

Still in search of politics: Disability, productivism, and socialism in liquid modernity

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Abstract

This article returns to Zygmunt Bauman's lifelong search for politics through the lens of disability, arguing that disability is not marginal to his social theory but revelatory to its moral core. Bauman's essay 'Society Enables and Disables' is read alongside major contributions from Disability Studies to reconstruct the philosophical anthropology that underpins Bauman's liquid period: a humanism not grounded in labour or productivity, but in mutual enablement and interdependence. Disability exposes the mutual economy of worth that structured life across solid and liquid modernity alike, illustrating how productivism continues to invalidate us. It builds upon Beilharz's claim that socialism is a principle rather than a programme, it argues that a politics adequate to liquid modernity must be anti-productivist. In the context of automation and artificial intelligence, it proposes a liquid socialism grounded in interdependence committed to opening the social question beyond labour.

Keywords

Bauman, disability, liquid modernity, socialism, UBI

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Socialism beyond gardening culture

In 1999, the year before Zygmunt Bauman redefined our understanding of what had been called postmodernity with his diagnostic concept of *liquid modernity*, he published *In Search of Politics*. This book explored a contradiction: that whilst we consider ourselves to be free, we also believe that we have little power to alter the organisation of our society. Searching for a politics could also describe Bauman's normative social theory from this point on: a critique grounded in his vision of the good society that in these later years rejected the certainties of gardening culture — “the practice of imposing order was likened to the work of gardening. The modern nation-state operated with a gardening stance, ‘cultivating’ its members into optimum producer-citizens” (Palmer, 2023). Bauman's search for a politics was lifelong and existential, grounded in his dreams of a socialist utopia forged in the reconstruction of Poland after Nazi occupation (Bauman, 2023; Wagner, 2020). Yet, despite the violent experiences of exile that Bauman and his family suffered at the hands of Poland's communist state in 1968, Bauman remained a lifelong socialist, albeit a heterodox one, reconceptualising socialism as active utopia (Bauman, 1976). Reflections on socialism, the future of the left and Marx were a continual fixture of his social theory (Bauman, 1981, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c, 2007a).

In the last decade and a half of Bauman's life, his books (2000, 2003a, 2005, 2006, 2010) and essays (2003b, 2007b, 2016) explored the metaphor of liquidity (Davis, 2016), their normative critique remaining anchored in this heterodox socialism. In this liquid period, the search for a politics continued. It refused the temptation of nostalgia and sought, instead, to take seriously the fundamental characteristics of our liquid lives – hurried, atomised and a sense of freedom that is structured by the market. In searching for a politics, Bauman searched for a socialism appropriate to our liquid modern age that departs from the utopias of solid modernity, whilst remaining grounded in the need to overcome barbarism with something better. Before he became one of Bauman's most celebrated interpreters, Peter Beilharz (1994) travelled a similar path in his *Postmodern Socialism*:

If there is indeed a new politics, it is unlikely to be called postmodern socialism. Yet the tracks within which we work suggest that these are likely to be among the markers for its discussion. And if there is no new politics then there will still be the old politics, and the ongoing puzzle about the human condition which has served to orientate us over the millennia. *Fin de socialisme* represents something less than the end of the world, even if socialists had raised their hopes on this idea. (Beilharz, 1994: 115)

Whilst the utopias of solid modernity have lost credibility, the ethical obligation that when faced with barbarism ‘we cannot leave the world as we find it’ remains (Beilharz, 1994: 115). Even if a new politics is unlikely to be called ‘liquid socialism,’ unpacking how the socialist spirit should respond to the conditions of our liquid lives is a question we must continue to ask in Bauman's wake.

I was lucky enough to hear Bauman deliver public lectures more times than I can recall. An education in itself. Almost invariably, after what was always an incisive

intervention on the topic at hand, someone in the audience would – with growing frustration – ask a question along the lines of: ‘That’s all well and good, but what shall we do?’ The irony of this question was usually lost on the questioner. They were asking the most *liquid modern* political theorist, the most *solid modern* question: Lenin’s question – *what is to be done?*

Given that Bauman would no doubt have placed Lenin among the leading gardeners of solid modernity – whose ‘gardening’ culture he so explicitly rejected – this paper does not try to offer a Baumanian answer to that question. Rather, it uses Bauman’s lifelong search as a way of reopening the question of politics itself: *what kind of socialism might be necessary now, as the first quarter of the twenty-first century passes and we find ourselves deep in the liquid modern age?*

In the 1980s, Bauman identified ‘gardening culture’ as a unifying tendency of modernity: the dream of designing, ordering and controlling society so that nothing unruly would be allowed to grow (Bauman, 1987d, 1991). This concept was most famously directed towards the Nazi regime in *Modernity and the Holocaust* (Bauman, 1989). Yet Bauman’s point was that the Nazis were not an exception; the dangers of gardening culture were latent in all modern societies.

Socialism, too, was a gardening culture. It promised to pull up the weeds of poverty and injustice, to plant the seeds of equality and nurture them into a perfectly cultivated social order. Bauman’s work showed us the terrible price of this vision: the fences and boundaries of the garden too easily become the walls of camps; the pruning of disorder too easily slides into the eradication of those deemed out of place. Beilharz provides a succinct account of the transformation of socialism:

Socialism represents, among other things, the ideology carried by the labour movement in response to the ‘social question’, which erupted in the nineteenth century as a name for the new forms of poverty that emerged with the crystallisation of modernity in the industrial city. In the nineteenth century the dominant way of seeing – or ‘optic’ – of socialism was local, or municipal. In the twentieth century, socialism became identified with the state, and more particularly with the symbols of planning, nation-building, citizenship and nationalisation. (Beilharz, 1994: viii)

A socialism for our liquid modern age matters precisely because it must escape this temptation. If such a socialism cannot seek to return to the solid ground of planned order, how should it proceed? How should we in our liquid modern times respond to the ‘social question’?

Before Bauman diagnosed gardening culture as part of the order-making horrors of modernity, he had already begun – in *Socialism: The Active Utopia* – to imagine a form of socialism that would move beyond it (Bauman, 1976). It is my contention that this search for a socialism that rejected the gardening culture of modernity was not only central to the political urgency of Bauman’s writing, but remains vital today as we try to inhabit a shared world in which the promised fourth industrial revolution – a new wave of automation driven by artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics – threatens to reshape work, transform the terms upon which our lives are lived, and reorganise the very fabric of society.

This paper is not about Bauman, but about where the values that underpin his lifelong search for politics lead us today. I am arguing that any socialism for the liquid modern age must break decisively with the gardener's dream of order. It must refuse the nostalgia of retrotopia, be capable of living with uncertainty, and be grounded in the fundamental interdependence of humanity. This paper argues that in following Bauman's search for politics, we must never stop asking how to respond to the 'social question', and that it can only be answered today through confronting productivism and automation together. To explore this question, I turn not only to Bauman, but also to Disability Studies, which offers us insight into the danger in grounding our answers to the 'social question' in work – as the rigid expectations of the labour market have been so central to systems of exclusion. We will now turn to Bauman's (2007c) essay on disability: 'Society Enables and Disables', some key thinkers in Disability Studies, and arguments from my book, *Disablement in the Age of Ambivalence* (Campbell, 2026), to consider how labour's utopia can leave behind the necessity of labour whilst maintaining its ambition to build a better world.

Enablement, disability and the moral economy of human worth

Disability occupies a distinctive place in Bauman's social theory: rarely foregrounded as a topic in its own right, yet when he does write on it, his central concerns with care, order, exclusion, and moral responsibility come into focus. When Bauman (2007c) wrote his short essay 'Society Enables and Disables', his work had already been cited by many early figures in Disability Studies: David T. Mitchell and Sharon Snyder (2003), along with Lennard J. Davis (2002), discuss related ideas when theorising order, eugenics, and normalcy. Bill Hughes (1999, 2000, 2017, 2020) has had a sustained engagement with Bauman, most notably the influential paper 'Bauman's Strangers: Impairment and the invalidation of disabled people in modern and post-modern cultures' (Hughes, 2002). Bauman's essay on disability, despite its brevity, should not be dismissed as ephemera: it is one of the keys to the normative force of Bauman's sociology – reflecting his moral compass and offering a concise statement of his philosophical anthropology. Read in this light, disability emerges not as a marginal application of Bauman's ideas, but as a site through which the ethical stakes of his sociology – and the conditions under which societies include or exclude their members – can be so clearly seen. The philosophical anthropology that is found in 'Society Enables and Disables' makes visible the moral compass that was directing Bauman's thought in his liquid period, offering us a path to follow as we persist with responding to the 'social question' in our liquid modern times.

The *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* invited (like many a periodical or institute at the time) Bauman to comment on their central concern: disability. In the mid to late 2000s, in many ways at the height of his powers, Bauman had proven himself able to comment meaningfully on an unusually broad array of social and cultural topics. As a scholar of both social theory and Disability Studies I found the piece hugely prescient at the time and have continued to return to it, year on year. As I read more of Bauman, the depth of insight nascent in the piece grew for me. There is a normative claim made about the human species, that we human animals are unique in our capacity to enable one another to live with what we in Disability Studies call impairment:

Half century ago, in my student years, I learnt from my anthropology teachers that the beginnings of culture or ‘civilization’ (that is, of a fully and truly human society) could be dated thanks to the discovery of a humanoid skeleton of a male who died at the age of 30 years, but who had broken his leg and begun limping in childhood. My teachers told me that only in a human society could such a creature survive to 30 years of age. I learnt that human society differs from an animal pack or herd by its ability and willingness to count such damaged and indolent creatures among its members. (Bauman, 2007c: 58)

Bauman is a humanist, this commitment is not just political for him, he raises the activity of care – enabling one another – to be a fundamental characteristic of what it means to be human. Where Marx begins from labour – *homo laborans* – Bauman begins from the human as carer, enabled by and enabling others – *homo curans*. In beginning his discussion of disability with this fundamental question of humanity’s species *being* Bauman makes clear the sociological and normative importance of understanding disability. In discussing the primordial capacities of humans to enable one another he sets up a normative tone to his intervention on disability that to disable members of one society is not only a moral crime but that it departs in a way from what makes us human:

What I learned from my teachers, and have remembered ever since, was that compassion and care stood at the cradle of human society; that the surest way to recognize human society is by its ‘enabling’ work – enabling to survive those who otherwise would not manage to stay alive on their own. It was that enabling skill and labour that made society and all its members (those cared-for as much as those who cared for them), human. To be truly and fully human and secure in one’s humanity one needs to be cared for by other human beings and to be confident that care will be provided when needed; but to be human one needs also to be moral – one needs to care for other human beings and be ready to hurry to provide help when it is needed. It is ultimately on the relationship of caring and being cared for that human society is built and the humanity of its members is sustained. (Bauman, 2007c: 58)

When Bauman writes of his teachers here, he is of course referring to those who taught him Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Warsaw, but most likely too, Stanislaw Ossowski and Julian Hochfeld. His essay for Edmund Morzyzkycki Freischaft, ‘How to be a Sociologist and a Humanist: Sociology in Liquid Modern Times’ (Bauman, 2024), illustrates Bauman’s continual debt to Ossowski’s humanism in his own sociological imagination: ‘For Bauman, following Bourdieu, Mokrzycki and Ossowski, in studying the social we world cannot remain neutral and indifferent, responsibility to other humans, is the first principle of social science’ (Campbell et al., 2024: xxxi). It is the first principle of his socialism, too.

Responsibility to the other and the human capacity to enable are clearly entwined in both Bauman’s moral compass and his vision of the vocation of sociology. To disable is positioned by Bauman as a departure from the fundamental characteristics of our species and the moral systems he thinks should bind us together. Whilst disability is not one of Bauman’s central concerns, it is absolutely clear that he considers it a fundamental topic for sociologists. Bauman identifies the centrality of norms in performing ‘the gruesome

job of segregating and excluding norms and standards would hardly be set in the first place were all people expected to fit and obey them' (Bauman, 2007c: 59). Bauman, whilst not citing him here, is covering similar ground to Lennard Davis' (1995) *Enforcing Normalcy*. In but a few paragraphs he goes from anchoring his moral opposition to oppression against disabled people in his philosophical anthropology to an argument that links his analysis of disability to broader themes of ambivalence and gardening culture. He seems to explore the centrality of disability in relation to categorisation in modernity's gardening culture: 'We could even say that the separation of the "able" from the "disabled" is the prime purpose of norm-setting' (Bauman, 2007c: 59). To not abide by norms leads to stigmatisation, as to follow norms is virtuous and to not is to be deviant somehow. The conceptual centrality of disability to modernity's gardening culture is suggested if not said; this is something I have tried to elaborate in *Disablement in the Age of Ambivalence* (Campbell, 2026). This raises a deeper question for socialist thought: what it means to answer the social question once labour and bodily capacity cease to function as stable moral foundations of social worth.

Returning to 'Society Enables and Disables', Bauman (2007c) identifies that, in the individualised society of consumers, an ideal of bodily fitness is entangled with consumer markets in shaping our experience of life. This leads Bauman to identify another closely related value – the 'adulation of youth' – which he links thoughtfully to disablement:

No wonder that, in a society of consumers, youth is celebrated: the young, by definition, fit the bill in both roles – as consumers and as objects of consumption. The old, on the other hand, are the epitome of having been around for a long time and holding no surprises – and therefore of being both 'jaded' and "'blasé', of having experienced everything that there is to be experienced and of having exhausted the supplies of novel experiences that could be offered. 'Being old' is a 'disablement' because it stands for limitation of desires, modesty of wants, insensitivity to market seductions; indeed, 'being old' is an anathema in a society of consumers. (Bauman, 2007c: 59)

Bauman goes on to draw connections between the unfit body and the 'flawed consumers' who are excluded from our individualised society. He elaborates how both older people and people with physical impairments are both 'disparaged and depreciated' in a society that is organised around the norm of fitness. Further acceleration of individualisation results, for Bauman, in not only objects in the society of consumers being thought of for only short-term use, but also people being thought of in these terms. This attitude towards the other, what he referred to in other places as 'adiaphorization', is for Bauman a threat to the 'very substance of human society – to that form of togetherness and cohabitation which, as we have seen, has been founded on and is held together by compassion and care' (Bauman, 2007c: 60). This acceleration of individualisation, the increasing dominance of the ideal of bodily fitness results in the bar for successful participation in the market being 'raised higher than ever before, and so an increasing number of people risk "disablement" and indeed end up as "disabled" because they lack the capacity to clear the hurdle' (Bauman, 2007c: 60). The intensification of market forces that Bauman theorised in the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century is rightly

positioned by him as accelerating disablement. The increasing intensity of disablement is, for Bauman and Donskis (2013), linked to what he later calls the corrosion of our moral sensitivity:

Our hedonistic and thoroughly individualized society, odds more powerful than ever militate against the moral stand that always implies readiness to forego some personal and private interest and make some degree of self-sacrifice. In such a society, loving care for others for the other's sake is disparaged as leading to detestable 'dependency' and so to be avoided at all cost, while taking responsibility for the other's well-being tends to be condemned as an imprudent limitation of freedom to go where pleasurable experiences beckon. Ethical impulse can count on less and less support from the increasingly frail and brittle (above all, revocable and admittedly temporary) human bonds – and so must rely ever more on its own strength of conviction and determination. People who dedicate their lives to the care of others, and particularly such others as have been failed by the society upheld precisely by their invocation of humane compassion and care, are the frontline troops of humanity. On their courage and determination depends not only the well-being of people in their care, but also the humanity of the society we share. (Bauman, 2007c: 60)

It appears that, for Bauman, disablement, a form of social oppression accelerated by our market-driven society of individuals, is something he opposes because of his humanist moral and political commitments. Whilst Bauman may not have written many pages on disability, his strength of feeling on the topic comes through in these short contributions. Together, Bauman and Disability Studies expose productivism as an exhausted moral answer to the social question – one whose limits are only further amplified by the automation enabled by AI.

My book, *Disablement in the Age of Ambivalence*, works to intensify a dialogue between Bauman and Disability Studies, to develop a new theory of disablement (Campbell, 2026). I argue that solid and liquid modernity alike are fundamental characteristics that invalidate, exclude and oppress disabled people, but the general tendencies of these two moments result in them playing out quite differently. In the solid phase of modernity, built on order-making, normativity and categorisation, disabled people find themselves invalidated because of the rigidity of our gardening culture, its search for perfection. In the liquid phase of modernity, disabled people are still dealing with these solid modern issues, but the increasing dominance of the market, speed and fitness result in increased precarity and uncertainty.

What *Disablement in the Age of Ambivalence* seeks to contribute is an account of the conditions of invalidation that disabled people face across both our solid and liquid modern times (Campbell, 2026). In my reading, disabled people today must still deal with solid modern institutions, classificatory practices, and normalcy, but this is twinned with the pressures of liquidity, precarity, speed, marketisation and individualisation. Against accounts that suggest we have moved beyond modernity, I argue that understanding disabling formations today requires us to analyse the entanglement of both solid and liquid characteristics. To be disabled today, at its worst, is to experience solid and liquid forms of invalidation simultaneously.

In the book, a cartography of the moral economy of validity is explored: the ways in which, across the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, human worth has been assessed, recalibrated and at times withdrawn (Campbell, 2026). The organising categories of solid and liquid modernity offer powerful conceptual tools such as ‘gardening culture’ and ‘the melting of solids’ via the market, which allow for the investigation of the constitution of disabled people as valid or invalid, and its variation. Disability Studies is situated as a moral and political project that, in its hostility to order-making and opposition to individualisation, has much in common with Bauman’s thought, and argues that a social theory after Disability Studies would be one that recognises the relationship of social theory to the gardening culture of modernity itself and the valorisation of the productivist body. The solid modern pursuit of order is a key axis: impairment, normalcy and the manageable body are shown to be established as technologies through which the bureaucratic project of modernity’s gardening culture is realised. This pursuit of a manageable body deploys a moral economy of validity through which many disabled people find themselves othered and excluded.

The diagnostic concept of liquid modernity allows us to analyse the shifting contours of disablement as we move from societies organised around consumption rather than production. Whilst many solid modern forms of invalidation persist, the moral economy of validity becomes intensified via the rising prominence of the market and the demand not just to be healthy, but to be fit. Disabled people find themselves increasingly exposed to precarity, monitored, and under pressure to reach ever higher levels of productivity. Bauman’s analysis of adiaphorization allows us to consider how disablement is sustained through moral distancing, indifference and the erosion of proximity to the other. Adiaphorization, first achieved through the rigidity of workplace norms and bureaucratic processes (UPIAS, 1972), is now joined by a market-driven corrosion of our moral sensitivity that atomises our sense of interdependence, and the hurried life that leaves us with little time to take responsibility for the other. Adiaphorization offers a sociological explanation for psycho-emotional disablism and internalised ableism – where disabled people internalise these logics of invalidation and othering.

Operationalising Bauman’s analysis of temporality across solid and liquid modernity allows the concept of crip time to be refined through a twofold distinction between linear and pointillist forms. Although pointillist crip time may intensify under the haste-ridden conditions of liquid modernity, the linear temporalities embedded in solid modernity’s gardening culture – and their disabling effects – persist.

Inspired, in part, by Bauman’s humanist anthropology of *Homo Curans*, I argue in the final pages of *Disablement in the Age of Ambivalence* that interdependence must be reclaimed as a counter-principle to the atomised society of individuals. Amongst the many horrors of the present, it is argued that through the affirmation of our mutual interdependence a fragile hope of an enabling world can be maintained – one in which the automation of work may lead to freedom rather than serfdom. Universal basic income (UBI) is opposed to societies organised around production and consumption, both of which have, in different ways, excluded disabled people. Even as formal commitments to inclusion, diversity and rights have increased, a persistent gap remains between

recognition and social worth – as social worth is rooted fundamentally in productivism. Disablement has been maintained through forms of invalidation that have varied across solid and liquid modernity, in which disabled people have been persistently classified as burdens, failures, or flawed consumers.

Liquid socialism, after labour: the search for politics continues

Across this article, our search for a politics has been thinking with Beilharz's statement: 'socialism is not a goal but a principle' (Beilharz, 1992: 76), a series of moral commitments rather than a technocratic project. The moral foundation from which socialism must now begin rejects productivism and affirms the interdependence of humanity:

The world we must build together will not resemble the solid certainties of the past, nor the uncertain horizons of our hurried present. The politics such a world demands begins from a truth that disablement makes plain: that interdependence is not a limit on human freedom, but its condition. Humans flourish only because we are part of humanity. From this truth, perhaps we can find a spirit – a socialism for our liquid modern age – which, in recognising the universality of our interdependence, our fragility, and our unparalleled collective ingenuity, can drive technologies of automation and policies such as UBI+ to enable our collective well-being. This would allow us to leave behind the cruelty of measuring human worth by productivity, the pathologisation of human difference, and the invalidation of the other. This liquid form of socialism would recognise, as the disabled people's movement has long insisted, that justice begins not with inclusion into broken systems, but with the redesign of the systems themselves. The first quarter of the twenty-first century has been characterised by uncertainty, acceleration, and the return of right-wing populism; if AI is poised to further this in the years ahead, then our politics must begin from a simple and enduring truth: we need each other, and we always have. The task of politics is to begin, again and again, from this truth. (Campbell, 2026: 146)

Today, our search for a politics necessitates such a fundamental redesign. Not only of the project but of its principles. This begins from the fundamental shift in the philosophical anthropology of our active utopia. We must leave behind, once and for all, visions of the good society underpinned by *homo labourans*, beginning the task of sketching a vision of the good society underpinned by *homo curans*. The lie of the atomised individual cast aside and the truth of interdependent people affirmed. We are living in a moment of technological hype where a capitalist utopia is guiding the direction of innovation in AI and robotics – unparalleled automation is promised. No doubt the promise is overhyped, but if significant change is coming then we must develop a politics that responds to the new social, political and technological conditions. In doing so, we can endeavour to ensure that the mistakes of both solid and liquid modernity are not repeated. Prominent tech CEOs (explicitly techno-capitalist in their worldview) and leftists have both suggested UBI, a guaranteed income provided to every citizen, as a necessary response to the social consequences of automation (UBI+ would provide this as well as realising the benefits of the social state). Ever since *In Search of Politics*, Bauman (1999) advocated for UBI, drawing largely upon arguments made by Claus Offe (2009). My assertion

is that the techno-capitalist vision of UBI remains within the moral economy of validity that underpinned solid and liquid modernity. Many humans would find themselves redundant, with the few left working experiencing increased social worth. For a socialist vision of UBI to succeed it must win the argument of philosophical anthropology – *homo curans* contra *homo labourans*.

The tragedy of solid and liquid modernity alike has been to make the cruel ordinary. Where some of us found ourselves surplus to requirements, invalidated, subjected to inhuman treatment and sadly sometimes exterminated. As previously human tasks are automated by AI and robotics perhaps our judgement on the success of this technology should not be how fast they innovate but rather how they can be deployed to nurture society, producing warm bonds of love and care where no one is left behind. Where everyone's humanity is recognised. If the disabling society of solid and liquid modernity alike has been inhuman – then perhaps in leaving behind the necessity to work, we can build a society that is not structured around economic productivity but ensuring that all human life flourishes. A society that disables less and enables more. A humane rather than an inhuman society. If automation is the way we are to depart our liquid modern times then perhaps disability politics needs to reorientate towards a vision of UBI+ that could liberate us all. (Campbell, 2026: 145)

Such a vision responds to a danger nascent in our moment of automation, the resolidification of political reason. Without the guidance of a politics of liberation, automation may not free us from the cruel logics of solid and liquid modernity, but intensify them. Where an algorithmic gardening culture returns, creating an ambient managerialism; where automated surveillance, productivity scoring and algorithmic welfare conditionality permeate every aspect of our lives. The possibility of unparalleled automation invites the planners to impose their vision of order like never before. We must dare to dream an alternative. In solid and liquid modernity alike, adiaphorization made the cruel ordinary; the risk of AI-driven automation is that adiaphorization becomes algorithmic, and that without human oversight the cruel becomes not only ordinary, but automated. I have argued that in both solid and liquid modernity the moral economy of validity is derived from our ability to work. We are invalidated when our bodies do not match the rigid structures of bureaucracies or the hurried demands of the market. Thinking about disability exposes both the cruelty and arbitrariness of these ways of valuing human life.

A socialism that rises to the challenges of liquid modernity must therefore be anti-productivist at the level of morality, not merely redistributive at the level of income, otherwise it risks reproducing the same forms of invalidation just with a more humane face. The revolutionary potential of UBI+ is not just its policy implications, but the moral revolution it could ignite in moving away from labour as the foundation of worth. Such a liquid socialism must reject gardening culture (planned order and social coercion) but also laissez-faire market thinking; its third way is not a compromise between the two, but rather a society calibrated towards enablement rather than control. Developing profound visions for what it means for us to flourish collectively is vital if we are to ensure that the sun sets on the productivist stage of human history.

Srnicek and Williams (2015) note that ‘Neoliberalism, as secure as it may seem today, contains no guarantee of future survival. Like every social system we have ever known, it will not last forever. Our task now is to invent what happens next’. If any of the predictions included in the fourth industrial revolution are to come to pass, then our vision of the active utopia of socialism needs to respond to the changed technological conditions. In a 2007 essay, ‘Has the Future a Left?’, Bauman argued that what is typically called the welfare state (but what he preferred to call the social state) is ‘an arrangement of human togetherness... [that] resists the present-day “neo-liberal” tendency to break down the networks of human bonds and undermine the social foundations of human solidarity’ (Bauman, 2007a). I have argued that we must search for a politics that can ground a new vision of the social state that frees us humans from the limits of productivism. The technological benefits of automation must be guided to facilitate new arrangements of togetherness, strengthening rather than weakening human solidarity. UBI+ deserves exploration as a policy that could help us realise this goal. The morally committed philosophical anthropology of Zygmunt Bauman remains a guiding light as we embark on this search together.

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