

WORK AS WELLBEING: LABOUR CONDITIONS IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

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I. ABSTRACT:

This paper argues for the adoption of a 'work / labour' index of wellbeing, which is to be used for welfare comparisons alongside measurements such as health, income, and education. Criticising conventional 'accounts' of wellbeing for being inherently perfectionist and incomplete, seeing fundamental indicators of welfare as 'measurements' of wellbeing is proposed. Showing that work belongs in this category as it is universal and interdependent with other welfare indicators, the theory of work as wellbeing is applied to labour conditions in cotton factories in and around industrialising Manchester. The development of the employer-employee relationship at Quarry Bank Mill in Styal, where the employer Samuel Greg was initially also landlord and shop owner of the workers community, serves as a starting point for this analysis; comparisons are drawn to other paternalistic factories in Lancashire as well as factories in Central Manchester, which were run differently. Findings include a strong dependency of workers on the relationship to their employers due to a lack of central legislation. The wellbeing of workers differed in terms of housing conditions, workplace health and leisure time; hence, the striking differences in wellbeing observable around Manchester can be related back to their working conditions. It is argued finally that a comparison between Northern England during industrialisation and sweatshops in developing countries could provide valuable guidance to modern policy-makers. Work is therefore established as a fundamental welfare indicator that should be included more into international and intertemporal comparisons of wellbeing.

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I declare that the dissertation at hand is my own original work except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgement. No portion of the work referred to in the dissertation has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Modern museums about the cotton industry often take pride in the impressive machinery they display – when Lancashire historian Chris Aspin lists ‘places to visit’ (1981: 32), he describes the equipment exhibited in each former mill. This fascination about historic machinery is interesting when related to the conditions under which the steam engines, spinning frames, power-looms and water wheels used to operate. Hammond & Hammond note that workers “worked among ugly things, in ugly factories or ugly mines, for though an engine or a wheel may have a noble beauty and design, its beauty is obscured for those who are tending one small part of it and doing nothing else” (1917: 39).

When analysing how much better people are off today as opposed to 200 years ago, their working conditions are often considered just one factor among many that contributed to their wellbeing. This paper aims to show, however, that the way people work is much more fundamental to the overall quality of their life than commonly assumed. I argue that looking at labour conditions in historical perspective shows that work can be seen as a measurement of, rather than a mere factor towards, their wellbeing.

Philosophers and empirical researchers have identified various ways of comparing different people’s wellbeing. They primarily start by outlining that account of welfare they perceive as the most comprehensive. I will start (chapter 2) by pointing out problems with this way of analysing wellbeing. Then I present an alternative way of thinking about the study of welfare. This will be based on the idea of a variety of ‘measurements’ of wellbeing, an approach which can be found, for instance, in Angus Deaton’s work. I will define useful measurements of wellbeing as those indicators which are *fundamental* to someone’s welfare, such as health, income, or education.

Next, I suggest ‘work’ as a measurement of wellbeing (chapter 3). I explain what work entails, i.e. which different aspects of the work life could be looked at with regard to wellbeing, based on a distinction between the terms ‘work’ and ‘labour’. The variety of these aspects will open up the possibility of a ‘work / labour index’ of wellbeing. I will argue that work is a fundamental welfare indicator because it is a) particularly universal and b) highly interrelated with other welfare indicators.

I then aim to apply this theory of work as wellbeing to the society developing in and around Manchester during industrialisation. Different parts of this society exhibited differing levels of wellbeing measured by various indicators – in some areas, people were healthier, experienced better living conditions, and had more leisure time. I aim to answer the question as to how these differences in wellbeing came about. First, I analyse the development of labour conditions within factories, using Quarry Bank Mill in Styal as an example (chapter 4.1). Then I compare this to the situation in other similarly paternalistically run factories in the surrounding areas (chapter 4.2). The results will be related to factories which were run in a different way, predominantly placed in Central Manchester (chapter 4.3). I conclude that the differences in wellbeing can be traced back to differences in labour conditions – particularly differences in the relationship between employer and employee. Finally, I consider how my theory and analysis could be applied today, focusing on labour in developing countries and similarities in the employer-employee-relationship (chapter 4.4).

Overall, this analysis will show that work can, indeed, serve as a measurement of wellbeing. It demonstrates, moreover, that the variety of aspects covered by the term ‘work’ makes it a relevant indicator which has potential for the comparison of wellbeing of different societies. Recognising the role paternalism played in England historically can provide guidance for work-related policy-making in the future.

2.1 'Accounts' of wellbeing and their problems

Over time, there have been various efforts to describe and compare people's wellbeing, generally defined as "the notion of how well a person's life is going for that person" (Crisp 2017). Accounts of wellbeing differ mainly in their epistemology, i.e. the origin of their knowledge about how well a person is off. They can be categorised into four groups, outlined, for instance, by Arneson (2013):

- objective welfare – it is possible to identify a set of qualities that make someone's life better or worse, whether they have an actual preference for these qualities or not;
- subjective welfare – it is possible to let people state themselves how well they think their life is going, measured by their own actual preferences;
- resources – it is possible to identify a set of resources that make someone better off by enabling them to fulfil their own actual preferences;
- capabilities – it is possible, either objectively or democratically, to define a set of valuable things; someone is better off if they have the freedom to pursue them.

These accounts each identify factors which they consider as counting towards wellbeing. Such factors can be health (objective welfare), happiness (subjective welfare), income (resources), or access to practical reasoning (capabilities). Although they all have their own individual problems – objective accounts are often seen as paternalistic or exclusive (Haybron 2011); subjective accounts bear problems of comparability and adaptive preferences (Deaton 2013: 47) – they all claim to be the best, most complete account of how well people are off.

Thinking about ‘accounts’ of wellbeing inevitably leads to a kind of perfectionism which cannot be resolved. Since an ‘account’ of something aims to be comprehensive, accounts of wellbeing seem immediately weakened as soon as someone identifies a factor they did not incorporate into their set of things which improve wellbeing. This is visible, for example, in the adaptation of utilitarianism over time – hedonistic approaches were rejected in favour of desirable mental-state utility, which was rejected in favour of preference satisfaction, which was rejected in favour of satisfying informed preferences, i.e. preferences people *should* have (Kymlicka 2001: 13ff.). The existence of such a huge variety of nuanced accounts of wellbeing is in itself problematic. John Rawls (2005: 137), for instance, has argued that any comparing account of welfare must be agreed upon by everyone. If individuals cannot agree upon one account of wellbeing, it is impossible for a fully comprehensive account to be found.

Due to the strive for perfection, the individual factors that make up these accounts are often left without in-depth analysis. This is also rooted in the two different existing modes of valuation, based on the *de re / de dicto distinction* (see Nelson 2019). If I value something *de dicto*, I value it for the services or utility it provides me with: I value an orange for the nutritional value it gives me. Any amount of apples that provides me with the exact same utility is worth the same to me – I am indifferent between them, and I could easily substitute one for the other. If I value something *de re*, I value it as a particular: I value my pocket knife not just because it cuts well, but because it was given to me by my dad when I was younger; I am attached to this particular knife, rather than any knife that cuts well. This makes substitution a lot harder (cf. O’Neill 2018: 7ff.).

By looking at broad, vague ‘accounts’ of wellbeing, the individual factors that comprise them – i.e. health, education, freedom – are valued *de dicto*, leading to a ‘circle’ of desirable

factors. For example, accounts of wellbeing would frequently include health as a determining factor; healthy, well-nourished children, in turn, are more likely to participate in education. The additional skills and knowledge gained provide them with higher degrees of occupational choice; this may lead to higher income, which often enables them to access better healthcare later in life. This chain of wellbeing factors draws the attention away from the value of each individual factor on its own, resulting in negligence of the variety of aspects that can be covered by each factor.

2.2 'Measurements' of wellbeing as fundamental welfare indicators

Seeing attributes like health, education or work merely as 'factors' towards wellbeing dismisses the value they have for us as particulars. Health, rather than just being a means to an end – even if this ultimate end is 'happiness' – has value to us independently of the other gains that come with it. It does not simply enhance our wellbeing, which would mean it is separate from it, but can instead be seen as a possible way to measure wellbeing itself. It might therefore be more useful to think of a variety of such measurements of wellbeing, rather than a variety of accounts of wellbeing, because it opens up the possibility of focusing on health as a whole while still analysing the nuances of what makes A healthier than B. This is done, for instance, by Angus Deaton; he states that he could look at many other aspects, like education or social participation, too (2013: 9). Despite only focusing on health and wealth in his book, he manages to compare different countries over time in terms of their wellbeing; the analysis of health and wealth respectively is much more in-depth than it could have been had he attempted to consider all factors at once. Consequently, the result is much more satisfying than a broad but inevitably incomplete account of wellbeing.

This is, on the one hand, because we value these indicators *de re*. The fact that so much time and detailed analysis is spent on both selected indicators means that it is easier to recognise the irreplaceable value they have to a society and to the individuals within it. On the other hand, they influence so many other indicators of wellbeing that we are in almost any scenario worse off if we cannot access them. Deaton says himself that any indicator of wellbeing should not be looked at in isolation (2013:8). Acknowledging the interplay between specific indicators, rather than collecting a large quantity of them, seems to allow interesting conclusions about how one country compares to another. A researcher can then use different measurements depending on what they want to observe, and there is no need for them to be all-encompassing.

Of course, not all indicators of wellbeing are useful for international or intertemporal comparison. This is primarily because *prima facie* anything can serve as an indicator of wellbeing. Consider, for example, the amount of fruit I can buy with my income. If I am able to buy 10 oranges, this says something about my wellbeing because I gain utility from them. Someone who can buy 12 oranges is better off than me. The same applies to any good I can buy and any utility or disutility I can experience. Actual measurements of wellbeing, however, are only those which I cannot easily substitute. Good healthcare, fulfilling education and stable employment are not as easily substitutable as oranges because oranges are not *fundamental* for my wellbeing. If, due to troubled trading relationships with the European mainland, there was suddenly a shortage of oranges, I could substitute Spanish oranges with British apples; my indifference curve shows, for instance, that 10 oranges provide me with the exact same utility as 15 apples.

This means that in order to find good measurements of wellbeing, it is necessary to identify those indicators which are fundamental for wellbeing. Some have been in the centre of attention for various scholars, Deaton among them; the value of health or education in themselves and their effects on other indicators are uncontroversial. In the following chapter, I will suggest work as a fundamental indicator of wellbeing, while simultaneously providing a framework with which one can identify other indicators which could serve as a measurement of wellbeing.

3.1 What 'labour' / 'work' entails

Fundamental indicators of wellbeing, such as health or education, have long been recognised as valuable in themselves. If one wants to compare different societies with regard to their health, for instance, one would look at a combination of health indicators, e.g. life expectancy, infant mortality, maternal mortality, morbidity, infectious diseases, cardiovascular diseases, mental health, nutrition, etc. – a list is provided, for instance, by the European Commission (2012).

These factors can be looked at in various ways. Firstly, they can be observed individually, for example by focusing on data tables by indicator collected by the World Health Organisation. Secondly, one can examine particular factors in terms of their effect on other wellbeing indicators. Development Economics often analyses the connection between health and education; see, for example, the relationship between distribution of mosquito nets and primary school absenteeism in Gambia (Aikins et al. 1998: 186). Thirdly, one can aim for a comprehensive analysis of 'health', combining different factors to receive an overview of population health in a particular region / time. Again, Deaton (2013) organises his analysis of health and income in this way.

The same can be done with 'work' or 'labour'. To explain the difference between these two terms, Füllsack (2009: 9) compares them to their translations in other languages: the first term 'work' translates to 'œuvre' in French and 'obra' in Spanish, while the second term 'labour' is the equivalent of 'travail' or 'trabajo'. This distinction, which can be found in many languages, shows two different sides of the same phenomenon – the basis of human survival

and reproduction lies in the creation of something of value (associated with the first term) and is arduous at the same time (associated with the second term). While I use both terms interchangeably in this essay, the distinction is important because it draws attention to the variety of aspects this wellbeing indicator covers.

Aspects of the quality of one's 'work' highlight the productive side of the activity – the worker is *doing something useful*. Consider the following categories:

- Unemployment rates – unemployment has severe consequences on psychosomatic wellbeing (Hurrelmann 1994: 87ff.), highlighting the benefits of engaging in work;
- Occupational choice and career opportunities – the degree of freedom to pursue whatever one deems the most valuable contribution to society;
- Required skills – feeling challenged, avoiding feelings of alienation due to dull, repetitive activities;
- Team work – possibilities to experience accomplishment embedded in social relationships;
- Workplace satisfaction – whether tasks meet the expectations the worker had prior to taking up the job;
- Income – related to perceptions of fairness, but also to stress levels on the basis of financial pressure;
- Unionisation – possibilities to influence one's working environment, being informed about one's rights, and feeling in control over production.

Aspects of the quality of one's 'labour' highlight the potentially uncomfortable side of the activity – the labourer is *doing something arduous*. Consider here the following categories:

- Health and safety – how hazardous the working environment is; this can involve immediate danger, such as accidents, but also long-term consequences;

- Leisure time – the length of the working day and sufficient opportunities to regenerate one’s labour power;
- Relationship to the employer and company hierarchies – how much interest an employer shows in the wellbeing of their workers, how reasonable they are;
- State regulation – whether the state exercises some form of protection over the worker or whether workers are subject to arbitrary behaviour by employers;
- Decommodification – how much pressure one faces to sell one’s labour power, as defined by Esping-Andersen (1990);
- Atypical employment – the existence of largely ‘typical’ or ‘atypical’ employment based on the structure of contracts, e.g. Zero-Hour-Contracts;
- Precariousness – how secure one’s position is and whether one can rely on the employer to guarantee this position over a time period.

Commonly used for international and intertemporal comparison are employment levels. Although necessary as an indicator of wellbeing in the overall economy, unemployment rates are visibly not a sufficient analysis of how well the working age population is off. Work / labour changes along the lines of being more or less useful and being more or less arduous. Therefore, a variety of the given factors should be considered for comparisons; they could be combined into one index of work, serving as a measurement of how well a society is off. This essay focuses on aspects from the second group of labour conditions; themes from this category will dominate the analysis in chapter 4.

3.2 Why labour is a fundamental indicator of wellbeing

I have identified the different aspects one could look at when examining work. Precisely, I argue that work is to be seen as a *fundamental* indicator of wellbeing. Hence, I want to

establish two criteria for what makes an aspect of one's life a fundamental indicator, and thereby a possible measurement, of their wellbeing. I show that work fulfils these criteria.

The first criterion is universality. In order for something to be a useful measurement of wellbeing, which can be used for comparison, the object of comparison should be as universally prevalent as possible – this ensures that an indicator is not simply exchangeable but instead fundamental. Non-essential indicators, like the previously mentioned oranges, do not appear in all cultures' usual basket of goods; they are not universal enough to serve as a comparing measurement of wellbeing. This is why health, for example, has been established as a fundamental indicator of wellbeing – all societies at all times understand the meaning of physical integrity and value the absence of diseases.

Work fulfils this criterion because people work at all times, everywhere in the world; distinguishing work from leisure time was uncommon until the first industrial revolution (Argyle 1989: 11ff.). This is particularly true when considering the large amounts of informal work being done – in developing countries, about two-thirds of jobs are in the informal sector (*The Economist* 2016) and thereby not captured by most official assessments of employment. There is also the field of reproductive activities, like domestic work and care. This field is increasingly being formalised and gains recognition as 'work' across academic disciplines (e.g. LeBaron 2010).

The second criterion is interdependency with other indicators. This describes the instrumental value of a wellbeing indicator. Education, for example, can influence many other aspects of one's life positively or negatively. Increases in life expectancy can be traced back directly to increases in education level (Luy et al. 2019); poorly educated people are likely to receive a

smaller income and, hence, have fewer opportunities in life; depending on the degree of social mobility, their children will be worse off, too. Non-essential indicators, like the amount of oranges we can buy, do not influence other indicators in a unique way; apples may give me the same health benefit, and both are irrelevant for my education. Hence, they do not have enough interdependencies in order to serve as a measurement of wellbeing. If one's education score is low, however, they will almost certainly be worse off in most other wellbeing categories; this makes education irreplaceable as an indicator of wellbeing.

This applies to work, too. Hurrelmann (1994: 80ff.) describes how somatic, psychological and social risk during adulthood is largely rooted in the working conditions people are exposed to. Traditionally, work-related risk is analysed in the context of industrial labour conditions – capital-intensive production methods are related to workplace accidents, stress, depression, addiction and hazardous work processes (ibid.). In many Western countries, the nature of work has changed during the past decades. However, this does not result in an absence of work-related risk. Despite the decreasing number of hours people spend working for a wage, the workplace (and workplace regulation) remains one of the most fundamental determinants of their socialisation. Physical and mental health is influenced by it just as much as social status, prestige and other living conditions. If one works under precarious conditions, this could impact their physical integrity; they probably experience higher financial pressure to take up certain jobs or limit their own possibilities of education; they are likely to pass some disadvantage on to their children.

The global and intertemporal differences in the nature of work reaffirm this proposal of a more sophisticated analysis of working conditions. Overall, because work is universal and interdependent with other indicators of wellbeing, it is irreplaceable when comparing different people according to the risks they face during their lifespan.

CHAPTER 4: WORK AS WELLBEING – APPLICATION

I have argued that work is a fundamental indicator of wellbeing because it is universal to all societies and because it is vital for other indicators, such as health, income, and education. Moreover, I have pointed out the variety of aspects that can be covered by the terms work and labour. I want to verify this argument by comparing the wellbeing of different people with respect to the way they work. Looking at textile factories, which operated in and around Manchester for about 200 years, can be an excellent starting point for a number of reasons.

Firstly, workers living in different parts of Northern England at different times – whether in a model village like Styal, the newly developed towns in Lancashire, or the areas surrounding the mills of Central Manchester – experienced highly variable levels of wellbeing. Since social sciences are familiar with aspects like health or education varying between social classes and wider regions of a country or continent, it seems peculiar that people of the same class and in very close proximity of each other experience such big differences. Focusing on this case means that it is possible to look at single factories, small villages, and even the reports of individual workers in detail while still getting meaningful results concerning wellbeing differences.

Secondly, various mills offer good recordings of life at the factory. This is partly due to the prevalence of paternalism, which meant that millowners took an interest in recording certain details; an example is the Quarry Bank Mill Memorandum (National Trust 2013c). Moreover, many former mills have been turned into museums, Quarry Bank being among them; reliable information has been collected, for instance, by the National Trust Foundation.

Thirdly, choosing the cotton industry more generally has another advantage, summarised by Greenlees (2016: 459): “Cotton textile manufacturing in America and Britain was one of the few trades where men and women could work alongside of each other, performing the same tasks for the same rates of pay and experiencing the same workplace health hazards”. Looking at the cotton industry, thereby, results in a less exclusive picture than, say, looking at mining towns, where differences in work-related wellbeing are likely to correlate with gender differences, thus blurring the results. If gender differences had to be considered, this analysis would have to be much more complex in order to give an accurate impression of life as a worker.

4.1 Historical perspective: Work at Quarry Bank Mill

This chapter looks at the relation of wellbeing and work at Quarry Bank Mill. Since the village Styal was built and run by one family for over 150 years, the relationship between the Gregs and their workers provides a framework for the analysis of wellbeing. Other factors – namely living conditions, workplace health and safety, education, income levels and freedom of choice – can be related back to the employer-employee-relationship. I choose to analyse this aspect of work because of the style in which the Gregs operated the mill and village, which is commonly called ‘Paternalism’; the term describes millowner behaviour that directly and indirectly governs most aspects of the workers’ life. This is a common trait of cotton mills and the corresponding “company towns” during the industrialisation all over the world (e.g. Wingerd 1996).

The fact that Samuel Greg chose to build his cotton-spinning factory in 1784 powered by a water wheel was of great importance to the wellbeing of several generations of workers. It

meant that he had to run his business outside of Central Manchester, where he continued to live during the factory's early years (National Trust 2013b). The River Bollin provided Greg with enough energy to run the mill; however, there were barely any workers outside the city at the time. Consequently, Greg began to build cottages with small gardens which workers could rent, forming the village Styal (ibid.).

Quarry Bank Mill was not only one of the first industrial factories in the world, but also pioneered a particular relationship between mill owners and workers (Rose 1986: 27). Samuel Greg ran mill and village in a way that has been described as paternalistic; rent as well as shopping bills were deducted straight from workers' wages ('cottage system' and 'truck system'). Together with his wife Hannah, Greg made efforts to improve the workers' situation; in particular, a school was built, a sick club as well as a women's group were set up (Rose 1986: 114), and the cottages remained superior to Mancunian accommodation throughout the following decades. Although Greg's treatment of his workers had a good reputation, it would be misguided to romanticise his actions as entirely altruistic; they gave him control over wages, rent, and goods prices. Rose describes how the initial need to provide housing soon proved to be "an invaluable tool of management" of the workforce (1986: 4) and a tool to generate output more efficiently.

Despite the good living conditions, the working conditions in the factory seemed no different from the conditions in other cotton mills (National Trust 2013b). The mill was a dangerous place to work at in the short run as well as in the long run. The effects of mill labour on workers' health are outlined by Greenlees (2016: 465): omnipresent dust led to respiratory problems such as bronchitis, pneumonia, tuberculosis and byssinosis; humidity, which was needed to protect cotton fibres, caused rheumatism; insufficient lighting strained the eyes; the loud noises of machinery could even cause deafness. Although deadly accidents happened

less often than in some other industries, workers were still vulnerable to them. Since they spent about 70 hours a week in the factory, this was a significant part of their lives; during the first decades of Quarry Bank, most factory workers across the country had no understanding of the concept of 'leisure time', as outlined by a spinner from Rossendale, Moses Heap (Aspin 1981: 30).

Another aspect common to all factories was the strong focus on discipline and hierarchy. Rose (1986: 103ff.) argues that the Gregs expected their workers and apprentice children to be particularly loyal to them, following their orders at all times; this is precisely because they were willing to guarantee better living conditions than other mills. While pre-industrial workers had always suffered from harsh working conditions, Aspin (1981: 30) describes how the new kind of discipline with long lists of rules and the creation of hierarchies even within the workforce was perceived as particularly negative. It demonstrates that the paternalist system did not always create a purely harmonious environment; it was also the origin of commands, sanctions and punishments. This aspect has been picked up on by artists and commentators, such as the caricaturist William Robert Cruikshank, as visible in the drawing in Figure 1.

It has proven rather difficult to find direct records by the first generations working under Samuel and Hannah Greg. Hence, it is not possible to assess how they themselves judged their situation – whether they predominantly felt resentment about the conditions in the factory or gratitude for the good living conditions likely depended on the individual experiences of a working family. Yet, since more than half of the workforce under Samuel Greg was children predominantly from workhouses (Rose 1986: 28), and Quarry Bank had less of a problem

with truancy than other millowners (Rose 1986: 109), it is legitimate to assume that it was overall perceived as more comfortable than other places.



FIG. 95. A CARTOON OF THE EARLY NINETEENTH CENTURY illustrating the condition of children in the factories of the time. A bale is directed to Sir Robert Peel. This is the first Baronet (1750–1830), father of the statesman. Peel the elder was a cotton-spinner who imported from the London workhouses deserted children whom he treated well, but used to work his factories in Lancashire. He was a Member of Parliament and in 1802 carried the Act which was the forerunner of all factory legislation, *An Act for the Preservation of the Health and Morals of Apprentices and others, employed in Cotton and other Mills.*

Figure 1. Caricature by Robert Cruikshank: “English Factory Slaves”.

Source: Wellcome Collection.

However, there were changes after Samuel Greg retired, making the situation less clear. His oldest son Robert was an Anti-Corn-Law activist and strongly opposed any kind of trade unions or other workers’ organisations. His two brothers, Samuel Jr. and William Rathbone Greg, were among the founders of the Manchester Statistical Society (Ashton 1977: 6); they took an interest in the health and wellbeing of Manchester’s population for several years. The brothers’ activism ended abruptly after a strike in 1846. Ashton himself (1977: 7) notes that Samuel Greg Jr., whose “chief energies were devoted for many years to efforts to educate and humanise the workers in his community”, had become disillusioned after the event. Morley (1881: 3) wrote about William Rathbone Greg: “For the miseries of the working class, Mr

Greg's pity was profound and almost passionate, but his moral and intellectual sympathy was not with them and was often inaccessible, from their point of view".

Workplace regulation increased and improved the working conditions of the workers heavily – sometimes by force of the law, sometimes by nudging employers into making adjustments before new laws were made. Overall, the conditions improved due to this kind of regulation. Moreover, workers at Styal continued to be privileged due to their countryside environment. Particularly during the First World War, sufficient food existed even though everything imported was rationed, and according to Jim Mottram (2014), “no one starved”.

Yet, tensions between the Gregs and the workers continued, if not increased. This could also be related to the factory increasingly making losses (Jeremy 1988: 354). Interview material from those who grew up in Styal between 1890 and 1920 heavily focuses on how the Gregs behaved, and how distant they were from the lived reality of the workers. An anonymous woman (2014) describes how the Gregs did not understand what it meant not to have money; she goes so far as to say that “the only thing [the Gregs] ever did for Styal was giving the children buns and oranges for Christmas”. Reg Worthington (2014a) describes ongoing struggles particularly with Alec Greg; while they were sometimes humorous, they demonstrated Alec's dominant sense of self-importance. This kind of behaviour led to the older generations telling the younger: “In no way are you going to be fodder for the looms of Quarry Bank Mill” (Worthington 2014b). This highlights that despite the paternalist leadership of the mill, strong feelings of pride and awareness existed among the workers of Quarry Bank; this is important to keep in mind when looking at paternalist factories in general.

4.2 Comparison to paternalist factories

This part relates the findings from 4.1 about Quarry Bank to surrounding industrial textile factories. I will consider similarly paternalistic factories and how the literature has judged them historically, showing how a lack of regulation gave paternalistic millowners the power they had.

Hammond & Hammond (1917: 38) start their analysis of life in the new industrial towns with the statement that there was very little regulation made centrally for England; this resulted in a localised concentration of power in the hands of few individuals, such as borough rulers and land owners. Any rights to political influence, which are usually tied to the notion of citizenship (e.g. Isin 2002: 79), were virtually inaccessible to workers – in fact, workers “were not citizens of this or that town, but hands of this or that master” (Hammond & Hammond 1917: 40). This is crucial for understanding the position mill workers were in. The vast majority of workers had little control over any aspect of their own personal wellbeing – the quality of health, education and housing was highly dependent on the relationship they had with their employers.

This is particularly true when looking at mills that were, similar to Quarry Bank, run in a paternalistic manner. Scholars exhibit a large variety of opinions when it comes to evaluating paternalistic factories and model villages. Generally, they seem to agree that housing of the workers in such factories was much better than elsewhere. Anti-Corn-Law writer Cooke Taylor (1842: 30ff.), for instance, emphasises better housing as well as education; according to Hammond & Hammond (1917: 41), he saw the millowner in “fear of losing his rents” and thereby more disciplined to improve the living conditions of workers. Gaskell agrees that the cottage system managed to provide housing of unique quality compared to previous times and

other regions (1833: 347). On the other hand, it is often described how some millowners abused the power that came with the monopoly supply of housing and consumer goods to set prices high above market value (Babbage 1832: 309); it is apparent and perhaps unsurprising that they were primarily interested in making a profit, but, according to Babbage, they could have easily afforded charging less excessive prices while still making good returns (*ibid.*; Gaskell 1833: 345).

Throughout the literature, the Gregs are listed as a prime example of successful paternalism and responsible, even generous millowner behaviour (e.g. Hammond & Hammond 1917: 42, 49). They managed not only Quarry Bank, but also other surrounding mills, such as in Eagley, Bolton, which was known as a particularly civilised and well-organised workers community (Aspin 1981: 30). Workers at other paternalistic mills were much more likely to be subject to arbitrary behaviour. Yet, this invites to a more general conclusion about the relationship between workers and owners of such firms – it was one of inevitable dependency. Even when mills, shops and cottages were run with benevolence and faithfulness, workers had very little control over their own situation; the emotive writings of Friedrich Engels are by far not the only documents of the negative effects of this lack of autonomy. Gaskell (1833: 358) compares the situation of workers under the truck and cottage systems to that of slaves in the West Indies; a change in ownership of the mill could change the overall wellbeing of the workers completely. Likewise, the direct link between goods prices and wages in model villages was frequently used to the benefit of the employer (Babbage 1832: 309ff.) – in times of depression, the employers decreased real wages by raising the prices of consumer goods. Even in well-managed establishments like Quarry Bank, workers faced a constant struggle for more power and independence – the truck system was abandoned in Styal in 1873, when the local shop became a co-operative run by the workers themselves (National Trust 2014).

4.3 Comparison to non-paternalist factories

In paternalist mills, the wellbeing of the workers was in all respects dependent on the employer-employee relationship. I will now examine the situation of workers in Central Manchester, where firms were run differently, to show that the wellbeing of the workers still depended on this relationship and their working conditions more broadly.

The effects of work on the wellbeing of mill workers, as previously analysed, can be split into two groups to highlight differences. First, there are fundamental indicators of wellbeing such as the quality of housing and health, which were dependent on the employer-employee relationship. Second, there are direct working conditions within the sphere of formal employment. The first and the second group are, as I will argue finally, interrelated.

The literature describes Central Manchester during the age of the cotton mills as one of the dreariest places in the country. When industry began to demand a labour force of unprecedented scale, the focus was largely on building mills rather than towns (Hammond & Hammond 1917: 43). The lack of concern about the workers' relationship with their environment was much greater in the cotton towns than in the outskirts, where factories were more commonly paternalist. Once more, this is rooted in the absence of centralised legislation and planning.

Housing and its relationship with health is often mentioned as the most striking difference between living in the city centre or the surrounding areas. The state of public health in Manchester, related to living in cellars and a lack of basic hygiene, was by no means a matter of opinion; it was outlined by plenty of political economists across the ideological spectrum.

Note, for instance, a particularly telling statement by Nassau William Senior, quoted in Quiller-Couch (1925: 152):

“As I passed through the dwellings of the mill-hands in Irish Town, Ancoats and Little Ireland, I was only amazed that it was possible to maintain a reasonable state of health in such homes. The towns [...] have been erected with the utmost disregard of everything except the immediate advantage of the speculative builder. [...] In one place we found a whole street following the course of a ditch, because in this way deeper cellars could be secured without the cost of digging, cellars not for storing wares or rubbish, but for dwellings of human beings. Not one house in the street escaped the cholera.”

While some small families lived in cellars at Quarry Bank, the condition of the buildings was a lot better; moreover, at most five people inhabited a cellar, compared to up to 30 people per cellar in towns (National Trust 2014). The cottages in Styal had their own privy in the backyard, whereas town dwellers would often share a privy with everyone living in the same street (ibid.); this is one explanation for the cholera epidemics in town. The cottages in Quarry Bank were designed in a deliberate manner for the number of workers employed in the mill; Mancunian millowners were never in the position to engage in this sort of planning because the surroundings of their factories were not ‘new’ to the same extent. Consequently, they had a different initial relationship with their employees; they also lacked the possibility to build up a closer connection to the workers by providing for them, like it was the case in paternalistic mills.

I have argued previously that paternalistic millowners, such as the Gregs themselves, did not take an interest in the wellbeing of their workers out of pure altruism; they saw their chance to shape each generation of workers in a way that would be of more use to them. Initially, they were obliged to provide better living conditions to motivate workers to move wherever the mill was situated. Millowners in places like Manchester, where there were plenty of people looking to sell their labour power, never had much of this incentive to take up responsibility for better housing or education. This shows that the key origin of differences in health and

housing was the difference in employer-employee relationship between paternalistic and less paternalistic factories.

As stated in section 4.1, direct working conditions within factories did not differ much between the regions. Janet Greenlees (2016: 460) defines occupational health as a subset of workplace health: “Many causes of ill-health relate to both working and living conditions. Hence, workplace health encompasses ill-health experienced at work but not necessarily caused by it and overlaps with occupational health, or ill-health caused by specific work processes”. I will therefore not repeat the state of occupational health, which has already been described in the context of Quarry Bank. Greenlees’ approach is, however, invaluable because it draws attention to the connection between the direct working conditions and the living conditions outlined. Living conditions were dependent on the employer-employee relationship; living conditions, then, influenced the workers’ health, which, in turn, influenced aspects of workplace health. Hence, while *occupational health* was more or less the same, *workplace health* in Central Manchester was different from workplace health in Styal.

Consider the example of weavers, who were particularly vulnerable to contagious diseases (Greenlees 2016: 465) – in order to operate the suction shuttle, they had to frequently use their mouth to draw thread through a small hole. If workers in Central Manchester experienced much worse living conditions than those, say, in Styal, the weavers of Manchester were more likely to be infected with such diseases; therefore, other weavers were at higher risk to get infected, too. This makes visible how differences in living conditions can affect workplace health. Likewise, it shows that the exact processes of work – such as the use of suction shuttles – could interact with other aspects of health and thereby impact wellbeing through means other than straight-forward occupational health. This definition leads to the conclusion

that, while workers in Manchester and Styal experienced similarly hazardous occupational health, their overall workplace health could vary dramatically, with Styal workers being significantly better off.

Another aspect that differed was the length of working hours. Hours in paternalist factories were often already shorter or cut before government legislation was introduced, especially when it came to child workers (National Trust 2013a); those employers were also much more likely to openly support shorter hours for mill workers. William Rathbone Greg, who managed one of his father Samuel's mills in Bury before starting his own business in the cotton industry (Chrisholm 1911: 555), wrote in favour of shorter hours; others, like John Fielden, were leading figures in the fight for the Ten Hours Bill 1847 (Hammond & Hammond 1917: 49). Interested in philanthropy, some paternalist millowners experimented with the provision of parks and libraries to guide the workers' newly acquired leisure time. Most millowners however, particularly those in towns, shared the attitude that any leisure time would only be spent on drinking (ibid.); much opposition to the Ten Hours Bill was framed in the way that the whole industry would die out due to profits being made in the last hour only (e.g. Nassau William Senior 1844). Mancunian cotton mills remained therefore known as factories where overwork was not only common but even appreciated by millowners and policy-makers. Since enforcement of the new laws of the 1840s was difficult, workers remained dependent on their employers' benevolence.

4.4 Work today – the role of paternalist employers in developing countries

The unique employer-employee relationship of the cotton mills was, as seen, related to a lack of centralised legislation, which put factory owners in a very powerful position. The existence

of such legislation in modern-day Britain would either require a different angle of analysis of work, or the analysis would bring about less meaningful results. However, this kind of centralisation is not prevalent in all places around the world. Many developing countries still assign much more authority to individual companies. In this section, I want to show how the theory of work as wellbeing and my chosen aspect of employer-employee relationship could be applied to work today in developing countries. I briefly outline similarities in the health and safety structure of factories, the lack of centralised organisation by governments, and the role employers play in other aspects of their workers' lives, aiming to point future researchers into a direction of what to analyse.

Firstly and most prominently, work in factories of the developing world has been described as particularly hazardous. So-called sweatshops run by multinational corporations seem to exhibit occupational health and risk almost indistinguishable from Manchester's early cotton mills, as Arnold (2009: 636) outlines: "Workers are exposed to malfunctioning equipment and toxic chemicals, fire doors are locked, workspaces are poorly ventilated, supervisors are often verbally, and sometimes physically, abusive". These are attributes this essay encountered in section 4.1. Toxic chemicals, like the carcinogenic lubricating oils on spinning mules, have existed in Lancashire; likewise, the air in mills was kept humid in order to protect the cotton fibres. As depicted in Robert Cruikshank's drawing, abusive behaviour was common even under friendlier millowners.

Secondly, it is possible to compare the roots of rather poor occupational health to the origins of occupational health of millworkers in Manchester. These roots are to be found to some extent in the lack of standardised regulation, leaving working conditions largely in the hands of individual employers. On the one hand, there is much less centralised labour legislation

than in developed countries; on the other hand, there are few means to enforce existing laws (Arnold 2009: 628). In England, inspections only came about mid-19th century; however, capacities were not sufficient to actually provide an effective means for the prevention of rights violations (Greenlees 2016: 466). Lacking regulation and insufficient law enforcement was common in industrialising England and is common in developing countries today.

Thirdly, there is a trend in factories to be run in a paternalistic way similar to the one found in industrial Lancashire. Generally, the employer-employment relationship in sweatshops is built upon a similar asymmetry of information, putting the employer in a particularly powerful position – many long-term health consequences, for instance, are well-known to the factory owners due to their experience and education, but unknown to the worker until experienced later in life (Anderson 1995: 197). An interesting development in company leadership globally is related to the provision of housing – while Lucas (2017) describes efforts by private Chinese firms to provide housing as “old-school communist policies” in the *Financial Times*, a historical perspective on model towns in 19th century England calls into question whether these developments have anything to do with communism after all. This trend, which can be observed in developed as well as developing countries, is to be examined in future years to establish whether the relationship between employers and workers develops in the same way as it did in Lancashire.

A more comprehensive comparison between England’s cotton mills and factories in developing countries promises to be fruitful – lessons could be learnt in terms of governmental legislation, but also in terms of employer behaviour. To take this analysis even further, a ‘work / labour index’ of wellbeing as suggested in this paper could be used to compare wellbeing between the working population in today’s developed and less developed

countries. Asking questions about centralisation of regulation, power of the employer, and pressure to sell one's labour power could form the foundations for an analysis of the interplay of a) the bargaining power of workers, determining behaviour of governments as well as employers, and b) the *de facto* political power of employers.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this paper was to analyse the differences in wellbeing of factory workers around Manchester. I found that differences in general health, workplace health, income, education, housing and other important indicators of wellbeing largely occurred due to differences in the employer-employee relationship. A lack of central regulation and policy-making resulted in a workforce with little control over its environment; individual company owners were free to treat workers despotically without having to fear sanctions. On the one hand, this led to paternalistic owners who dedicated most of their efforts to improve working conditions for their workers; on the other hand, some other paternalistic owners exploited the situation of the workers by controlling wages indirectly via the truck and cottage system. The same reasons led to non-paternalistic owners not being held responsible for the situation their workers were in.

Policy-making that takes the importance of work for wellbeing into consideration has the potential to benefit all societies. Several things can be drawn from my analysis, mainly applicable to cases where employers are in particularly powerful positions. Firstly, regulation concerning working conditions is highly interrelated with regulation concerning housing. If policy-makers are rather unwilling to put restraints on company owners, legislating landlord behaviour could have similarly beneficial effects. Secondly, the difference between occupational health and workplace health is of immense importance; measures to produce equality in occupational health do not automatically lead to equality in workplace health. Thirdly, ensuring the separation of rent and wages gives workers more autonomy in cases where employers are strongly involved in land ownership.

While this paper offers an overview of wellbeing in different areas around Manchester, chapter 3.1 has established many other aspects of work that were not yet touched upon. A closer analysis of wages, occupational choice, social mobility, unemployment, unionisation and skilled labour in mills could add nuance to the findings of this paper. Moreover, work as wellbeing could be applied to a variety of social strata, analysing how daily work affects them differently. As outlined in 4.4, similarities can be found in factories in developing countries; an in-depth comparison between industrial England and other countries today could lead not only to a better understanding of the prevalent challenges of the factory life, but could also provide guidance in policy-making.

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