destroy them; on the contrary, new forms of local cultural autonomy, the demand for local cultural identity and self-expression, are causally bound up with globalizing processes.

The second major source of social change over recent years is **detraditionalization**. Here again we can distinguish longer processes of transformation from the more intensified changes happening over the past few decades. Modernity, of course, always set itself against tradition — this was one of the very origins of the Enlightenment. Yet during the lengthy period of what Ulrich Beck has called "simple modernization", modernity and tradition existed in a sort of symbiosis. Science itself became a kind of tradition — an established authority to which one turned when seeking the answer to puzzles or problems. This symbiosis of modernity and tradition marks the phase of "simple modernization" — roughly speaking, the first century and a half or so of industrialization and modernity.

In the phase of "reflexive modernization", which has accelerated over the past several decades, the status of tradition becomes altered. Detraditionalization does not mean an end to tradition. Rather, traditions in many circumstances become reinvigorated and actively defended. This is the very origin of fundamentalism, a phenomenon which does not have a long history. Fundamentalism can be defined as tradition defended in the traditional way — against the backdrop, however, of a globalizing cosmopolitan world which increasingly asks for reasons. The "reason" of tradition differs from that of discourse. Traditions, of course, can be defended discursively; but the whole point of tradition is that it contains a "performative notion" of truth, a ritual notion of truth. Truth is exemplified in the performance of the traditional practices and symbols. It is not surprising, therefore, that we should see so many clashes and fracturings today across the world as embattled tradition clashes with much more open life-style choice.

Detraditionalization is closely linked to the "end of nature" and indeed the two intertwine very often. "Nature" disappears in the sense that few aspects of the surrounding material world — and of the body — remain uninfluenced by human intervention. Tradition and nature, as it were, used to be "landscapes" of human activity, carrying with them a certain fixity of life-style practices. As tradition and nature dissolve, a whole host of new

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decisions has to be taken (by somebody) in areas which were not "decisionable" before.

Consider, for example, the field of human reproduction. A variety of aspects of reproduction which were previously "given" — not open to being influenced by human decision-making — now are in principle or in practice malleable. It is possible to have a child without any kind of sexual contact with another adult at all; the sex of a child can become a matter of choice; contraception becomes highly effective, so that the decision to have a child becomes something quite different from when childbearing was more of a "natural" process. The "end of nature" in the domain of reproduction, however, integrates closely with the social changes brought about by detraditionalization. Thus central to the lowered birth rate in the developed societies today is the series of changes which have promoted the autonomy of women and therefore altered the traditionally-given relations between the sexes.

The third great set of changes sweeping through the world concerns those associated with the expansion of **social reflexivity**. This is again not confined to the Western or developed societies, but is bound up with the globalization of communication. "Reflexivity" does not mean self-consciousness. It refers precisely to the condition of living in a detraditionalized social order. In such an order everyone must confront, and deal with, multiple sources of information and knowledge, including fragmented and contested knowledge claims. Everyone in some sense must reflect upon the conditions of her or his life, as a means of living a life at all. Consider as an example the case noted previously — the decision to get married. That decision is taken amid a welter of information about "relationships", "commitment", the changing nature of sexuality, of gender relations and of the very institution of marriage itself. Such information or knowledge is not simply a "background" against which the decision to marry is taken: as remarked earlier, it enters constitutively into the environment of action which it describes.

Living in a highly charged reflexive social environment brings many new rewards and forms of increasing autonomy; at the same time, it also brings new problems and anxieties. As an illustration consider eating disorders and anorexia. As a widespread phenomenon, eating disorders in Western countries are relatively recent, dating only from the past 30 or so years. They are pathologies of a society where everyone is "on a diet": that is, a diversity of foodstuffs is available, to those who can afford them, at any time of the day, month or year. Diet is no longer given by "nature" — by the local seasons and by the availability of local produce. In such circumstances individuals have to decide what to eat — in some sense select a diet — in relation to how they want to be. Diet becomes intrinsically bound up with the cultivation of the body — for some people, particularly young women, social pressures to do with bodily appearance can assume a pathological and compulsive form.

When we decide what to eat, and therefore how to be, we know that we are taking decisions relevant to present and future health. A person might resolutely stick to a traditional diet, continue to smoke and so forth, in the face of widely disseminated medical knowledge which indicates these habits

to be harmful. Yet he or she cannot do so without being aware of such knowledge claims. Ignoring them is in effect a decision.

In a globalizing world, marked by the swathes of social change just described, pre-established institutions start to come under strain. This is true of areas of social life ranging from personal and intimate social ties right through to large-scale global orders. In politics, to take one illustration, the voting population now lives in the same discursive arena as their political leaders. In such a circumstance, political legitimacy starts to come under strain. Deference tends to disintegrate, and political activities and procedures which were once acceptable start to be placed widely in question. It is not just happenstance that corruption cases have come to the fore in political life in many countries across the world. Corruption was there previously, although it might not have been treated as such; but in the new conditions of social visibility in which political life operates today, what was once accepted becomes generally seen as illegitimate (although the reverse can also on occasion be true).

Rather than developing the political example, I shall concentrate here upon the question of the welfare state and welfare institutions. Most students of social policy agree that the Western welfare state is in a situation of crisis. That crisis is ordinarily understood in fiscal terms — as part of a "can't pay, won't pay" mentality on the part of the middle classes. In the more affluent sectors of society, in other words, people increasingly refuse to accept the levels of taxation required to support others less fortunate than themselves. Sometimes the fiscal crisis of the welfare state is described, as in Galbraith's phrase, as a "culture of contentment": many middle class people have achieved a comfortable way of life and become protective about it. Others see the situation more as one of anxiety and insecurity; the middle class is no longer exempt from worries which used to concern mainly those in the lower strata of the social order.

I do not mean to say that the thesis of the fiscal crisis of the welfare state, in either of these competing versions, is a wholly mistaken one. It is not. However, one can also look at the problems facing the welfare state in a different way. The crisis of the welfare state, it can be suggested, is in some large part a crisis of **risk management**. The welfare state originated as a "security state" and was actually called such in some countries. It was the socialized, public counterpart to private insurance. Now the involvement of modernity with insurance makes an interesting and informative story. Modern civilization on the whole looks towards the future rather than the past, seeking to "colonize the future"; the future is a "territory" to be "occupied". It is not surprising, therefore, that early industrial enterprise was closely bound up with the emergence of the notion of insurance. What is insurance? It is a means of organizing future time. Insurance is a means of protecting against the hazards which might in the future befall individuals or groups in different contexts.

The welfare state, I think it can be said, was an insurance system which was developed in terms of coping with external risk. Certain things could befall the individual: he or she could get ill, become disabled, be divorced or become unemployed. The welfare state would step in to protect those who fell foul of such contingencies. In an era coming to be dominated by

manufactured uncertainty, by contrast, welfare institutions based on external risk start to break down. Take as an illustration the changing circumstances of divorce. A half a century or so ago, in most Western countries, only a minority of people got divorced (most of these were cases of men leaving women, because legal and economic circumstances made it difficult for women to extricate themselves from marriage). Where only few divorced, divorce could be treated like a "hazard of nature" — it might happen to you if you were very unlucky. Where it did take place, divorce happened against the backdrop of gender and family relations which were quite clearly defined and fixed. Today, not only are divorce rates very high compared to what they were; the large proportion of marriages in Western countries are actively broken up by women. In such a situation, reflecting so many other changes in personal and economic life, treating divorce as a "hazard of nature" makes no sense. Divorce (and remarriage) become part of a much more active series of engagements with life problems. Welfare systems cannot simply step in to pick up the pieces; they have to be redirected and reorganized in such a way as to promote responsible decision-making.

Something parallel applies in the case of health and illness. The medical health care systems of the welfare state were based upon the assumption that falling ill was something which simply happened to people in certain circumstances. In a world of much more actively organized life-styles, where the body is no longer so much of a "given", this assumption no longer holds. We all know that how healthy one is tends to be strongly influenced by the life-style decisions which one takes, and by alterable states of the surrounding environment. Health care systems come under strain not simply because of the escalating costs of standard medical treatments, but because they still depend too much upon the presumption of illness as external risk.

In recent times critiques of the welfare state have come mostly from the neo-liberal Right. Neo-liberals see welfare institutions as promoting dependencies rather than encouraging more responsible life-style practices. The impulse of neo-liberalism has been to cut back upon welfare expenditure and to seek to turn welfare systems into markets wherever possible. In an oblique and negative sort of way, the neo-liberals have had a better grasp of the inadequacies of the welfare state in current social conditions than have most of its defenders. But the relevance of their critiques has been undermined by their fascination with markets. In place of the neo-liberal attack upon welfare institutions, we should seek to provide what I would describe as a **positive critique** of the welfare state, rather than a primarily negative one. A positive critique of the welfare state would aim to restructure welfare institutions so as to bring them more into line with a detraditionalized world of manufactured uncertainty. I believe that many interesting and important issues are raised by such a reorientation, although I shall not pursue these here.

Positive welfare means the active mobilization of life decisions rather than the passive calculation of risk. We should think in terms of positive welfare, I think, not only when considering the position of the welfare state within the developed societies, but also when approaching the seemingly intractable problem of the divergence between the rich and poor countries globally. There is a shift in political orientations going on today which corresponds in a general way to the shifting circumstances of social life discussed thus far in

this paper. This is a transition from **emancipatory politics to life politics**. By "emancipatory politics" I mean the pre-given political arena of Left liberal political theory and practice. Emancipatory politics is concerned with securing freedom from oppression, with social justice and with the diminishing of socio-economic inequalities. It has also been the defining parameter for Conservatism; Conservatism arose as a reaction precisely to the Left liberal values held first of all in the American and French Revolutions.

Emancipatory politics is a politics of **life chances**. The relevance of emancipatory political problems does not diminish with the advent of life politics; instead, life political issues come to form a new set of contexts of political decision-making. Rather than a politics of life chances, life politics is a politics of life decisions. It comes to the fore in the degree to which the end of tradition combines with the end of nature. In many areas of social life thus detraditionalized, new decisions have to be taken; these decisions are almost always politicized, involving as they do an ethical or value dimension. Crucially, however, issues of life politics cannot be settled by emancipatory political criteria.

The debate surrounding abortion is one example of a life-political issue. Where abortion becomes both easy to obtain and non-dangerous, a whole series of novel questions are posed. The issues involved in the abortion controversy, however, do not conform simply and directly to questions of emancipatory politics. The women's movement raised the right to easily available abortion as an emancipatory issue. But the problems posed by abortion cannot be resolved by such means alone: they concern questions such as "at what point is the foetus a 'human being'?"

A second illustration of the emerging agenda of life politics is the controversy over the family. In most countries the family has suddenly become politicized, and the discussion of "family values" intensified. Why should this be? The answer lies in the detraditionalizing of family life, something happening not only in Western countries. The discussion going on about the family certainly continues to raise issues of emancipation, but is by no means limited to them. Many issues are raised which are to do instead with the ethics of life decisions. The family is no longer equivalent to a state of nature, but rather is being reconstructed afresh.

The more life-political questions move to the centre of the political agenda, I want to propose, the more it makes sense to think of the emergence of a **post-scarcity society**, particularly within the industrialized countries but to some extent across the world as a whole. The idea of a post-scarcity society has a lengthy history, and it is important to distinguish my usage of the term here from others that have been adopted. One sense of the term "post-scarcity" surfaced in early socialism and also found expression in Marx's youthful writings. In this sense, "post-scarcity" meant the universalizing of abundance. Marx at least hinted at the possibility that industrial society could create so much wealth that everyone might have enough to fulfil all possible needs. Scarcity would more or less disappear. This is not what I mean by the notion. Some goods, including especially "positional goods", will always be in short supply; and the world being as it is, there seems no chance of the creation of a social order of super-abundance.

In more recent years the idea of post-scarcity has quite often been linked to the so-called "Inglehart thesis". On the basis of survey evidence, Robert Inglehart has proposed that a current of "post-materialism" is moving through the industrialized countries. People are turning away from the overriding goal of economic growth and orienting their lives towards different values. In so far as it is valid, the Inglehart thesis is certainly relevant to the notion of a post-scarcity society as I use it, but does not offer an exhaustive characterization of the term.

I mean by a post-scarcity society not a distinctive form of social order, but a series of emergent trends. These trends are the following:

- First, as mentioned, the increasing involvement of political debate with questions of life politics.

- Second, the diffusion of circumstances of manufactured risk from which no one can be completely free. Some, but not all, ecological risks are of this type, although ecological hazards are only one form of generalized risk.

- Third, a decline in "**productivism**", where this term is taken to refer to a pre-eminent commitment to economic growth. Productivism sees paid work as the core defining feature of social life. It is this aspect of a post-scarcity society which most closely overlaps with Inglehart's formulations.

- Fourth, the growing recognition that the problems of modernity cannot necessarily be resolved through more modernity. This refers in effect to a broad consciousness of the importance of manufactured uncertainty. Many examples can be found in the area of technology and technological innovation. The impact and value of technological innovation cannot be decided solely in technological terms. For instance, no amount of technical information will show conclusively whether or not a nuclear power plant should be built; such a decision involves an irreducible political element.

In so far as tendencies towards the formation of a post-scarcity society do in fact develop, they are likely to alter the conditions of socio-economic and political bargaining, both within and across societies. There are some positive implications here for issues of poverty and inequality. Grasping these means indicating the relevance of certain kinds of life-political questions for more well-established issues of political emancipation.

Existing prescriptions to do with alleviating inequality tend to be based upon possibilities of the direct transfer of wealth or income from more affluent to poorer groups. I do not suggest that attempts to provide such direct transfers should be abandoned. They have distinct limitations, however, especially in so far as they are bound up with difficulties of the welfare state noted previously. There are some interesting similarities between the critiques of the welfare state which have come from the political Right and critiques of welfare aid programmes internationally, most of which have come from the political Left. In the context of the welfare state, Rightist authors have

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argued that, for example, the building of large housing estates creates more problems that it resolves. Such estates destroy pre-existing modes of communal life and foster welfare dependency. Those on the Left tend to resist such analysis when applied to welfare institutions, but present a quite similar argument when discussing the drawbacks of global aid programmes. Where such aid is used, for instance, to build a large dam, critics argue the result is often the displacement of local forms of interdependence and the creation of new forms of dependency upon the bureaucratic provision of resources.

Thinking laterally about alleviating inequality makes it possible, at least in principle, to escape from such dilemmas. Instead of thinking primarily in terms of direct wealth or income transfers, I want to propose, we should consider the possibilities implied in what I want to term **life-style bargaining**. Life-style bargaining involves the establishing of "trade-offs" of resources, based upon life-political coalitions between different groups. Four main types of life-style bargaining may be distinguished. Each can, in some circumstances, be redistributive downwards, although I would stress that in each of these contexts opposite possibilities also exist.

The first form of life-style bargaining depends upon **active risk management**. There are many situations, both within and outside the developed countries, in which the active management of manufactured risk can generate a positive redistribution of resources. An illustration can be taken from the area of health care. There is normally a quite direct correlation between poverty, both relative and absolute, and the risks of contracting various kinds of illnesses. It is not always the actual condition of poverty itself which produces this connection. Rather, the connection comes from certain life-style practices which those in poorer groups tend to follow. Programmes of health education, diet and physical self-care can quite readily be redistributive downwards. Those who benefit most from such programmes tend to be people in poorer groups, who ordinarily do not have the same access to relevant information and strategies as do more affluent individuals.

A second type of life-style bargaining is **economic life-style bargaining**. In this case there are direct economic trade-offs between groups. A major area of economic life-style bargaining concerns the distribution and nature of paid work. There are powerful trends tending to accentuate inequalities in the domain of work. Some have argued, for example, that a generalized lowering of wages of workers in less skilled jobs is occurring, because of the impact of global competition — firms have an interest in reducing the costs of labour wherever possible. Moreover, it may be that new technology will eliminate jobs without the creation of new demand which would generate jobs to replace them.

Yet not all changes affecting paid work have such negative implications for equality, and it is readily possible to point to trends and active policies which could move in an opposite direction. In a world where the amount of available work may shrink substantially over the coming twenty years, the distribution of work holds the key to overall social integration. I list here only an example of a situation in which life-style bargaining over work can be redistributive downwards. There is a tendency for people (particularly

men) in well-paid jobs to retire much earlier than they used to. Some such early retirement, of course, is involuntary, and the jobs which individuals lose in that case are not necessarily replaced — at least by work of a comparable level. The larger proportion of such early retirement, however, is deliberately chosen. These are people who become "time pioneers", people who regard the flexible control of their careers as more important than a strict work orientation. In leaving jobs which they could have held on to, they release them for those of a younger generation — with a "chain of opportunity" effect down the line.

The work thereby redistributed may "filter down" in a patterned way, not altering the distribution of income and wealth very much. Yet if a single job is thus created for a young person, even if that job is relatively poorly-paid, the result is likely to be a downwards redistribution of resources, since younger people are disproportionately represented among the "new poor" and among the unemployed.

A third type of life-style bargaining is **ecological**. As with the other categories, we know that ecological objectives often clash with attempts to produce a downward distribution of resources. Ecologically-sensitive policies are sometimes expensive, and may go against the economic interests of power groups. For instance, regulations aimed at limiting industrial pollution can run counter to maintaining forms of industrial production which generate employment for poorer people. The ecological news, however, is not by any means all bad — there are many circumstances in which ecological life-style bargaining can be redistributive downwards. This applies both within the developed societies and in more global contexts. The reason is that poorer people, by the very nature of their circumstances, are often forced to adopt life-style practices which are ecologically damaging. Such is the case in instances ranging from fuel pollution in the developed countries to the cutting back of rain forests in impoverished Third World areas.

As in the other areas of life-style bargaining, there is a diversity of contexts in which more affluent groups share an interest in reducing such ecologically harmful practices. As a minor example, take the policy which has recently been introduced by some European governments of paying a sum of money to the owners of vehicles which are particularly polluting if they trade in those vehicles for newer, less environmentally harmful ones. Since poorer people tend to be the owners of older vehicles, which emit more damaging emissions, this type of policy tends to be redistributive downwards.

The fourth form of life-style bargaining might on the face of things seem much less important than the others, in so far as material inequalities are concerned. This is what I shall describe as **emotional life-style bargaining**. Far from being the least important type, I regard it in some ways as the key to all the others. It refers to negotiation about the emotional conditions of our lives, and these conditions have changed as massively as any of the more formal contexts of social activity in response to the wide social transformations described earlier in this paper. Particularly important here are the changing relations between the sexes, a phenomenon of worldwide importance and certainly not limited to the economically advanced societies.

Women across the world now stake a claim to forms of autonomy previously denied or unavailable to them. Such a claim plainly has a strong emancipatory element, in so far as a struggle is involved to achieve equal economic and political rights with men. At the same time, however, that claim to autonomy intrudes deeply into the domain of life politics, for it raises issues to do with the very definition of what it is to be a woman, and therefore a man, in detraditionalizing societies and cultures. Few things can be more significant worldwide than the possibility of a new social contract between women and men, since sexual divisions affect so many other forms of stratification in societies of all types.

To the extent that it could be achieved, a new social contract between the sexes would certainly be redistributive downwards. For women are everywhere on average less privileged than men, and again make up a disproportionate part of the "new poor". Redefinitions of gender and sexuality rebound directly, not only upon the sphere of the family, but upon that of work. Most innovations or changes which improve the working conditions of women reflect back on other inequalities — and the reverse is also true. And what of men? Suppose it became increasingly common for men to redefine the emotional and communicative balance of their lives, moving away from the primacy of paid work and other activities in the public domain. Many consequences tending towards greater economic equality would stem from such circumstances, ramifying through most contexts of social life.

Perhaps all this talk of positive life-style bargaining sounds utopian, given the strength of the influences tending to produce large-scale inequality, social division and even social fragmentation. I do not mean to say, let me stress again, that there is any inevitability about the downward redistributive effects of life-style bargaining. Yet whether we like it or not, in conditions of manufactured uncertainty and detraditionalization such bargaining is likely to become a central feature of formal and less formal political manoeuvring. Within the developed societies, a variety of new pacts, some of which will figure directly in electoral politics, are likely to emerge in the future. One such pact, for instance, might be between older people and the young, for both figure among the more deprived groups in the contemporary world. As always, the currents affecting social life do not have an inexorable character. We always have possibilities of individual and collective choice — this is the very core of life politics in any case. We can try to use whatever choices we have in a fruitful way. Life political mechanisms offer us the possibility of defending some of the emancipatory values which otherwise, paradoxically, are likely to lose their purchase.