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978-0-521-70951-4 - Discretionary Time: A New Measure of Freedom

Robert E. Goodin, James Mahmud Rice, Antti Parpo and Lina Eriksson

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## *Discretionary Time*

A healthy work–life balance has become increasingly important to people trying to cope with the pressures of contemporary society. This trend highlights the fallacy of assessing well-being in terms of finance alone; how much time we have matters just as much as how much money. The authors of this book have developed a novel way to measure ‘discretionary time’: time which is free to spend as one pleases. Exploring data from the US, Australia, Germany, France, Sweden and Finland, they show that temporal autonomy varies substantially across different countries and under different living conditions. By calibrating how much control people have over their time, and how much they *could* have under alternative welfare, gender or household arrangements, this book offers a new perspective for comparative cross-national enquiries into the temporal aspects of human welfare.

ROBERT E. GOODIN is Distinguished Professor of Philosophy and Social & Political Theory in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University.

JAMES MAHMUD RICE is an ARC Research Associate in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University.

ANTTI PARPO is Administrator of Somero Social & Health Services, Finland.

LINA ERIKSSON is an ARC Research Associate in the Research School of Social Sciences at the Australian National University.

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# Discretionary Time

A New Measure of Freedom

ROBERT E. GOODIN

JAMES MAHMUD RICE

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For purposes of both social accounting and behavior modeling, a uniform ‘currency’ in which concepts can be structured and behavioral parameters estimated is of enormous value. Historically, the only such science with such a currency has been economics, where money has served as a measuring rod by which a large number of decisions can be understood, evaluated and aggregated. (Juster 1985a, pp. 19–20)

Real economy – savings – consists in the saving of working time ... Economising, therefore, does not mean the giving up of pleasure, but the development of power and productive capacity, and thus both the capacity for and the means of enjoyment ... To economise on labour time means to increase the amount of free time, i.e., time for the complete development of the individual. (Marx 1858/1972, p. 148)

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## Preface

One thing leads to another, in scholarship as in life. The project reported here grows out of Goodin's earlier collaboration with Bruce Headey, Ruud Muffels and Henk-Jan Dirven on *The Real Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. That book used a very different sort of data from ongoing 'panels' to examine the real impact of each of the three main types of welfare regimes on various standard indicators of social concern: poverty, equality, efficiency, social stability, social integration. In addition to all those standard indicators, we thought that we ought also try to assess their impact on people's 'autonomy', somehow construed.

We floundered searching for a good measure. Eventually we hit upon one that seemed particularly telling: a time-and-money measure of 'combined resource autonomy', representing the proportion of the population earning at least a poverty-level income and spending no more than the internationally agreed maximum of 40 hours a week in paid labour to do so.

The proportion of people failing that standard might be said to be in 'time-or-money poverty'. In countries representing corporatist and social-democratic welfare regimes, that proportion was only a shade higher than the proportion in money poverty alone. But in the liberal US welfare regime, where money poverty was already twice as high as in the other two regimes, 'time-and-money poverty' was double that again – a whopping 35 per cent.<sup>1</sup>

We were mightily impressed by that finding. So was Nobel Laureate Robert Solow, in his long and appreciative review of our work in the *New York Review of Books*.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, it was something that merited much further investigation. Alas, there was no way of pursuing the matter further within the confines of standard data sets focusing on

<sup>1</sup> Goodin *et al.* 1999, pp. 276, 312.    <sup>2</sup> Solow 2000.

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income alone. A different approach, employing specifically time-use data, was clearly required. Hence the present project.

Goodin mapped out the basic conceptual strategy for calculating ‘discretionary time’ in a paper for a May 1998 ‘Workshop on Social Policy and Political Theory’ convened by Stein Ringen for the Maison des Sciences de l’Homme in Paris. Invaluable early advice was received at that point from Abram de Swaan, Bernd Marin, Ulrich Mückenberger, Claus Offe, Einar Overbye, Stein Ringen and Philippe Van Parijs. Later we benefited from the hospitality of the Institute for Social and Economic Research at the University of Essex and received excellent advice from Kimberly Fisher and Jay Gershuny on how the Multinational Time Use data set might best be used in our project. Along the way, we benefited from the continuing advice of several of ANU’s distinguished Adjunct Professors – Nancy Folbre, Bob Haveman, Claus Offe, David Soskice and Bobbi Wolfe – during their recurring visits to RISS over many years. Extraordinarily helpful comments on near-final drafts of the book as a whole have come from Nancy Folbre, Paul ‘t Hart, Kieran Healy and Sandy Jencks.

Our initial attempts at implementing that strategy empirically came in a pair of preliminary, exploratory papers. One was co-authored with Michael Bittman and Peter Saunders, the other with Olli Kangas. While various aspects of our methodology have shifted since, and the findings reported here supplant those earlier ones in certain ways, we remain greatly indebted to those early collaborators for help getting us started.

Versions of these arguments have been presented at various conferences and seminars: to the annual conference of RC19 of the International Sociological Association, meeting in Orviedo, Spain; to the ‘Time Use and Economic Well-Being’ conference of the Levy Economics Institute of Bard College, Annandale-on-Hudson, New York; to the International Association for Time Use Research meetings in Halifax, Nova Scotia, and Copenhagen; and to seminars at the University of Bergen, the Norwegian Business School, the Stockholm Institute for Future Studies, the University of Turku, Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW, Sydney and ANU. For discussions then and later, we are grateful to Sara Arber, Tony Atkinson, Christine Benesch, Geoff Brennan, Frank Castles, Kenny Easwaran, Marc Fleurbaey, Marzia Fontana, Bruno Frey, Paul Frijters, Jay Gershuny, Diane Gibson, Bruce Headey, Karl Hinrichs, Charlotte Koren, Andrew Leigh, Bernard Manin, Julie McMillan, Sue Mendus, Jane Millar,

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Above all, for permission to use their data we are grateful to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the Multinational Time Use Study, the German Institute for Economic Research, the Luxembourg Income Study, Statistics Finland and Statistics Sweden. Our work on the 'Discretionary Time Project' has been carried out with the financial support of Australian Research Council Discovery Grant DP0450406, for which we are also most grateful.

Finally, we are grateful for the permission of the editors, publishers and our other co-authors of the following articles to rework some material from them for this book:

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