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   Can we learn again to talk with one another? The purpose of this series of hacks is to see if we can. In *21 Lessons for the 21th Century,* Yuval Harari argues that the place to start the serious soul-searching that we need to do as a country is accepting that we don't really understand what is going.[1] The dominant themes in the US narrative are ones grounded in classical liberalism and, more recently, neoliberalism. Globalization has challenged this worldview, and it is far from clear what resources we can draw upon to meet those challenges. What we will become as a country depends largely whether we can find a way to talk across the polarization that now divides us.

   In "Pursuing a Shared Future in the Face of Globalization: Four Essential Questions," we identified three themes for healing the divisions created by globalization: (1) fostering dignity, (2) safeguarding livelihoods, and (3) encouraging respect. In the short essay below, we discuss issues related to those themes and identify questions for further discussion. The goal of the discussion, we hope, is not necessarily to reach consensus, but rather to better appreciate the experiences and perspectives that we collectively bring to that discussion and to the priorities for further action.

Deserving and Undeserving: Who is Entitled to What

Abstract: The invidious distinction between, and disparate treatment of US and NOT US when it comes to resource allocation, cooperation, and positive regard is a central topic both in psychology and evolutionary biology. In human societies such divisions are apt to be based not only biological kin, but "fictive kin" reflecting shared ethnicity, community, culture, religion, ideology, and other sources of shared group identity. Human beings, in contrast to other primates, not only engage in such disparate treatment but individually and collectively rationalize their willingness to do so, and create institutions and philosophical systems that define our obligations toward others in those categories. In particular, we make distinctions between those deserving and those not deserving our assistance. Today, as globalization, and new technologies creates increasingly sharp social and political divides some of the key questions we must face are:

1. *What can those who are unemployed and unable to support themselves and their loved ones do to show themselves to be members of the community deserving of its assistance and support?*

2. *Given that a community is a group of people who depend upon one another, what kind of dependencies do we want to encourage and discourage for the truly disadvantaged?*

3. *Given that shoulder-to-shoulder relationships build future communities, what safety nets for the disadvantaged promote the kind of community in which we want to live?*

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In the early years of the great depression, James Truslow Adams in his 1931 book *The American Epic* articulated the goal of creating a society that offered not only guaranteed life and liberty but the pursuit of happiness and fulfillment. He wrote: *"The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."*[2]

On November 29, 2017, President Donald Trump flew to St Charles, Missouri, to make a speech promoting his tax cut as a benefit to the middle class.[3] Trump's message focused on a contrast between the deserving, who are worthy of our help, and the undeserving who are not worthy of it. He pledged to help workers by cutting government benefits to those who do not and will not work. With the dubious claim that he knew people working three jobs who live next door to people who have no intention of ever working at all, he directed his ire at the "spongers" who are "making more money and doing better than the person that's working his and her ass off." The crowd roared with approval.

The Early Poor Laws

The distinction between the "deserving" and the "underserving" poor has as a long history. The English Poor Laws, first passed during the reign of Elizabeth I, sought to distinguish the swindling poor from the deserving poor. The test was their willingness to

submit to humiliating circumstances. As prominent figure stated after his first visit to a poorhouse, "everything possible was done to inflict mental and moral degradation."[4] The idea was that only those truly needy would seek help under such debasing conditions. It was called "the workhouse test."[5] This approach eventually evolved into a principle known as "less eligibility." Less eligibility required that the relief offered inside the workhouse was always less than what the lowest wage-earner could provide.[6] The intent was to make sure that there was always an incentive to work.

The prevailing assumption behind English Poor Laws was that poverty was the fault of the person who happened to be poor. Personal shortcomings or bad character caused poverty, and the only way out was thrift, hard work, and improved moral rectitude. However, this understanding of poverty eventually gave way to the recognition that poverty was often the result not of drunkenness or laziness but of forces over which individuals had no control—the disappearance of jobs, death or incapacity of wage earners, and other sources of special, but often wide-spread, need. This recognition laid the foundation for the emergence of the welfare state [7] in which protection against joblessness and acceptance of assistance in times of need would no longer be stigmatized, and indeed would be seen as a right or entitlement.

One aspect of this de-stigmatization was the legal requirement for those earning income to purchase some type of insurance against circumstances that lay beyond the remedy of self-reliance, such as job-loss, or medical expenses. When people found themselves in desperate times, they could collect the benefits they would need to tide them over. The contracted payouts from this so-called insurance provided "social security," and the notion of *entitlement* to various kinds of welfare assistance as a legal right was born.

Three Fundamental Questions

The welfare state was industrial society's way of keeping social and economic order intact.[8] The goal was never to guarantee people protection from harm in every situation but rather to provide them with minimal social security. But, this safety net approach created a source of political dissatisfaction. For elites, politics may be about who gets (or perhaps who gets to keep) what. But for most ordinary Americans, it is about who deserves what.[9] To the extent that Americans hate welfare, it is because they see it as a program that rewards the undeserving.[10]

Our feelings about welfare are grounded in what psychologists called strong reciprocity. Strong reciprocity is the inclination to reward those who honor the norms of cooperation and to punish those who violate them.[11] Strong reciprocity produces conditional cooperators who offer or withdraw assistance depending upon whether they think the other is acting responsibly. The relevant norms give rise to three core questions.[12]

1. Who merits or even may be entitled to help (and who does not)?
2. How can we provide help without increasing further dependency (and in the case of many political progressives, how can we do so without stigmatization and loss of feelings of self-worth and self-efficacy?
3. What are the limits of responsibility to help the poor (and who should pay the bills)?

These questions have never been easy to answer. They relate to deep notions of US and THEM, which have been investigated by scholars from diverse fields ranging from evolutionary biology and neural economics to psychology, sociology, anthropology, moral philosophy, and the humanities. Students of human behavior have found evidence of differences in norms and practices governing and shaping in-group versus outgroup interactions with those considered to be one of US and those considered to be one of THEM. They include different degrees of felt obligations relating to daily practice of care and concern, and also of tolerance.

The practice of distinguishing US from THEM, and acting in accord with that distinction, is grounded in the notion of fictive kin-- people who, although not actually family relatives, are treated as if they are; maybe not sons and daughters but, at least, distant cousins. Nations, small towns, supporters of particular athletic teams, religious communities, and university faculties, students and staff are all, to various degrees of closeness and intensity, comprised of fictive kin.

Today, the challenges of globalization and increasing social and ethnic diversity, oblige us to address fundamental concerns about the glue that holds us together as a society and a nation, about the durability of such bonds, and about what we may become in future.

Who Does and Doesn't Merit Help?

The American Dream embodies the idea that you can succeed if you work hard. Perhaps as clearly as anyone, President Bill Clinton articulated this belief in his 1993 Labor Day speech:

> *"We'll think of the faith of our parents that was instilled in us here in American, the idea that if you work hard and play by the rules, you'll be rewarded with a good life for yourself and a better chance for your children"* (Clinton, 1993).

This sentiment that hard work pays off is also deeply engrained in the American psyche, but it has a questionable corollary: "if you don't work hard or don't play by the rules then you aren't entitled to a reward" (AEI/Brooking Working Group on Poverty and Opportunity, 2015). Recent studies show that Americans assume that the poor don't work. A 2016 survey by the American Enterprise Institute found the two-thirds of those surveyed did not think that the poor held steady jobs.[13] While it is true that the majority of poor don't hold down steady jobs, the two major reasons that they don't are health issues and home/family responsibilities.[14] Nevertheless, most Americans lay the responsibility for poverty on the shoulders of the poor.[15] This conviction stands in stark contrast to other countries, where the state or the employment system is faulted.[16]

Although Martin Gilens's survey study, *Why Americans Hate Welfare*, is somewhat dated—it was conducted in the 1990s—much of it still rings true. Perhaps, the most relevant insight today concerns the work ethic that demarcates the deserving from the undeserving. Back in 1986, the public was equally divided about whether the goal of welfare was to provide relief or to get people people back on their feet.[17] Public opposition to welfare was grounded in a wide-spread belief that recipients would rather sit at home collecting benefits than work.[18] Today, most American, even among the poor, support welfare programs that are designed to get people back to work.[19]

A concern not to undermine the poor's commitment to work is as old as public assistance itself. In his classic *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* Max Weber locates this redeeming view of work in the Protestant notion of a calling. What was previously a morally neutral effort to make a livelihood became instead an expression of "brotherly love" (Weber, 2002, p. 51). Work became a religious expression of our commitment to God.[20] This new evaluation of work, combined with the strong influence of Adam Smith's "invisible hand," lead to the belief that work made one deserving.

The problem we encounter today is that the market forces, which previously provided "good-paying" jobs for those willing to work hard and be faithful employees, no longer reliably such opportunities. The Protestant work ethic is not an option for those facing long-term unemployment because no one can embrace a work ethic if no jobs exist. Our criteria for deciding who is deserving eliminates both the potentially deserving and undeserving in one stroke. Under these circumstances, a new and different question must be asked:

1. *What can those who are unemployed and unable to support themselves and their loved ones do to show themselves to be member of the community deserving of its assistance and support?*

How to provide help without increasing dependency?

Convention social and economic wisdom maintains that, if we wish to avoid dependency, we must eliminate the moral hazards that produce dependency. A moral hazard is a situation in which people are protected from consequences of their poor decisions.[21] Because moral hazards reduce incentives to avoid penalties, they encourage people to behave recklessly and irresponsibly. When applied to the problem of dependency, a moral hazard approach claims that we will increase dependency if we use welfare to shield people from the negative results that poverty produces.

There is good reason to question how effective a moral hazard approach will be in lessening dependency on welfare. First, people can't choose employment over dependency if there are no good paying jobs available.[22] Second, the motivation to avoid the ills of dependency is undercut if the overall benefits of being on welfare are greater than the overall benefits of being self-reliance (to family and loved ones as well as to oneself). Even if a moral hazard approach helps us recognize the unintended consequences of offering assistance, it is not a cure-all for the problem of dependency on the welfare system.

Nevertheless, our concern goes beyond moral hazards *per se.* Is dependency necessarily a vice to be avoided and should it be stigmatized? Because human beings are social animals, we are necessarily dependent on one another. The challenge is not to avoid dependency, because some people will require assistance to enjoy an even minimally acceptable standard of living. It is to avoid the kind of negative dependency that is humiliating and that

weakens rather than strengthens social cohesion. A more positive dependency is a one that flows from an acknowledgement of interdependence and that enhances the ability of those receiving assistance to lead meaningful lives, to make their own decisions about important aspects of their lives, [23] and ideally to contribute to their communities as best they can. In short, the question we propose is:

1. *Given that a community is a group of people who depend upon one another, what kind of dependencies do we want to encourage and discourage for the truly disadvantaged?*

What are the limits of responsibility to help the poor?

Anthropologists place human relationships on a continuum between two poles—*thick* and *thin.* Thick relations are the blood relationships we have with family and friends extended to other people. These relationships rest upon a sense of belonging, shared memories, and shared meanings.[24] Thin relations are the relationships we have with strangers. The only connections we have with strangers is that they, like us, are human beings.

Ethics is about the *care* and *loyalty* of thick relationships, and morality is about the *respect* of thin relationships.[25] Within this framework, we are not allowed to turn our back on the poor who are family and friends. We must actively care for them as the particulars of our relationship with them would dictate. For example, I would care for my son or daughter differently than I would care for a friend or a distant relative, but I would care for them nonetheless, as the nature of our relationship would require. What I owe strangers is respect—even, arguably, strangers who are enemies and strangers whose views and behavior I despise and/or find threatening. The respect that I owe them is both a refusal to humiliate them or to treat them cruelly and a willingness to recognize their common humanity with me and not to regard them as less than human. I may decide to help strangers because of my personal values or the dictates of my philosophical or religious beliefs, but I would not be morally required to. While our duties and responsibilities are relatively clear at the poles of thick and thin relationships, they become quite murky as we move to the middle.

What is at stake in this middle range is the glue that holds our communities together. Aristotle may have thought that, the city consisted of thick civic friendships, more than thin

commercial relationships, but the opposite is true for us. We now live close to strangers, and we live far away from family and friends. Indeed, our overall economic and social well-being depends more on benefits that our economic links with strangers produce than on how well our family and friends are faring in the world. In such a world, the glue that holds us together has become exceedingly weak.

It is the weakness of, or perhaps more accurately the increasing lack of, work-based or neighborhood-based shoulder-to-shoulder relationships that most trouble us today. There used to be shared experiences that drew people from different background and cultures together and created common bonds between them. Military service, especially during World War II, gave people a sense of common purpose and shared ideals. Labor unions, civil organizations, and service clubs provided opportunities for people with common interests and concerns to learn about the struggle and dreams that shaped people's lives. Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* documents the decline and disappearance of this aspect of community life in the US.[26]

We call the glue that binds people together into cohesive units with shared identities and shared expectations and obligation *solidarity.* Solidarities of fate reflect a sense of a common past; solidarities of destiny reflect a sense of a shared future.[27] Solidarity is strongest when it combines the forces of both past memories and anticipated future actions. Globalized communities lack collective memories and are left to rely only upon what collective action can contribute to in producing a better future or avoiding a worse one.

Perhaps the most difficult, but important test of solidarity is how we will respond to a past or present wrong when the cost of responding is significant and personal but the cost to the individual or group of our not responding is even greater.[28] While shoulder-to-shoulder solidarity demands the redressing of wrongs, it does specify how that that should be done, what kind of redress is most appropriate, or which current group members should or should not bear the relevant costs.

Our lives and fates today are linked to people whom we can't quite called neighbors but with whom we must cooperate in building a desirable future. With the shift from thick and thin relationships to shoulder-to-shoulder relationships comes a shift from moral/ethical judgments about deserving and dependency to decisions about what legal entitlements and obligations should we impose. What do we owe people when our futures are undoubtedly

linked so that we have no option but to build a future with them while, at the same time, we lack the close attachments that would allow us to share an identity? The final question, in short is:

3. *Given that shoulder-to-shoulder relationships build future communities, what safety nets for the disadvantaged promote the kind of community in which we want to live?*

Deserving and Undeserving: Who is Entitled to What

In our introductory essay, we emphasized the importance of "fostering dignity" and relationship between that goal and notions of deserving vs non-deserving, and issues of entitlement. With this analysis in mind, please "hack" the questions we shared with you at the outset of this essay and fleshed out further with some of our own observations and references to other scholars. We look forward to hearing yours.

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[1] (Harari, 2018, p. 16)

ENDNOTES

[2] (Adams, 2001)
[3] https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/29/us/politics/a-main-street-tax-speech-becomes-a-trump-riff-on-the-rich.html
[4] (quoted in Margalit, 1996, p. 223)
[5] (Renwick, 2017)
[6] (Renwick, 2017, p. 35) (Gilens, 1999, pp. Kindle Locations 1082-1085)

[7] (Renwick, 2017, p. 264)

[8] (Renwick, 2017, p. 266)

[9] (Gilens, 1999, pp. Kindle Location: 165-167)

[10] (Gilens, 1999, p. 178)

[11] (Gintis, Bowles, Boyd, & Fehr, 2005, p. 8)

[12] (Katz, 2013, p. 1)

[13] (Doar, Bowman, & O'Neal, 2016)

[14] (Richidl, 2016)

[15] (Schneider, 2016)

[16] (Desmond, 2018)

[17] (Schneider, 2016)

[18] (Gilens, 1999, pp. Kindle Location 176-178)

[19] (Schneider, 2016)

[20] (Weber, 2002, p. 50)

[21] (Baker, 1996)

[22] (AEI/Brooking Working Group on Poverty and Opportunity, 2015)

[23] (Margalit, 1996, pp. 247-261)

[24] (Margalit, 2017, pp. 55-59; 73-77)

[25] (Margalit, 2002, p. 8) (Margalit, 2017, pp. 154-155)

[26] (Putnam, 2000)

[27] (Margalit, 2017, p. 261)

[28] (Margalit, 2017, pp. 267-268)